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Effective School Leaders

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WHITE PAPER

Introduction

Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates (HYA) reviewed evaluation standards from key voices and institutions in the field of educational leadership, including standards developed by the American Association of School Administrators (DiPaola & Stronge, 2003) and the principles defined by Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) in *Leadership that Works*. An analysis of these standards and instruments, as well as factor analysis of leadership profile survey results across the nation, led to the development of the four Dimensions of Effective School Leaders: Vision and Values, Instructional Leadership, Community Engagement, and Management.

By adopting and confirming these standards and performance indicators, HYA has constructed an assessment that defines and identifies leadership behaviors representative of *effective* school leaders.

The Dimensions of Effective School Leaders acknowledge the multifaceted roles of school leaders while prioritizing the instructional focus and school leadership responsibilities that define 21st Century district leaders.

Dimensions of Effective School Leaders

Vision and Values—Items in this category measure the leader's ability to provide a clear, compelling vision for the future, align programs to the broader vision of the district, and uphold high expectations for all stakeholders.

Instructional Leadership —Items in this category measure the leader's capability to guide educational programs, make data-driven decisions, and implement effective change.

Community Engagement —Items in this category measure the leader's performance as the voice of the school and ability to communicate with and involve stakeholders in realizing the district's vision.

Management and Operations – Items in this category measure the leader's ability to guide operations, manage resources, recruit and retain highly effective personnel, and create an equitable accountability system for all employees.

Vision and Values

Goal setting, drive, and high expectations are defining qualities of district leaders and their leadership teams. The successful school leader values change and guides change efforts by articulating a clear direction and ensuring the programs and initiatives in the school align to the District vision. (Portis & Garcia, 2007; Waters & Marzano, 2007).

Effective leaders **commit the school to continuous improvement**: stipulating clear and non-negotiable priorities, building progress monitoring tools into the routine process of their school, and establishing a culture in which personnel are invested in the process and outcomes of change (Domenech, 2009; Waters & Marzano, 2007). The effective leader **maintains high expectations** for school performance and for all participants involved in this achievement — students, personnel, and the community — and maintains a relentlessly positive approach to helping others realize their potential (Lukaszewski, 2008; Waters & Marzano, 2007).

Instructional Leadership

Effective leaders embrace their function as the **primary instructional leader** for their school, prioritizing student achievement and effective instructional practices as the foremost goals of their work (DiPaola & Stronge, 2003; Enfield & Spicciati, 2014; Waters & Marzano, 2007). More than simply a cheerleader of good pedagogy, the school leader hones a clear and collaborative vision of teaching and learning, one whose goals for student achievement and the instructional program represent a synthesis of relevant research and the specific needs of the school (Portis & Garcia, 2007; Waters & Marzano, 2007).   An effective school leader pays close attention to what **data and research** say about learning and achievement, and apply new leadership frameworks and practices to ensure improved student achievement (American Association of School Administrators, 2007).

School leaders are responsible for **identifying achievement goals** and **facilititating discussions and learning** to enhance the educational process (Corda, 2012). Instructional leadership includes not just the identification of challenges and adoption of best practices but also the planning, follow-through, monitoring, evaluation, and reassessing of programs and initiatives necessary to optimize impact (Hickley, 2014; AdvancED, n.d.). Effective school leaders are **leaders of data-driven practice**: using student achievement data to identify gaps in learning, examining instructional practice, and informing future curricular and instructional decision making (Waters & Marzano, 2007).

Community Engagement

The successful school leader **communicates timely and relevant information** to all stakeholders (Waters & Marzano, 2007). By being a proactive communicator, the school leader builds trust, provides actionable guidance on personnel and programs he/she supervises, and demonstrates responsiveness to situations that arise (McCullough, 2009). Bird, Dunaway, Hancock, and Wang (2013) found a school leader's development of meaningful relationships, communication with stakeholders, and willingness to seek the opinions of others facilitates the implementation of practices proven to increase student outcomes.

A school leader's success is based upon their ability to **build and maintain relationships** (Banks et al, 2007; Phillips & Phillips, 2007; Portis & Garcia, 2007). Coalitions, collaborations, and motivation determine the efficacy of outcomes and initiatives — so effective leaders build trust, focus attention on the process, and employ political savvy to ensure buy-in (Phillips & Phillips, 2007).

The effective district leader **involves key constituents** in the goal setting process, shares and publicizes relevant school data, mobilizes parents and community members, builds local coalitions, and communicates timely and relevant information to personnel (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). The model school leader recognizes that effective leadership is shared leadership, one in which teams and **ongoing collaborations** help define and commit to a common vision, to a culture of respect and openness, and to methods of decision making that ensure every child receives the best possible education (Weast, 2008).

Management and Operations

Though the focus of a school leader's evaluation has in recent years shifted from management to leadership, Glass (2005) argues that managerial and leadership imperatives cannot be separated from one another. That is, a school leader is successful only when he/she **effectively allocates time, money, personnel, and resources** in ways that align with the goal of achievement for all students (Portis & Garcia, 2007; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005).

Essential managerial duties of the role therefore include **fiscal responsibilities**, such as setting spending priorities and distributing funds, **regulatory responsibilities**, such as ensuring compliance to accounting and auditing systems, **operational responsibilities**, such as facilities management, purchasing and contracting, property and supply management, and **personnel responsibilities**, such as labor relations, employee development, and retention. All of these resources and services must be effectively planned and coordinated to support short-term and long-term school needs (Glass, 2005; Waters & Marzano, 2007). It is also critical that the school leader have significant knowledge of legal issues affecting education; they must also **keep abreast of changes** to mandates, school governance and polices and legal requirements (Plotts & Gutmore, 2014; Glass, 2005).

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