

The Role of Leadership in Building the Capacity of Schools to Meet Student Needs

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Building Capacity Requires:

- Clear understanding of student needs
 - Academic and non-academic needs
- Ability to understand what your staff needs to be effective in meeting student needs
- Ability to identify, access and utilize resources to meet student needs
- A plan for creating a culture that is aligned to your school's goals
- A plan for engaging your parents as partners to reinforce educational goals



Identifying and Responding to Student Needs:

What does it take to educate the children you serve?

- Analyze student achievement data
 - What do the patterns reveal?
- Work with teachers to develop tools for diagnostic assessment
- Talk to parents and students about their needs and interests
- Work with social workers, nurses and CBOs to identify non-academic needs
 - What are the challenges confronting their families and neighborhoods?



Developing Professional Development Strategies in Response to Student Needs

- Achievement data will suggest areas where your staff needs to concentrate
- Conduct regular classroom observations to get a sense of your teachers' strengths and weaknesses
 - Look for evidence of learning
 - Engage senior teachers in peer mentoring
 - Provide new teachers opportunity to observe effective teachers
- Ask teachers what kinds of training and assistance they need
- Bring teachers together on a regular basis to analyze student work



II. The role of the principal in developing school capacity?

- Provide the vision: keep the big picture clear:
 - Why are we doing this?
 - What will we achieve?
- Share the vision to achieve “buy-in”
 - Use data to help staff understand the challenges facing your school
 - Staff, students and parents must understand the vision and their role in achieving it
 - Develop a plan with clearly delineated roles and responsibilities for parents, students, teachers and staff



Role of Principals continued

- Help staff to understand District and State policy
 - Make the best of directives even if you disagree with them
- Create conditions that enable others to be successful
 - Stay focused on morale and standards
 - Take responsibility for maintaining a safe and orderly environment
 - Work on team building, model respect and a willingness to cooperate
 - Keep systems working - maintenance, operations



Characteristics of Effective Principals

- Function more like coaches than generals
- Lead by example
- Share leadership, do not make themselves indispensable - Your work is secondary to the most important activity in the school: teaching
- Know their students and staff well
- Know parents and the community well
- Find balance between flexibility and decisiveness: willingness to collaborate and willingness to make tough decisions



Skills Needed by Principals

- Instructional leadership
- Knowledge of finance and budget management
- Public relations
- Human Resources
- Data management/analysis
- Strategic planning
- Knowledge of social welfare service delivery



Reflection:

- Which of the skills needed by principals do you have already?
- How have your past experiences and training prepared you for a leadership role?
- What do you regard as the necessary steps for building support for school change?



Obstacles to School Improvement

- School policies and practices are at odds with academic goals
 - Ineffective discipline - over reliance on suspension
- Inability to utilize your most effective teachers
 - Too many teachers are isolated
- A culture of complacency related to student outcomes and unwillingness to take ownership of the need for change
 - Unwillingness on the part of adults to work together for children
- Inability to achieve consensus and “buy-in” among key stakeholders on plan for change



III. Developing School Culture: Focus on Students

- Create opportunities for students to display leadership at school
- Solicit student ideas for school improvement
 - Provide opportunities for leadership
- Cultivate attitudes and habits that promote academic achievement
 - Confidence and competence
 - Self discipline, self motivation
 - Organizational and study skills
- Implement programs that help in developing these traits: AVID, US FIRST Robotics, Gear Up



Developing a Student Centered School Culture

- Build strong relationships between students and school through extra curricular activities
- Develop an advisory system
- Devise strategies to break and counter race and gender-based stereotypes
 - Teach code switching
 - Create an environment where racial identity and achievement are not linked - Is it cool to be smart?



Focus on Teachers and Staff

- Use achievement data to make it clear why change is necessary
 - Set bench marks
 - Analyze patterns
- Hold a retreat with staff to set goals and devise plans on how to achieve them
 - Must find ways to win “buy-in”
- Provide training in how to relate to parents and build strong relationships with students



Key Principles:

- Develop partnerships with service providers to address unmet non-academic needs
 - Health, nutrition, counseling, etc.
- Maintain quality control in interventions through ongoing evaluation
 - Title I and Special Education
- Adhere to key principles:
 - Kids who are behind must work harder and longer under better conditions
 - Improving the quality of teaching is the most effective way to raise student achievement
 - Look for evidence of learning when evaluating teaching



Key Questions When Developing a School's Culture:

- What will it take to educate your students?
 - What are their academic and social needs? What challenges do they face?
 - What skills and resources are needed to meet their needs?
- How will you achieve “buy-in” from staff, students and parents?
- What practices and rituals will serve as the basis for your school's culture?



IV. Close the Gap Between Parents and School

- Engage parents in partnerships to support students based on respect and shared interests
- Initiate contact before problems arise
- Design a variety of activities to engage parents throughout school year for parents
- Hire personnel who have cultural competence and are effective at working with parents



Basic Requirements for Building Strong Relationships Between Parents and Schools

- Must be based on a recognition of mutual need, responsibility and respect
- Must be based on the recognition that all parents can help their children
- Must be based upon understanding and empathy for the situation confronting parents and families
- Schools need personnel who can communicate effectively with parents - language and cultural skills
- Are We Ready for Parental Involvement?
 - What if parents are unhappy with quality of the school?
 - Tolerance for tension and some degree of conflict is necessary



Keys to Success

- Staff understands the external pressures students face and have devised ways to counter the pull of the streets
 - gangs, teen pregnancy, pressure to work
- Strategies for helping students to plan and think concretely about their future are in place
- Code switching is taught explicitly
 - Adoption of social skills that make adults in authority feel at ease
 - Learning to code switch
 - Speech, dress, demeanor

