

The Leader's Role in Creating High-Performing Schools

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National Center for Urban School Transformation

Dedicated to identifying, studying, and promoting the best practices of America's highest achieving urban schools in a manner that supports urban districts in transforming teaching and learning

<http://www.ncust.org>

4th Annual Symposium: May 7th & 8th in San Diego

NCUST Identifies and Studies Schools that Achieve Impressive Results

- Majority of students meet low-income criteria, no selective admissions criteria, and in an urban district; yet:
- Higher achievement than state average and higher than 90 percent of similar schools
- Small or no achievement gaps
- Exceed AYP criteria for at least two years
- Low suspension/expulsion rates
- High attendance rates
- High graduation rates
- No disproportionate racial/ethnic enrollments in gifted or special education
- Other evidence of high achievement

2009 NCUST Award Winners

- Bonham Elementary, Dallas, TX
- Bursch Elementary, Compton, CA
- Fallon Park Elementary, Roanoke, VA
- Franklin Town Charter High, Philadelphia, PA
- Golden Empire Elementary, Sacramento, CA
- Highland Elementary, Silver Springs, MD
- Ira Harbison Elementary, National City, CA
- Lawndale High School, Los Angeles, CA
- Kearny School of International Business, San Diego, CA
- KIPP Adelante Academy, San Diego, CA
- Montebello Gardens Elementary, Los Angeles, CA
- World of Inquiry School, Rochester, NY

Recent NCUST Award Winners

- Louisa Alcott Elementary, Cleveland, OH (2008)
- Bridesburg Elementary, Philadelphia, PA (2008)
- William Dandy Middle School, Ft. Lauderdale, FL (2008)
- Dreamkeeper's Academy, Norfolk, VA (2008)
- Franklin Elementary, Bakersfield, CA (2008)
- Henderson Middle School, Richmond, VA (2008)
- MacArthur High School, Houston, TX (2008)
- Signal Hill Elementary, Long Beach, CA (2008)
- Southside Museums Elementary, Miami, FL (2008)
- Harriet Tubman Blue Ribbon School, Newark, NJ (2008)
- Tucker Elementary, Long Beach, CA (2008)

Recent NCUST Award Winners

- Community Day Charter, Lawrence, MA (2006)
- Ginter Park Elementary, Richmond, VA (2006)
- Linwood Elementary, Oklahoma City, OK (2006)
- Muller Elementary, Hillsborough County, FL (2006)
- Whittier Primary School, Peoria, IL (2006)
- Cecil Park Elementary, Mt. Vernon, NY (2007)
- Columbus Alt. High School, Columbus, OH (2007)
- Detroit Edison Academy, Detroit, MI (2007)
- Edison Elementary, Long Beach, CA (2007)
- Gideons Elementary, Atlanta, GA (2007)
- Pillow Elementary, Austin, TX (2007)
- Rancho Cucamonga Middle, Cucamonga, CA (2007)

How Are They Different?

- These award-winning schools seem to thrive in a culture of continuous improvement, achieving greater and greater accomplishments that exceed expectations. They stand in stark contrast to other schools (sometimes in the same neighborhoods) that seem trapped in downward spirals of despair.

Focused Attention on A Few Clear Goals

- Leaders acknowledged that they could not do everything at once. Energies were focused on a few very challenging goals.
- Selected goals resonated with teachers & parents.
- Leaders used data to help staff determine what they could stop doing that wasn't effective.
- Educators identified baselines (for all groups) and determined how progress toward goals would be gauged frequently.
- Leaders helped people come to believe that their students could achieve impressive academic results.
- Leaders continuously kept everyone focused on progress toward goals.

Re-directed Energies Toward Service to Children

- School leaders helped teachers, support staff, and parents redirect energy away from adult conflicts and toward the improvement of services to students.
- Leaders emphasized “what we can do together for the children.”
- Staff members worked to create a positive, professional working environment.

Created Environments in Which Students Would Be Well Behaved

- School personnel established clear, simple rules that reflected high expectations for behavior. Rules were enforced consistently and fairly.
- Leaders used data to anticipate problem situations and proactively structure environments so students had a good chance of meeting expectations.
- Student responsibility for their behavior was nurtured through student leadership activities.
- Students knew they were respected and valued.
- Students were given challenging, interesting work.

Built a Collective Sense of Responsibility

- Leaders emphasized the importance of each individual's contribution to the attainment of school goals.
- Planning processes provided avenues for the involvement of many staff and faculty.
- Planning activities provided opportunities for vertical, horizontal, and inter-disciplinary planning focused on school achievement goals.
- Staff members took on new roles in support of school goals. Staff thought beyond their grade level, subject area, or assignment.

Ensured Students Were Taught Critical Standards

- Educators meticulously ensured that children were being taught critical skills articulated in state/district standards in a manner designed to generate depth of understanding.
- Educators determined what most needed to be taught, when, and by whom in order to achieve school goals.
- Educators did not try to teach everything. No “drive-by teaching.”
- In secondary schools, courses were carefully designed to ensure that all students would be taught key state standards.

Maximized Time for Instruction

- Educators allocated substantial time for key instructional issues, reduced distractions, and integrated key objectives across the curriculum.
- Educators created additional time for attention to critical instructional issues through before-school programs, after-school programs, summer programs, Saturday schools, homework strategies, and other approaches.

Adapted Instruction Based on Evidence of Learning

- Leaders articulated a clear vision of high quality instruction, what it looked like, and how it was different from ineffective instruction.
- Educators decreased the amount of “chicken feeding” by constantly looking for evidence that students had learned key concepts and skills.
- Educators adapted their methods and approaches when they found that students had not learned adequately. They created both classroom processes and school-wide processes for helping students who had not demonstrated evidence of learning.
- Educators demonstrated a constant willingness to adapt instruction. No TTWWADIs!

Provided Teachers Needed Resources and Training

- Teachers had access to high-quality professional development opportunities that were directly related to critical academic issues in their classrooms. Professional development was structured to give teachers opportunities to practice and receive useful feedback.
- School leaders made sure that teachers felt like they had adequate materials, equipment, and training.
- Teachers felt supported by their leaders.

Created Opportunities for Teachers to Plan, Work, and Learn Together

- School leaders created blocks of time for teachers to plan, work, and learn together frequently.
- Leaders created an atmosphere in which educators felt comfortable sharing instructional successes and failures and learning together.
- Planning times were used to discuss critical instructional issues, strategies, and problems. These planning times were often venues for “courageous conversations” about teaching and learning.

Increased Time Spent on Instructional Leadership

- Principals spent a substantial amount of time engaged in instructional leadership activities (approx. 40% of their day).
- Many schools created other positions through which individuals provided additional instructional leadership.
- Leaders kept teachers focused on improving teaching and learning.
- Leaders used data to help teachers improve instruction.
- Leaders assertively documented ineffective performance that was not getting better.

Built Partnerships With Parents


- Parents saw tangible evidence of the school's concern for their children. Thus, parents were more eager to support school improvement efforts.
- Educators helped parents believe there was hope for their child's academic future.
- School personnel made parents feel they were welcome as valued partners in efforts to educate their children.
- School personnel found ways to help parents know they could make meaningful contributions to their child's/the school's success.

Persisted Through Difficulties and Setbacks

- Leaders kept focused on school goals and assumed those goals would ultimately be achieved. They refused to give up when setbacks occurred.
- Educators celebrated successes often and made teaching and learning fun.
- School leaders perceived their work, less as a job, more as a mission.
- School leaders believed in themselves, their staffs, and in the ability of their students to succeed.



Nothing Changes Unless Teaching
and Learning Changes



Teaching and Learning Changes
Only When People Exert Effort to
Change in Ways Likely to Make a
Difference.

People Exert Effort to Change When

- They believe the change is worth their effort;
- They believe the change is possible;
- They believe they know what to do to contribute;
- They believe their effort will be valued; and
- They believe their effort will lead to eventual success.