

# Focus on Leadership, Climate, Culture and Instructional Practices: Practical Strategies for School Improvement

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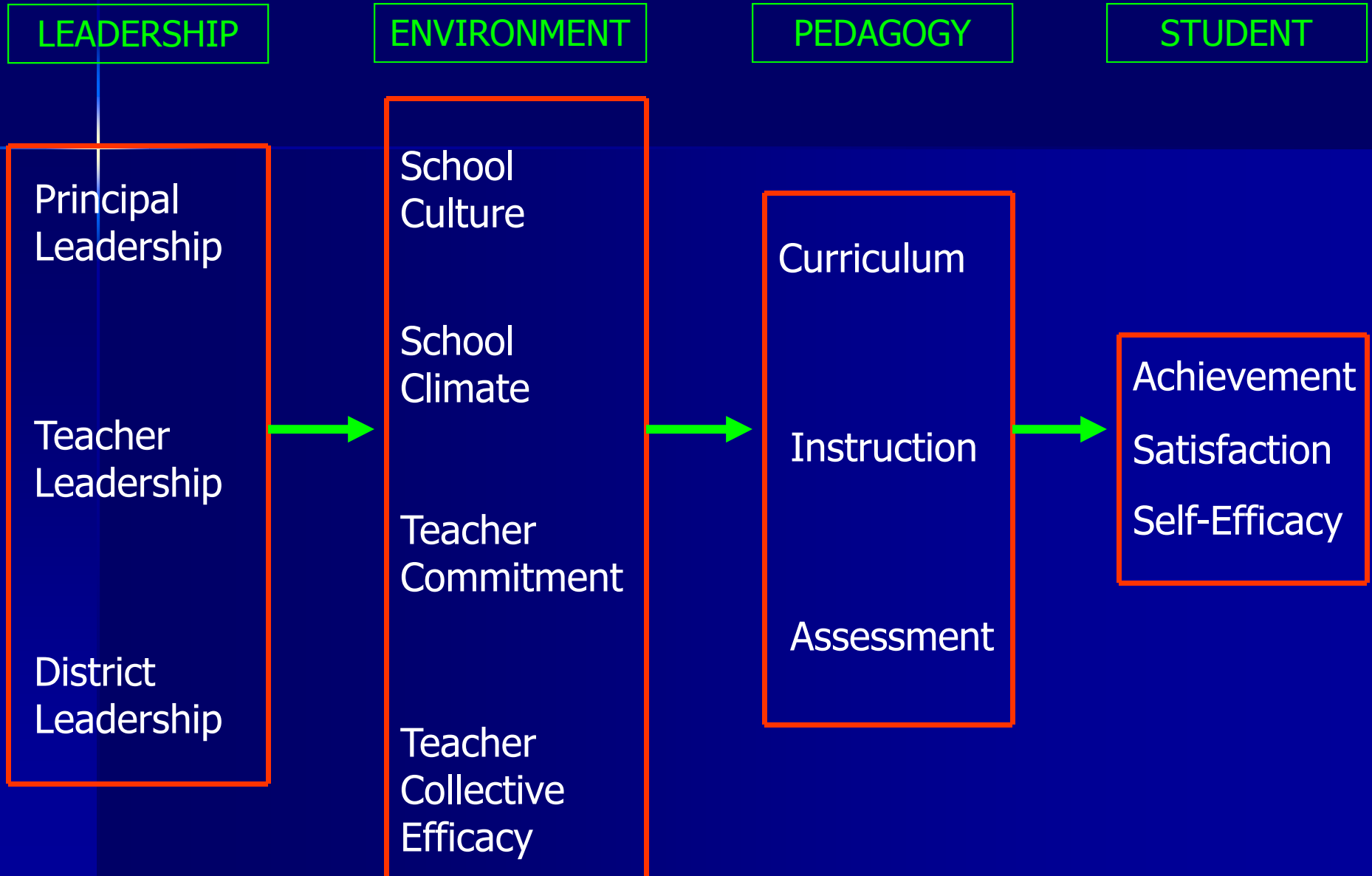
# Outline of Today's Discussion

- Introductions...
- Background for this presentation...
- Big Picture...
- Key questions and related strategies...
- Self-assessment tools to support school improvement process...
- Closing Comments, Q/A...

# Project ASSIST Background

- ASSIST: Achieving Success through School Improvement Site Teams
- Developed—1995-96 as a service project to Missouri schools
- 1996-1998—First Cohort
  - Elementary Schools
  - Middle Level Schools
  - High Schools
- 1998-2000—Second Cohort
  - Middle Level Schools
- 2003-2006—Third Cohort
  - Middle Level Schools of poverty and low achievement

# The Big Picture...



# **Q1: Do we have meaningful statements of school values, beliefs, and vision that drive school goals and action plans?**

- Did the faculty work collaboratively to develop the school's values, beliefs, vision, goals, and action plan statements?
- Do we revisit those statements periodically?
- Have those statements become a natural part of our conversations?
- Is everyone knowledgeable of them?
- Does everyone endorse them?
- Does everyone "live" them?
- Do we believe that working in a school with a clear set of values and beliefs and a vision and a direction for change makes a difference in student learning?

## **Q2: Does our principal lead our faculty using collaborative, facilitative problem solving?**

- Do our faculty meetings consist of discussion sessions for problem solving?
- Does our faculty collectively analyze key school improvement data?
- Are our faculty discussions both small group and whole group?
- Do our leaders facilitate the discussions and empower teachers to make decisions?
- Do we believe that having a principal who is collaborative and facilitative makes a difference in student learning?

### **Q3: Do we have a team of teacher leaders and a principal who work collaboratively to provide leadership for change?**

- Do we have a leadership, think-tank, problem solving team of teacher leaders?
- Does this team study together and become highly knowledgeable about best educational practices?
- Does this team design and lead faculty in similar study?
- Do members of the team devote extra time and energy to their leadership roles?
- Does our faculty respect the members of this team?
- Are our teacher leaders selected by their peers?
- Are our teacher leaders positive, constructive role models?
- Is our team small in size, but representative of our faculty?
- Do we have a process to groom new team members and rotate membership?
- Do we believe that having a team of teacher leaders who facilitate faculty discussions and problem solving makes a difference in student learning?

## **Q4: Do we have a caring, collaborative culture and trusting, respectful climate?**

- Are our school's assumptions, beliefs, rituals and ceremonies focused on student success?
- Do our teachers trust...each other, administrators, parents, and students?
- Do our teachers collectively overwhelm the negativity from skeptics and cynics during faculty discussions?
- Do our daily schedules and other structures of the day support small and large group teacher collaboration?
- Do our teachers enjoy their jobs and want to come to work?
- Do individual teachers learn from each other?
- Do we believe that having a caring, collaborative culture and trusting, respectful climate make a difference in student learning?



## **Q5: Do we understand adolescent development and effectively relate to today's students?**

- Do our teachers care about students enough to build a relationship of mutual trust and respect?
- Do our teachers accept personal and collective responsibility for student success?
- Do our teachers know the current facts and issues about today's students (drugs, alcohol, sex, crime, etc.)?
- Do our teachers have the skills to work with students who are "different" and "indifferent"?
- Do we believe that understanding student development and relating to today's students make a positive difference in student learning?

## **Q6: Does our school provide a relevant, challenging curriculum based upon state standards and expectations?**

- Does our curriculum develop basic knowledge and skill for success at the next level of study?
- Does our curriculum have the flexibility to take students beyond basic standards?
- Is our curriculum integrated so relationships across disciplines are evident, as they are in life?
- Does our curriculum avoid tracking and ability grouping across courses?
- Do our teachers have a deep knowledge in their content areas?
- Do our teachers implement a relevant and challenging curriculum?
- Do all of our teachers teach the written curriculum?
- Do we believe that a relevant, challenging, and aligned curriculum makes a difference in student learning?

## **Q7: Is our instruction aligned with curriculum, monitored and discussed, and based upon best practices?**

- Do we collect and discuss data about the level of student engagement during instruction?
- Are our students' learning experiences engaging, authentic, problem-based, and differentiated?
- Do we frequently use instructional methods that foster higher-order thinking?
- Do we use a flexible schedule that supports personalized learning by creating time for remediation, maintenance, and enrichment?
- Is our instruction designed around students' interests?
- Do we involve students in the identification and design of instructional strategies?
- Do we believe that the use of instruction grounded in current knowledge of best practice makes a difference in student learning?

## **Q8: Do we use formative assessments aligned with curriculum and instruction?**

- Do we regularly use common unit assessments across all classes teaching the same content standards?
- Do our assessments cover the basic content standards that the state expects our students to master?
- Do we administer formal assessments that mimic state tests, provide data about mastery, and help students acclimate to testing protocols?
- Do we modify lesson design and instruction based upon formative assessment data?
- Do we involve students in the design and scoring of assessments?
- Do we provide timely, meaningful feedback to students based upon formative assessments?
- Do we believe that using formative assessment data to redesign and reteach make a difference in student learning?

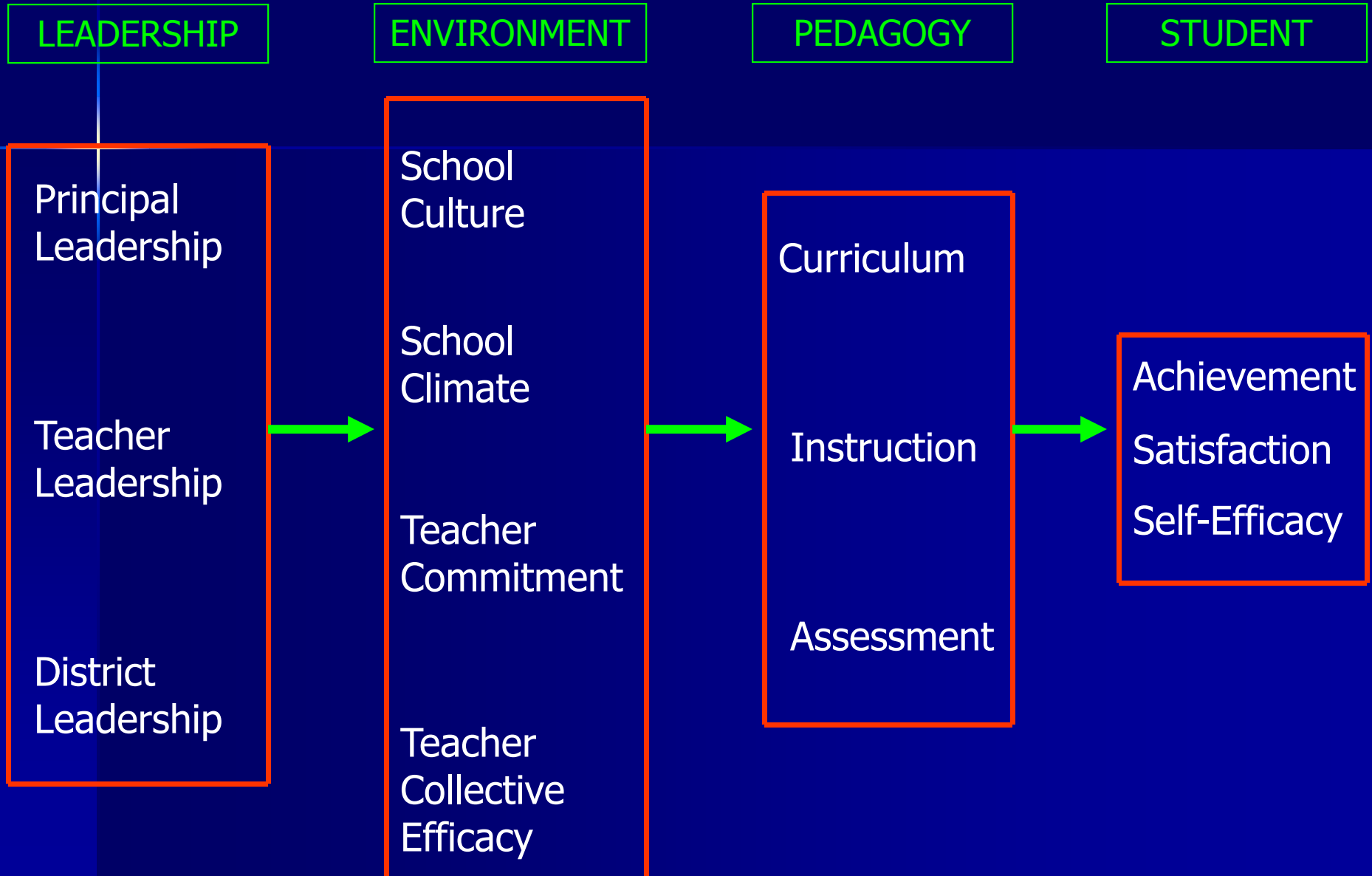
## **Q9: Does district leadership implement policies and practices that support school-site change?**

- Do district administrators and policy makers understand the processes necessary for school improvement, i.e. the multiple and complex facets of change described in the previous statements?
- Do district administrators and policy makers make decisions and set policy based upon what is best for all students in the district?
- Do district administrators and policy makers provide the personnel resources necessary for school improvement?
- Do district administrators and policy makers value the importance of steady, continuous improvement?
- Do district administrators and policy makers support changing student achievement through a steady, continuous school improvement process, even though the changes take years to make?
- Do we believe that the actions and decisions of district administrators and policy makers make a positive difference in student learning?

# Closing comments:

- Change is slow and complex...
- Establish teacher leadership team...
- Understanding Big Picture is essential...
- Define the elements you want to study and change...(Content Framework)
- Establish a process for change...(Process Framework)
- Use the three following diagrams as examples...

# The Big Picture...



**CARING, COLLABORATIVE CULTURE**  
**TRUSTING, RESPECTFUL CLIMATE**

**SUCCESS  
for each  
STUDENT**

- Academic
- Social
- Emotional
- Physical

**ORGANIZATIONAL  
LEADERSHIP**

- **Principal/Administrative Team Leadership**
  - ◆ Establish Distributive/Participative Leadership (Capacity)
  - ◆ Establish Transformational Leadership (Change)
  - ◆ Establish Instructional Leadership (Pedagogy)
  - ◆ Establish Managerial Leadership (Efficiency)
- **Staff Leadership**
  - ◆ Accept Leader Roles (School Improvement Team)
  - ◆ Become a Community of Leaders (Staff)
  - ◆ Commit to Success for Each Student (Staff)
- **Parent Leadership**
  - ◆ Accept Leader Roles (Committees)
  - ◆ Provide Instructional Support (Volunteers)
- **Student Leadership**
  - ◆ Accept Leader Roles (Committees)
  - ◆ Develop Leadership (Student Governance)
- **Community Leadership**
  - ◆ Accept Leader Roles (Committees)
  - ◆ Provide Instructional Support (Volunteers)
- **District Leadership**
  - ◆ Understand Site-Level Needs
  - ◆ Support Site-Level Needs

**ORGANIZATIONAL  
PEDAGOGY**

- **Standards-Based, Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum**
  - ◆ Align with State Standards
  - ◆ Align with Curricula of other Grade Levels
  - ◆ Align with Instruction and Assessment
  - ◆ Integrate across disciplines
  - ◆ Relevant and Authentic for Young Adolescents
- **Standards-Based, Developmentally Appropriate Instruction**
  - ◆ Align with State Standards
  - ◆ Align with Curriculum and Assessment
  - ◆ Engage Learners Actively (Mentally and Physically)
  - ◆ Relevant and Authentic for Young Adolescents
- **Standards-Based, Developmentally Appropriate Assessment**
  - ◆ Align with State Standards
  - ◆ Align with Curriculum and Instruction
  - ◆ Align with State/National Testing Methods
  - ◆ Relevant and Authentic for Young Adolescents
- **Grounded in Knowledge of Learner**
  - ◆ Match Academic Readiness and Capacity
  - ◆ Promote Socialization with Peers and Adults
  - ◆ Foster Emotional Self-Image and Self-Control
  - ◆ Foster Self-Esteem (General & Academic)
  - ◆ Match Physical Needs & Development

**ORGANIZATIONAL  
STRUCTURE**

- **Change Processes**
  - ◆ Establish Comprehensive and Systemic Processes
  - ◆ Establish Vision-Driven not Deficit-Driven Change
  - ◆ Inform Change via Formative and Summative Data
- **Program Delivery**
  - ◆ Embed Basic Skills and Enrichment Programs
  - ◆ Require Core and Exploratory Curriculum
  - ◆ Provide Co-Curricular/Extracurricular Opportunities
  - ◆ Implement Student Grading and Homework Policies
  - ◆ Create Small Learning Communities/Teaming Structures
  - ◆ Implement Multi-Year/Extended Learning Relationships
  - ◆ Implement a Flexible Instructional Schedule
  - ◆ Implement Student-Adult Advisement Opportunities
  - ◆ Implement Multiple Transition Practices to/from School
  - ◆ Provide Service Learning/Volunteerism/Health Services
- **Personnel Policies**
  - ◆ Recruit, Select, Retain, Develop, Dismiss Aggressively
  - ◆ Engage Staff in the Design/Implementation of Continuous Authentic and Relevant Professional Development
  - ◆ Align Teaching Assignments to Teacher Ability and Program Needs
  - ◆ Organize Staff by Teams and Content Areas
  - ◆ Provide Teacher and Team Planning Times
- **Student Policies**
  - ◆ Assign/Group Students Heterogeneously
  - ◆ Establish Attendance and Behavior Policies
- **Resource Allocation**
  - ◆ Align with Vision/Goals





# Resources...

- Marzano: ASCD series on leadership, instruction, classroom management
- Cotton: ASCD on principal leadership and student achievement
- NASSP: Breaking Ranks series
- NASSP Decade Studies: Leadership for Highly Successful ML Schools
- Fullan (*Breakthrough*)
- Hoy: [www.coe.ohio-state.edu/whoy/](http://www.coe.ohio-state.edu/whoy/)
- Leithwood: *Making Schools Smarter*
- *Middle Level Leadership Center Website:*  
[www.MLLC.org](http://www.MLLC.org)

# Contact Information

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