Leadership for Highly Successful Middle Level Schools

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Volume II of NASSP's National Study of Leadership in
Middle Level Education

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Session Outline

Introductions, Overview of Study	Jerry Valentine
Expectations of Academic Excellence for All Students	Don Hackmann
Educational Core Knowledge	Don Clark
Relationships and Communities of Learning	Vicki Petzko
Leadership Makes a Difference	Jerry Valentine
Panel Discussion	Vicki, Don, Don, Jerry

NASSP's ML Decade Studies

- **1980-1982 Middle Level Principalship**
- **1991-1993 Leadership in ML Education**
- **2000-2003 Leadership in ML Schools**

- **2000-2003 Study:**
  - **Phase I: National Survey of Schools**
    - **2000: 14,107 > 1,423**
  - **Phase II: Study of Highly Successful Schools**
    - **2001-02: 273 Nominated > 100 Selected > 6 Site Visits**

School Selection Process

- Nominated Schools from 50 States
  - 273 schools nominated by 200+ leaders
  - Highly successful at meeting student needs by addressing at least 2 or 3 recommendations from <u>Turning Points</u>
  - Principals completed survey re change, vision, goals, challenges, evidence of success, details re TP recs.
- Selection of 100 Highly Successful ML Schools
  - Panel of 7 experts analyzed the data from nominated schools
  - 100 schools invited to participate; 98 accepted
- Data Collection from 98 Highly Successful Schools
  - Principal, Teacher, Student, Parent Surveys
- Selection of Six Site-Visit Schools
  - Three days of interviews and observations (Spring, 2002)

Site-Visit Schools' Demographics

Schools	Grade Levels	Enroll.	Comm. Type	Ethnicity	% F/R Lunch
Einstein Academy	6-8	550	Small City	Eur/Am: 69% Afr/Am: 29%	20%
Fourstar MS	5-8	309	Small Suburb Town	Eur/Am: 94% Asi/Am: 3%	4%
Kent MS	6-8	1046	Metro Suburb	Eur/Am: 48% Afr/Am: 17% His/Am: 18% Asi/Am: 16%	29%
Mark Twain MS	6-8	180	Small Rural Town	Eur/Am: 96% Afr/Am: 2%	40%
Pioneer MS	6-8	1485	Metro Suburb	Eur/Am: 72% Afr/Am: 9% His/Am: 10% Asi/Am: 8%	12%
Southside Intermed.	7-8	589	Small City	Eur/Am: 37% Afr/Am: 13% His/Am: 50%	66%

Expectations of Academic Excellence for All Students

- Teachers and principals developed shared values and beliefs and a commitment to excellence and success
  - Principals established an environment to promote continuous conversations about their schools' direction and challenges
  - Principals took charge in this, institutionalizing the commitment in their schools
  - School's vision guides the work of the school; vision is student-centered

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Academic Excellence Expectations: Implications for Practice

- Collaboratively establish shared values, beliefs, and commitments
- Maintain ongoing dialogue to internalize beliefs
- Take a stand on what you believe is right
- Faculty members who do not "get on board" should work elsewhere
- Collaboratively establish a vision of what the school will need to look like in the future
- Incorporate knowledge of best practices into the vision and goals needed to accomplish school improvement

Educational Core Knowledge

- Understanding of and full implementation of middle level programs
- Commitment to effective teaching practices
- Presence of an instructional improvement process
- Use of data to change curriculum and instruction and to promote student success

Educational Core Knowledge: Implications for Practice

- Share responsibility for leadership
- Study and discuss current research and best practices in middle level schools
- Use interdisciplinary teams to create small learning communities

Educational Core Knowledge: Implications for Practice

- Use a variety of instructional strategies to actively engage students in learning
- Align curriculum, instruction, and assessment
- Monitor to ensure that the written curriculum is the taught curriculum
- Use formative assessment on a regular basis

Relationships

"The number one thing is relationships" (p. 110)

Principals took the initiative to build *outstanding* relationships with teachers, valued their work, provided support. They empowered teachers as well as knew them personally. They knew "who needed a pat on the back, who needed a kick in the pants, and who needed both" (p. 86)

Teachers valued collegial, collaborative work environments, sharing of knowledge, strategies and ideas, caring for each other, being a family. A personal and professional bond had developed through working toward a common purpose.

Principals valued parents/community members, involved them in decision making, and provided opportunities for learning about adolescent development and middle level programs. They demonstrated an understanding of community groups/issues, effective communication and "personal touch".

Teachers were attentive to students' needs, attended school activities, tried to understand the home lives of students. They worked to get to know each student individually, to establish a personal bond. This enabled teachers to push students, reduced discipline problems and increased the students' admiration of teachers.

Relationships

Implications

– Discuss and identify relationship enhancing behaviors

– Conduct study groups addressing student needs

– Collect and discuss climate data

– Engage in staff retreats

– Create small learning communities

– Build/maintain positive relationships with parents/community members

– Communicate TWO ways

– Be a role model (p. 111)

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Communities of Learning

Who? *Everyone*
- Principals modeled
- Teachers modeled
- Students understood and engaged

How? *Actively*
- Study groups
- Presentations
- Reading
- Graduate Study
- Classroom

What?
- Teachers and principals worked collaboratively to design professional development that supported their *vision and goals*...
- They were impatient with P.D. that was not *transferable to their work*, and aggressive in reducing nonrelevant P.D. (p. 111)

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Communities of Learning
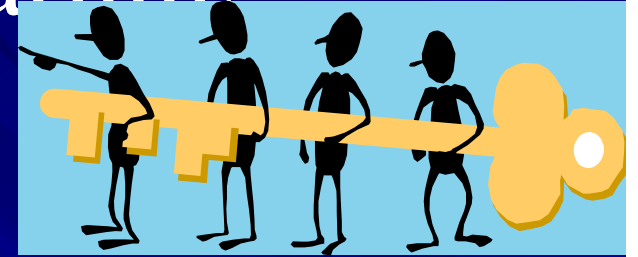
- **Implications**
  - Use small study groups to build knowledge
  - Use small study groups to practice, review and fine-tune implementation
  - Use only effective practices for P.D.
  - Be aggressive in planning the journey to become a "Community of Learners"
  - Recognize the importance of the change process
  - Be patient as well (p. 112)

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Leadership Makes A Difference— Beliefs and Convictions

- **Principals aggressively model beliefs and conviction that all students can/will learn**
  - Express personal passion and commitment
  - Create and lead conversations among faculty
  - Demonstrate beliefs/convictions via decisions
  - Establish high expectations per beliefs/convictions
  - Hire teachers with the beliefs/convictions
  - Ensure PD fits beliefs/convictions
  - Serve as the "keeper of the school's vision"

Leadership Makes A Difference—Structures Match Beliefs/Convictions

- Principals work with teachers to establish school structures and procedures that align with conviction that all students can/will learn.
  - Establish teaming, flex schedules, common planning times, advisory, extended academic time
  - Establish communication and leadership structures: committees, cadres, vertical teams, advisory teams, school improvement teams, task-forces
  - Ensure effective/efficient day-to-day operations
  - Establish teacher leadership as nucleus for continuous improvement

Leadership Makes A Difference—Accountability for Best Practice

- Principals understand best practice and measure against that benchmark:
  - Middle level education
  - School improvement and change
  - Collaborative/distributive leadership
- Principals collect/analyze data per goals/vision
  - Student achievement
  - Written and taught curriculum
  - Instructional practices
  - School environment/relationships/perceptions

Panel Discussion

In Highly Successful ML Schools:

- Structure alone is not enough…
- Teaming is more than an instructional strategy…
- What you believe is what you get…
- Readiness and rigor are compatible…
- Data-based decision-making is not adequate…

Panel Discussion—Structure alone is not enough…

For the most part, HSS principals were highly committed to middle level concept and programming (teaming, exploratory courses, advisory, cocurricular, intramurals)

- HSS schools went beyond these components, looking to other programs that complemented the middle level concept, to bring instructional and curricular coherence to their schools

- Each principal had a strong vision about how young adolescent learners could be successful in their schools

Panel Discussion—Teaming is more than just an instructional strategy…

- Provided teachers with the opportunity to collaborate and reflect regularly on issues of curriculum standards, appropriate instruction, and student learning.

- Allowed teachers to share and discuss data, participate in collaborative decision making, and to take on additional leadership roles in the school.

- Facilitated a culture of learning where a community of learners could regularly engage in a variety of formal and informal continuous learning activities.

- Allowed teachers to build strong relationships of trust, to create cultures of collegiality and support, and to develop core values and beliefs that led to successful adult and student learning.

Panel Discussion—What you believe is what you get…

Principals of HSS _DO_ what they believe is important

and

MODEL what they say they believe.

Panel Discussion—Readiness and rigor are compatible…

Developmental appropriateness and high-stakes testing must co-exist. The problem:

- **High Stakes Testing**
  - Is refocusing instruction on basics LA/M
  - Has the potential to reduce time in explo
  - May lead to more direct instruction
  - May lead to learner expectations that do not fit student readiness level

Panel Discussion—Readiness and rigor are compatible…

- **School Responses**
  - Double time LA & M but vertically articulated explo
  - Increase # of explo "wheel" options
  - Refocus on active/engaged, authentic/relevant instruction
  - Design academic excellence times for remediation, maintenance, enrichment
- **Principal and Staff Commitment**
  - Common focus on student academic success
  - School vision/mission/goals compatible with rigor <u>and</u> developmental responsiveness

Panel Discussion—Data-based Decision Making is Not enough…

- Vision-driven change with goals informed by existing data
- Comprehensive change is broad in scope and addresses the many components of the school, not just improving achievement test scores
- Systemic change comes from within the organization and involves leadership and staff from across all sections of the school family

Q/A and Closing Comments

- Copies of the presentation will be available at

www.mllc.org