Leadership in Six Highly Successful Middle Level Schools

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

Don Clark, University of Arizona (Emeritus)
Don Hackmann, Iowa State University
➤**Vicki Petzko, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga**
Jerry Valentine, University of Missouri

"... leadership and learning are indispensable to each other."

(From) Remarks prepared for delivery by President John F. Kennedy, for November 22, 1963, in Dallas, Texas. Retrieved 12/30/03 from http://www.jfk-info/trademrt.htm

Four Themes

- Students First
- Professional Learning Communities
- The Change Process
- Commitment and Passion

Vision and Beliefs

…these six principals shared a bedrock belief that each student in his/her school could be successful, and that their charge, as principal, was to do whatever possible to ensure that each student was given every opportunity to grow academically, socially, and emotionally…
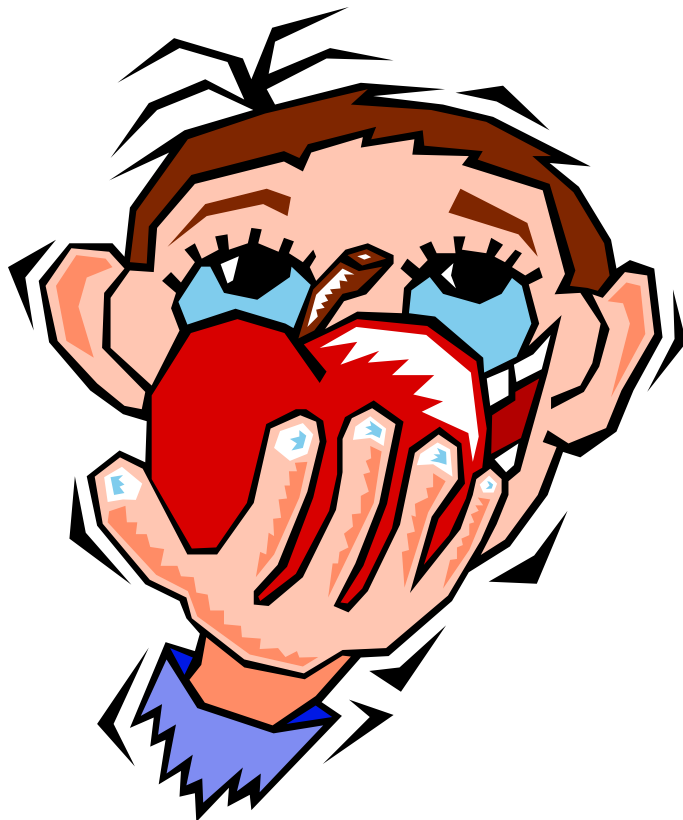
- ALL students can learn
- EVERY child can learn
- Do what is best for KIDS
- Close the achievement gap
- Students FIRST

"…don't tell me a child can't learn until you have done everything including standing on your head and spit quarters and can't get their attention. Then maybe you can tell me that you haven't gotten to *that* child'."

Professional Learning Communities

Emphasis on the importance of the "ability to provide teachers with everything they need to be the best they can be"

Professional Development

- Teachers in every school commended the quantity, the quality, and the variety of professional development activities available to them. They had presented at and attended conferences, they took classes, participated in seminars, attended workshops, engaged in book studies, and read and discussed professional journals.

- Not only was there school-wide commitment to professional development, new strategies and approaches were consistently brought back to the school and actively implemented by groups of teachers. The conventional model of "sit and get", or "hear it today and file it tomorrow" was not at all evident in these schools.

Leaders of Teaching and Learning

- Informal and formal observations
- Most of the principals interviewed in this study talked more about informal processes than formal ones
- Constant enhancement of teacher skills
- Participated in professional development
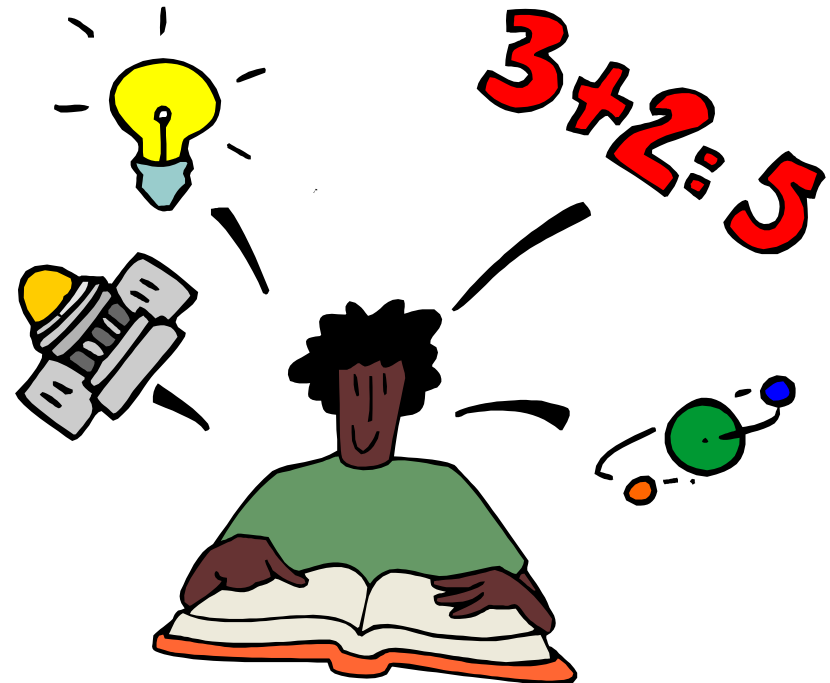
Intellectual Leadership

- "The difference between a good leader and a great leader is that a great leader reads."
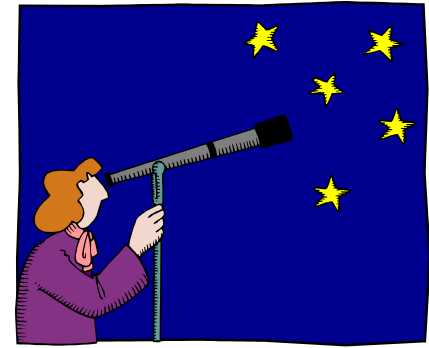- Lifelong learners
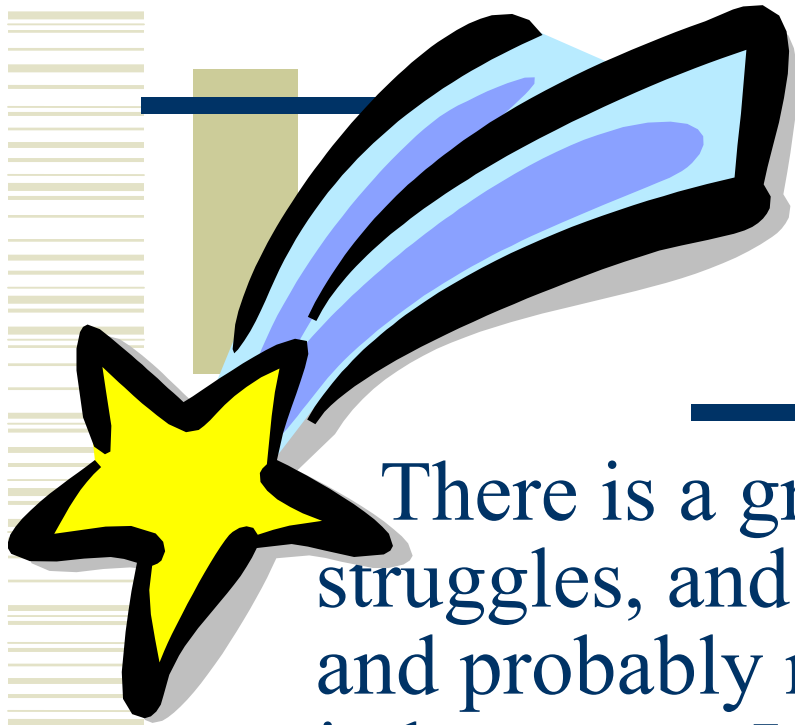
Garnering of Resources

"If we run out of budget, we are going to sell pickles to the kids at lunch so we can pay our gas (to go to professional development)."

High Expectations for Teachers

"…some teachers need a pat on the back, some need a kick in the pants, and some need both"

There is a group of teachers that really struggles, and a group that are super stars, and probably most teachers fall somewhere in between. I have to make sure I support those who are struggling and kind of push the ones who are doing OK and want to do good. And, it is my job to make sure the ones that don't want to improve are not here.
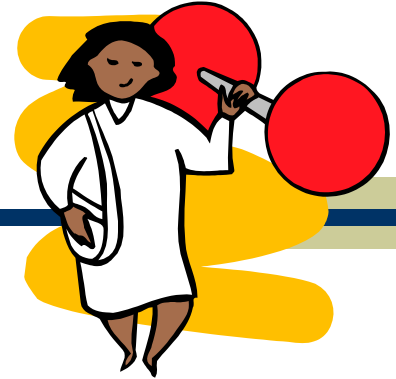
Parents as Partners

I tell parents that we are like guardrails on that highway; we are one set, the parents are the other; they (students) go across all kinds of lanes and bounce off all sorts of things, but **the students** are the ones who have to find the lane, we just help them.

Leading Change Collaboration

"At this school, we have a lot of committees and a lot of discussion about most major decisions. But the principal is not a spineless person who will not make a decision when it is needed. If he has to make a decision without the discussions or after the discussions and you disagree with it, he will tell you why he made that decision."

Leading Change
Use of Data

With everything we do, we evaluate it to see if it was worth it, should we continue it, is it something we want to do again next year? Did it make a difference in student outcomes? And we shouldn't do it if it doesn't affect student outcomes or student success.

Use of data

- ◆ Disaggregate down to their shoe size
- ◆ Item analysis
- ◆ Grade distributions
- ◆ Failure rate
- ◆ Achievement gaps
- ◆ Attendance
- ◆ Discipline
- ◆ Classroom Observations
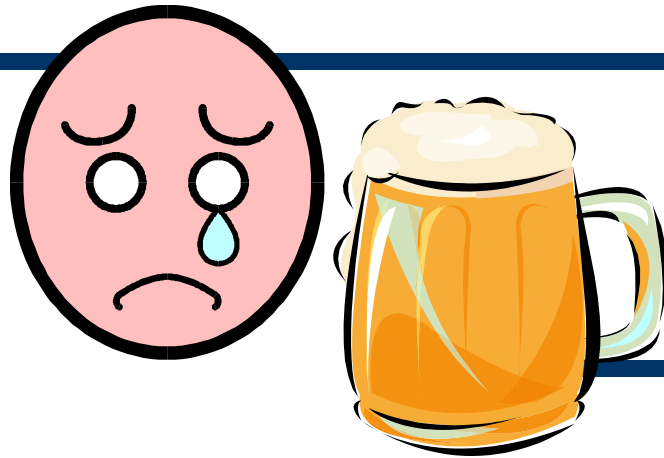
We started looking at our data; we started being data driven. Our tears aren't going to solve it. We have been crying in our beers all these years and nothing has happened. So, we started looking at our data to fine tune what it was we needed to work on by target objective, and once we started looking at our data, we looked at what groups of kids did poorly on this objective and what groups of kids did well on this objective. We became more data driven.

Personal/Professional Characteristics

- Modeled beliefs
- Importance of collaboration
- Visible presence
  - Available
  - Approachable
- Communicators
- Courage
- Commitment

Thank You…

♦ The principals of the six school visited have provided insights and examples of how varied personalities and differing circumstances can each produce extraordinary results. They have confirmed that there although there are dominant themes, there is no one route to success in middle level schools, nor is there any one prescribed style of leadership. We have learned a great deal from them, individually and collectively.