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ABSTRACT

This guide is designed to offer strategies for building leadership capacity in schools and to assist school administrators in finding new ways to encourage and support teachers and students in their efforts to succeed. The guide answers four questions: (1) What do leaders do to create curriculum and instruction that push all students to higher levels of proficiency? (2) How do school leaders demonstrate that nearly all students--with their own effort and that of teachers and administrators--can master challenging curricula? (3) How do leaders generate the efforts of many to focus on the success of every student? (4) How can leaders put these ideas into practice? The guide is intended to give school leaders and school-system leaders practical ideas for encouraging and supporting effort as a means of improving student performance. Building leadership capacity means using effort to elicit effort from others. All members of the education community play significant roles. School boards need to promote programs and activities that encourage and support effort by the community. Administrators need to exhibit day-to-day behaviors that encourage and support effort by teachers and students. Teachers need to challenge students with rigorous, meaningful assignments and provide the extra time and support for students to complete them. Students need to understand that today's effort leads to tomorrow's success. (DFR)

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Leadership Matters

Building Leadership Capacity

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Leadership Matters

Building Leadership Capacity

EFFORT X ABILITY

= SUCCESS

AIMED AT ACHIEVABLE GOALS

As leaders for higher expectations, superintendents and principals need to buy this formula, apply it and sell it to school board members, teachers, parents and, most importantly, students. This formula shows that when people apply effort to their ability and aim at achievable goals they will succeed. Too many students, parents and teachers believe that ability is the only key to success. **Only when individuals acknowledge that effort is the determining factor can they make the needed investment (sweat equity) to succeed.** From the battlefield to the athletic field, from the music hall to the science lab, from the corporate boardroom to the classroom, great leaders inspire effort from others. Leaders in improving schools encourage others to make an effort.

Building leadership capacity means using effort to elicit effort from others. All members of the education community play significant roles. School boards need to promote programs and activities that encourage and support effort by the community. Administrators need to exhibit day-to-day behaviors that encourage and support effort by teachers and students. Teachers need to challenge students with rigorous, meaningful assignments and provide the extra time and support for students to complete them. Students need to understand that today's effort leads to tomorrow's success.

Going the extra mile to provide exceptional instruction that produces extraordinary student effort can be seen in movies such as "Stand and Deliver" and "Music of the Heart." Administrators and teachers should watch and discuss these videos together. This professional-development activity will provide the vision needed to establish "a culture of effort." Teachers and students should watch the videos to help students understand that ongoing effort and perseverance are the keys to success. Winston Churchill's words at a graduation ceremony should become every student's rallying cry: "Never, never, never give up!"

Making Schools Work Major Goals

- Increase the number of middle grades students who complete a rigorous core curriculum taught by highly qualified teachers who engage students in relevant, hands-on activities that prepare them for success in high school.
- Increase the percentages of middle grades students who perform at the proficient levels in reading, mathematics and science on the MSW Assessment, which is based on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).
- Increase the percentages of high school students who perform at the proficient levels in core academic subjects, as measured by the MSW Assessment.
- Increase the percentage of high school students who complete a core curriculum of college-preparatory mathematics, science, language arts and social studies and a concentration in an academic area, career/technical area, or blend of academic and career/technical studies.

Making Schools Work Key Practices

- **High expectations.** Set higher expectations and get all students to meet them.
- **Middle grades academics.** Get middle grades students to complete an academic core that accelerates their learning, challenges them to achieve at higher levels and appeals to their interests.
- **High school academics.** Get high school students to complete a challenging program of study with an upgraded academic core and a concentration.
- **Career/technical studies.** Provide opportunities for middle grades and high school students to engage in career/technical studies and to use technology in academic courses.
- **Students actively engaged.** Provide varied learning activities to help middle grades and high school students link challenging academic content to real-world applications.
- **Teachers working together.** Give all teachers time to work together to plan, develop and conduct high-quality learning experiences and to share student work that meets standards.
- **Guidance.** Base guidance activities on the belief that all students matter and that they need long-term, personal relationships with adults at the school who will work with them and their parents to set learning goals and to make plans for further education and careers.
- **Extra help.** Provide a structured system of extra help and quality time that will enable middle grades and high school students to complete an accelerated program of study and to meet rigorous and consistent standards.
- **Data.** Use data on student achievement and school and classroom practices to revise curriculum and instructional strategies.

The MSW-recommended curriculum for middle grades students

- **Mathematics:** By the end of grade eight, all students either will complete Algebra I with acceptable performance or will pass a pre-algebra proficiency test and will be able to use algebra to solve problems.
- **Science:** All students will use laboratory and technology experiences to learn concepts in physical, life and earth/space sciences.
- **Reading:** Students will use reading skills in all content areas to become independent learners.
- **Language arts:** By the end of grade eight, students will use language skills correctly and effectively and will be able to find, organize and report information.
- **Social studies:** By the end of grade eight, students will be able to describe their heritage, their government, the world in which they live and key economic principles.

The MSW-recommended curriculum for high school students

- **English:** Students will complete four credits in college-preparatory English courses that emphasize reading, writing and presentation skills. Students will read a variety of books in and out of class, will make presentations, will write short assignments daily and will complete at least one major research paper each year. Students will revise their work until it meets standards.
- **Mathematics:** Students will complete four credits in mathematics — Algebra I, geometry, Algebra II and a higher-level mathematics course, such as trigonometry, statistics, pre-calculus, calculus or The College Board's Pacesetter Mathematics. Students will solve complex problems, develop alternative solutions and apply mathematics knowledge and skills to real-world problems. Mathematics teachers will provide opportunities for student discussion to increase understanding of key ideas.
- **Science:** Students will complete three credits in science, including at least two credits in college-preparatory biology, chemistry, anatomy/physiology or physics/applied physics. Students will conduct lab experiments and investigative studies; will read, critique and discuss three to five books or equivalent articles about science; will keep lab notebooks; will make presentations; and will complete research projects and written reports. Students will design and conduct group or individual projects.
- **Social studies:** Students will complete three credits in college-preparatory social studies courses that require them to read five to eight books or equivalent articles, write weekly, make presentations, complete research projects and prepare at least one major research paper per course.
- **Concentration:** Students will complete four credits above the academic core in either a career/technical, an academic, or a blended academic and career/technical concentration. Students will study one area in depth and use reading, writing, mathematics and science to complete projects and assignments. Students will be able to choose from among at least four career/technical concentrations and two academic majors, such as mathematics/science or humanities. At least one course in each academic major will be an Advanced Placement course. The concentrations can be developed in collaboration with postsecondary institutions.

This guide is designed to offer strategies for building leadership capacity in schools and to assist school administrators in finding new ways to encourage and support effort. While reading this guide, highlight what sounds promising and record ideas in the margin. Then act on them.

This guide answers four questions:

- What do leaders do to create curriculum and instruction that push all students to higher levels of proficiency?
- How do school leaders demonstrate that nearly all students — with their own effort and that of teachers and administrators — can master challenging curricula?
- How do leaders generate the efforts of many to focus on the success of every student?
- How can leaders put these ideas into practice?

This guide is intended to give school leaders and school system leaders practical ideas for encouraging and supporting effort as a means of improving student achievement.

Leadership promotes learning ---

What do leaders do to create curriculum and instruction that push all students to higher levels of proficiency?

Leading for learning has been hard work, at least since Galileo's time. Galileo found that telling people new information — and even showing them — did not bring about change. For example, Galileo met opposition when he challenged an erroneous belief by Aristotle, one of the most brilliant thinkers of all time. Aristotle had asserted that if two different weights of the same material were dropped from the same height, they would fall at different speeds. Hundreds of years later, Aristotle's theory still was being taught at the University of Pisa. When Galileo contradicted Aristotle's theory, the other professors and students were astonished and challenged him to prove his position.

Galileo did. According to legend, he went to the top of the Leaning Tower of Pisa with two different weights of the same material and dropped them together. They hit the ground at precisely the same time. Though he proved beyond any doubt that he was right and Aristotle was wrong, the professors continued to teach Aristotle's theory.

The Wall Street Journal (Wednesday, Feb. 16, 2000) suggests that the "belief" problems facing Galileo still confront school leaders today: "Five years after states began

drafting tougher school standards, more than half of the teachers say that they expect no more than they ever did of their students and that they receive little guidance from the new guidelines.” According to a poll conducted by the Public Agenda Foundation, about half of the teachers surveyed said their colleagues still pass students based on age rather than on how much they have learned. While two-thirds of parents and teachers polled said that recent graduates of high school have the skills to succeed on the job and in college, only one-third of employers and 46 percent of professors said they thought the graduates were prepared. The Wall Street Journal said that \$400 million will be spent in 2000-01 just to write and administer the tests linked to higher standards. The states’ millions of dollars may have little more effect than did Galileo’s demonstration unless local leaders make learning happen in classrooms, labs, homes and work sites.

In the 2000 MSW Teacher Survey, only 23 percent of the high school teachers and 34 percent of the middle grades teachers said they agreed strongly that teachers in their schools maintain a demanding yet supportive environment for student learning. Fifty percent of middle grades teachers and 48 percent of high school teachers reported that there is little they can do to ensure that all students are ready for the next level. More than 60 percent of middle grades and high school teachers said they believed that students’ success or failure is largely because of factors beyond the teachers’ control. If schools are to matter to more students, change clearly must begin with school leaders.

This section will explore three specific strategies that effective leaders employ in schools that are increasing student learning: (1) modeling learning; (2) providing compelling reasons for others to learn; and (3) creating a coaching environment for continuous growth.

STRATEGY 1: MODELING LEARNING

“Modeling the model” (leaders’ exhibiting the behavior that they want teachers to display) is an essential leadership phrase. Tom Peters’ book “The Circle of Innovation” suggests that employers stop spending their time evaluating employees and instead consider quarterly “updating-your-résumé” meetings. In these sessions, employees and their manager share what they have learned and what skills they have gained during the previous quarter that show their increasing value to the organization. School board members, principals and teachers should consider updating their résumés each quarter to identify new things they have learned. Here are some ways that different groups can model learning:

Local Board — School board members should publicize the work that they are doing to enhance their knowledge about learning, leading, fostering change and using technology. They should notify other board members and school administrators of their learning experiences.

Administrators — School administrators should share with staff members what they have read and should ask them about their reading. If teachers in a district are asked to submit individual growth plans, administrators should copy and distribute to teachers their own growth plans. **Administrators always should attend staff development provided for their teachers.** Three-quarters of the way into one all-day workshop for teachers about learning styles, a trainer asked to see the hands of the administrators in attendance. As two or three hands went up, the energy left the room. The 17 other principals were missing. Administrators' absences from such workshops not only communicate that staff development is not very important but also deprive administrators of learning ways to support teachers in implementing the ideas presented.

Teachers — Teachers should model their excitement for learning among colleagues and students and let students know about what they have learned recently. Being a critical thinker aloud and modeling learning may be among the most important teaching done.

Teachers also need to know what is taught in the grades above and below the one they teach, and they need to understand the continuum of learning in their subject area. Only then can they plan together for successful transitions and build a curriculum that drives instruction and expectations.

For example, to achieve the goal of having students complete Algebra I, geometry and two years of college-preparatory English by the end of grade 10, teachers in the middle grades and high school must examine student work and their own instruction with that goal in mind.

STRATEGY 2: PROVIDING COMPELLING REASONS FOR OTHERS TO LEARN

Effective leaders continuously create compelling reasons for others to learn. Learning often takes great effort by the learner, and most people need to see a payoff in order to put forth that effort.

The work of William Glasser describes some compelling motivations. Called “controlled theory” in his earlier writing and “choice theory” in more recent work, the key motivators are the desires to **survive, to belong, to gain power and to have freedom and fun.** Successful leaders and administrators identify these motivators in their students daily. Students in low-level classes know they need to work at only the most basic levels. There is no expectation for more than that. They also learn quickly that to “belong” with other students in low-level classes they should avoid excelling; they often engage in inappropriate behavior. However, students in challenging classes must excel in order to survive at the high levels and to be accepted by teachers and fellow students. In these classes, teachers routinely allow students to take control of their own learning.

Learning is focused on solving problems and doing mind-engaging assignments, so students quickly realize the freedom that such learning provides. These students view learning as fun.

Teachers who have discovered the secrets of having high expectations for all students and providing them with challenging, real-world learning do not have to spend time explaining to students why learning is useful. They only have to engage learners' minds in meaningful ways and stand back as the learning itself becomes the motivating force.

School leaders also can encourage staff in high-level teaching. They can remind staff continuously about the payoff for efforts to plan and implement strategies for high expectations and challenging content. They also can praise staff for the improvement in student achievement that these strategies produce. Teachers and administrators always should ask: "What else can we do?"

Administrators — Students engaged in learning create fewer discipline problems (**survival**) that take up administrators' time, thereby giving administrators the **freedom** to devote more time and energy to coaching teachers and students.

Teachers — A focus on higher student achievement can create a feeling of **belonging** among staff and can place the teacher in a leadership role (**power**) with students. Almost all teachers find higher-level instruction to be more **fun**.

Students — While increased achievement frequently translates into increased future earnings (**power**), perhaps the most important payoff for the student is that his or her choices (**freedom**) increase. When students complete the middle grades and begin high school programs that achieve the MSW goals by the end of 10th grade, they are empowered with **choices** for the next two years to build a specialized program — the academic or career/technical concentration — that is tied to their future plans. The concentration may be a purely academic one, such as mathematics/science or humanities; it may be a career/technology concentration, such as automotive technology or pre-engineering; or it may be a blended concentration, such as international business (foreign language and business courses). Counselors should ensure that students and their parents are mindful of these choices, beginning when students are in the middle grades.

Parents — As parents help to engage their children in learning, they experience an increased sense of family **belonging**. Parents need to study the courses, opportunities and requirements their children face in order to provide motivation for their children's effort. Successful learners are usually happier, meaning more **fun** for parents.

Community — As student achievement grows, students have new opportunities (**power**) to contribute to the growth and development of the entire community. An educated work force benefits everyone.

STRATEGY 3: CREATING A COACHING ENVIRONMENT FOR CONTINUOUS GROWTH

The third element of leading for learning is creating a coaching environment that is safe, positive and supportive, in which thinking is encouraged and risk-taking is valued. On the 2000 MSW Teacher Survey, many teachers reported that they seldom were asked to reflect upon what they learned in staff development or to work together to implement and refine new strategies. Those data indicate that coaching is needed in individual schools. Similarly, many school administrators complain that they hear from the central office only when there is a problem. Developing a coaching environment at all levels requires system and school leaders to keep score on student achievement and to create a climate of continuous coaching.

Consider how a basketball coach is judged. The coach's evaluation is based upon the team's performance. While the coach actively participates during practices, on the evening of the game he or she has to stay on the bench and ask the crowd, "How am I doing?" To suggest that administrators or teachers are coaches means that they are willing to be evaluated based upon the success of those they are coaching. Coaching behaviors should be developed at all levels:

Local Board — School boards need to create a risk-taking environment for school administrators. Administrators historically were evaluated based upon their ability to "not rock the boat." **Today's effective leaders are boat-rockers.** Leaders need to create an environment in which risk-takers are protected from early, unwarranted attacks and have the opportunity to learn from failure. Douglas McNally, principal at Taconic High School in Massachusetts, reported that when low-level courses were eliminated and graduation requirements were raised, some students failed and their parents became upset. However, because the school had done a high-profile information program in the community, support remained. When the mission was explained and parents recognized that general diplomas with low academics were useless to their children, they joined the school in exploring ways to get students to perform at higher levels.

Administrators — Time spent coaching teachers is much more likely to raise teacher expectations, effort and skills than time spent evaluating teachers. While the administrator does need to do some evaluation, that evaluation usually focuses on the teacher's ability to meet minimum standards. Coaching is used to reach greatness. The true value of professional development is realized only in schools that have plans for teacher coaching. Research has found that teachers who receive theory, modeling, practice,

Is Your School Board Focused on Student Achievement?

School boards that spend most of their time looking at curricula, instruction and student learning are the ones that support teachers, principals and superintendents in advancing student achievement. If the school board spends little time on these issues, it may be part of the problem of low-performing schools. Unfortunately, the typical school board's agenda usually is filled with bids for services, reports from architects, plans for facilities, department of education directives and grievances from parents and teachers. Discussions about curricula, instruction and best practices often are relegated to 10 minutes at a school board work session. State test results are given some additional time, because results frequently are published in local newspapers, but most local boards rarely address practical solutions for low-performing schools. The following self-assessment can be helpful in determining the extent to which your local school board addresses continuous improvement of student achievement:

- Our school board meetings focus on issues related to student achievement.
- Our school board has led or facilitated conversations in the community that have helped set a common vision for student achievement and a clear definition of student success.
- Our school board uses reliable data to make informed decisions about how to support student achievement goals and how to measure progress.
- Our school board acts to encourage the expression of diverse opinions and to create community consensus on student achievement goals.
- Our school board sets benchmarks and discusses progress toward student achievement goals.
- Our school board and superintendent are leaders in defining achievement standards for all students.
- Our school board has developed a process for maintaining accountability within schools, the district office and the school board itself.
- Our school board and superintendent exhibit the same teamwork and partnership that are expected of the schools and the community.
- Our school board has established opportunities for feedback from parents, administrators, teachers and the community regarding student achievement goals.
- Our school board works to create policies that clearly support student achievement goals.

Source: National School Boards Association

feedback and coaching on a new strategy use that strategy accurately in class between 75 percent and 90 percent of the time. Those who receive only the theory without any follow-up (the norm in providing staff development) use a strategy properly 5 percent or less of the time.

Other research on the value of coaching shows that teacher performance is affected by feedback (positive or negative) that teachers receive. In a controlled experiment on two classroom-management tasks, feedback was manipulated so that half of the teachers who rated themselves positively received positive feedback from evaluators, while the other half received negative feedback. On subsequent tasks, those who had received positive feedback outperformed those who received negative feedback. People who have confidence in their ability to succeed are more likely to succeed. They also are more likely to solicit feedback.

Teachers — Effective teachers use coaching activities to help students move toward and beyond high standards. A teacher knows that a student has reached the highest level of learning when the student is capable of self-evaluation. Consider the following teacher strategy:

High school teacher Harry Wallace jokingly calls his motivational teaching methods “Teaching Yourself Out of a Job.” But his strategies are no joke: “I’m aiming to create a persistent individual who doesn’t need a teacher anymore, and within the first quarter I have all but two or three students working on their own.”

Wallace’s process starts with a teaching situation in which the teacher is responsible for all aspects of learning: asking questions, providing answers, evaluating work and giving grades. It quickly moves to one in which students provide the answers and then to one in which students also make up the questions. Wallace’s process eventually has students evaluating their own work and that of others.

“Grades become relatively meaningless in this process,” says Wallace. Failure is no longer a concept, because the classroom is an experience of investigation and experimentation. If one thing doesn’t work, students are expected to try something else. “I will help them, but very little. I will teach them, but only as much as I need to. I’m trying to give them a new attitude about learning.”

He offers a few tips for getting started on the process:

- Put students in charge immediately, starting with lessons that are relatively easy so that they experience success.
- Get right to work. The more time students have, the better.
- Have students learn to value the learning process by keeping every scrap of paper they produce, even scratch paper.

- Pair less-successful students with more-successful ones.
- Expect a period of adjustment while students change their expectations.

Wallace teaches electronics and computer classes at Mesa Ridge High School in Security, Colo., and is happy to share and discuss his ideas. Contact him at (719) 687-3761 or P.O. Box 521, Woodland Park, CO 80866.

Jeanne Chambers at Ringgold High School in Ringgold, Ga., uses a similar process with her English classes. At the beginning of each term, Chambers teaches students processes for working in groups, reaching consensus on ideas, and evaluating their own and others' work in the classroom. She gradually moves from making specific assignments to giving students only concepts and challenging them to develop projects that demonstrate the concepts. Students almost always are working on challenging assignments for projects they collectively have designed and created. During a study of "Beowulf," her students wrote a musical score for classical guitar for the epic; produced replicas of weapons, buildings and dress; created dramatic presentations; and translated the content into a modern-day rap song. Students said they never had realized the study of something like "Beowulf" could be so much fun.

Coaching in the classroom is designed to move responsibilities gradually from the teacher to the students. It is important to recognize that the teacher's focus is on increasing performance standards for students by coaching them into taking responsibility for their learning. One reason teachers do not have much practice in coaching middle grades and high school students is that expectations for many students are so low. Some career/technical classes are a good example. Teachers frequently complain that these courses are dumping grounds for students who do not want to learn. Sadly for these students, not much actually is expected of them. There is no tough exam at the end of the course or program. There is no senior project that must meet certain standards and be judged by an outside panel. The work is hardly demanding enough to merit the intervention of the teacher, much less require extra help.

Coaching also is rare in language arts. Many students still are placed in lower-level language arts classes in the middle grades and high school, and these students receive little extra help or coaching. The teachers and students believe that extra help is unnecessary because the students cannot perform at higher levels. On the other hand, coaching and extra help are increasing in mathematics. States have instituted higher mathematics requirements, and more students are enrolling in Algebra I, geometry and Algebra II in high school. As middle grades and high school teachers raise expectations and decide to teach more demanding materials, they discover that students need more coaching. These students will begin to respond positively to the freedom of learning in an environment in which they have some control over their learning.

Giving more control to the students requires schools and teachers to create courses that focus student efforts on performance, not on grades. Grading allows students to do just enough to get by. Teachers increasingly will need to use strategies such as cooperative learning, in which students can learn to coach themselves and one another.

Leadership (or lack of it) always shows _____

How do school leaders demonstrate that nearly all students — with their own effort and effort by teachers and administrators — can master challenging curricula?

Leaders' daily decisions about investments of time, energy, money and resources send a loud message about what is considered important.

LOCAL BOARD — The board of education needs to communicate its higher expectations of student learning. Among its responsibilities are four general priorities: employing, assigning, retaining and supporting teachers; building community partnerships; providing appropriate and sustained professional development; and providing time for administrators and teachers to plan together to increase student achievement.

Establishing high standards in hiring and assigning teachers — According to an Education Week article, "Out-of-Field Teaching Is Hard to Curb" (March 31, 1999), "... nationwide, 28 percent of high school mathematics teachers have neither a major nor a minor in mathematics, and 18 percent of all science teachers are similarly deficient in their preparation." These deficiencies are most prevalent in poor and urban school districts.

The most recent data from SREB on the content preparation of middle grades teachers reveals that about 50 percent of the teachers in high-performing middle schools have a content focus in mathematics or science, compared with about 40 percent of teachers in low-performing schools. Most teachers of the middle grades have elementary education majors; in many states, six semester-hours of lower-level study in

Cooperative learning is a strategy to get students to work together on challenging assignments. More than 500 studies reveal that student achievement is enhanced when students are engaged in purposeful and collaborative learning. When this strategy is used correctly, students are responsible for their own learning and the learning of others. Quality cooperative learning requires teachers to put a lot of effort into planning activities that will pay off in increased effort by students.

Key Conditions for Accelerating Student Achievement

Making Schools Work is based on the belief that school board members, district leaders and school leaders must be involved actively with teachers in designing improvement strategies, allocating resources and developing an accountability process. Most importantly, they should align themselves with teachers by supporting improvement strategies. Several conditions are fundamental in using the MSW model to improve student learning:

- **A clear mission statement** — District and school leadership is needed to develop a strong mission statement about preparing middle grades students for success in challenging high school studies and preparing high school graduates for success in post-secondary education and the workplace.
- **Strong district leadership** — Middle grades and high school leaders and teachers need strong support from the district office and the local school board to align curricula in grades six through 12 and to link the curricula to national and state standards. Each grade and/or course needs to have standards that define content and skills, and each needs to have several agreed-upon examples of student work that meets the standards.
- **Strong school leadership** — The middle grades and high schools need strong, effective principals who encourage their teachers, help them plan and implement research-based practices, and provide leadership for improving curricula and instruction.
- **Qualified teachers** — Middle grades and high school teachers must have in-depth knowledge of their subjects and of how to teach students in grades six through 12. Middle grades teachers who lack majors or minors in their teaching assignments must be required to obtain majors or minors and must receive support for this effort. The school board and the superintendent should agree not to hire teachers unless they meet this qualification.
- **Support for staff development** — District and school leaders must provide leadership and financial support for instructional materials, joint planning time and professional development on new curricula and research-based instructional methods. These leaders must give guidance and direction as teachers implement new practices.
- **Planning for continuous improvement** — District and school leaders must create an organizational structure and a process that will ensure that they continuously are involved with faculty in decisions about what to teach, how to teach, what to expect students to learn and how to evaluate student learning. Leaders need to support faculty study teams that address problems in instruction and student learning.

a content area (such as mathematics) qualify an individual with an elementary education license to teach that content area in kindergarten through eighth grade. There is further evidence that low-achieving students in mathematics are assigned the teachers with the least preparation in mathematics content. According to the 2000 MSW Teacher Survey, middle grades teachers recognize their need for further content knowledge. Nearly 80 percent of them reported a need for help in getting at-risk students to master more challenging content, yet only 7 percent received more than 40 hours of such help over a three-year period (about two days a year).

Also, an article in Education Week — “Why So Many Under-Qualified High School Teachers?” (Nov. 4, 1998) — reports that, in many states, laws or state board of education policies permit assigning teachers who are not adequately prepared in a content area to teach that subject. Some states have no regulations concerning teacher assignments. Amid pressure to reduce staff and save money, many principals find that assigning teachers to teach out of field often is the path of least resistance.

School board members need to ask the following question: “Are teachers assigned to teach courses that they are not prepared to teach?” Students learn more from teachers with deep knowledge of the subjects they teach. Without such teachers, school districts will not improve student achievement. Therefore, it is imperative that school boards establish high standards for the content knowledge of teachers they hire.

If a school board faces hiring difficulties, there should be an incentive plan to attract or retrain teachers. Data indicate that fewer than 20 percent of schools offer such options. Teaching should be a highly valued profession — one that requires expertise and skills in a specialty area of certification. SREB recommends three strategies to address this problem:

- State colleges and universities should offer summer institutes in content areas, such as mathematics and science.
- School districts should offer teachers pay incentives to complete academic majors.
- School boards should require new hires to complete academic majors within a specified time.

Building community partnerships that are future-focused — Today’s school board members have the difficult task of convincing the community that schools are the best they’ve ever been, yet, at the same time, they need to improve. Board members must build trust among members of the community by indicating that the local schools are capable of doing the job. At the same time, board members need to help educate the community about schools’ needs and demands so that there is support for the board’s plans for continuous improvement. Only a community that understands the impact and necessity of keeping schools on the cutting edge will support the necessary spend-

ing of resources. Superintendents, school board members and school administrators can build support in the community by implementing three strategies:

- Institute an “administrator for a day” program. Invite local business leaders to swap jobs with district administrators for a day. This event gives business and community members the opportunity to observe what happens in the classroom, to interact with students and parents, and to examine school budgets. It also gives school administrators a taste of the business world.
- Collaborate with local industry to hold parent conferences at job sites. Providing opportunities for teachers and administrators to talk with parents at their job sites increases parent participation, decreases “lost time” on the job and gives educators a unique perspective on the lives of their students.
- Approach local businesses and community agencies about providing summer internships for school employees. This practice allows the businesses to utilize the talents of well-educated, professional staff and allows teachers to understand what businesses need from their graduates.

Providing professional development for all employees — The school board’s policies and calendar should show that learning by school employees is a high priority. Teachers cannot raise expectations for students unless they increase their content knowledge and learn new, proven, research-based teaching methods that engage students in learning. Time and financial resources must be dedicated to ongoing professional development. When a school district shaves teacher in-service days from the calendar to meet a budget crisis, it sends the disturbing message that its expectations for teachers are not high enough. Creating time for teachers and administrators to talk about best practices to improve student achievement is an important component of professional development. School board members should ask principals how such time is made available.

Providing time for instructional planning — Once school boards, district administrators and principals decide to focus on improving student effort and to teach all students what they historically have taught to only their best students, teachers need more time to plan ways to teach advanced material to all students. Teachers need time to discuss issues that are relevant to students’ experiences, to develop real-life examples and activities, and to learn strategies for connecting learning to the world outside the classroom. School boards must view planning time for teachers as an investment. Although many school boards are reluctant to provide additional planning time because they fear a loss of instructional time, there are several ways to avoid this problem:

- Use alternative, flexible scheduling to compress instructional time and add planning time.

- Provide teachers with stipends to plan instruction during the summer.
- Add extra days for instructional planning to the school calendar and compensate teachers for them.
- Increase the number of contract days for professional development.

ADMINISTRATORS — Middle grades and high school principals have important modeling roles. Their responses to teachers, parents and students show whether they are committed to high expectations and student learning.

Implementing an attendance policy — The importance of what happens in the classrooms is communicated through a school’s attendance policy. Although a plan needs to stress the importance of attendance and to contain penalties for missing school, a strategy for helping students meet high expectations for attendance goes much further. Consider the following plan:

Former Principal Steven Godowsky and the faculty at Paul M. Hodgson Vocational-Technical High School in Newark, Del., found an effective way to decrease school absences.

“In many schools,” said Godowsky, “students are put on no-credit status after a certain number of absences. We found that policy very punitive because it gives students no way to come back. It also provides very little incentive to continue to learn. We decided we wanted a consequence for absences and we also wanted kids to take responsibility for their further learning.”

Hodgson’s program allows students to regain credit status by attending after-school sessions on Tuesday or Thursday afternoons or Saturday mornings. Each session provides tutoring related to missed schoolwork or help with special projects designed to earn back standing and grades.

“This is a very positive consequence for students. One-on-one tutoring is great for them,” said Godowsky. The program creates a sense of caring and guidance that increases students’ sense of belonging to the school. As a result, Hodgson experienced a 14 percent improvement in attendance in one year.

Students are placed on no-credit status and are referred to the program when they have missed six days — excused or unexcused — in a semester. (No-credit status means that course credit has not been earned regardless of grade average.) There are a few exceptions — such as a death in the family, legal business and approved medical leave — that do not lead to no-credit status.

“Six days represents a high standard,” said Godowsky, “but we wanted to be proactive. By the time students reach 15 or 20 days of absence, it’s too late for them to make up the time and work.”

Principal Wesley Revels at Purnell Swett High School in Lumberton, N.C., a charter Making Schools Work site, says, “You can’t teach students if they aren’t in school.” So he and his faculty have developed a reward system. An attendance goal is set for each grade level based on those students’ attendance the previous year. At the end of each grading period, all the students in every grade that meets its goal receive rewards that have been donated by the community. Revels said that overall attendance for the first grading period rose to 94 percent from 91 percent in the first grading period the previous year and that all grade levels reached their attendance goals. The idea is to make students responsible for their attendance and to get them to put pressure on their classmates who have histories of chronic absenteeism.

Building professional development into each faculty meeting — For staff development to be truly effective, schools constantly must focus on improving instruction. Principals should use faculty meetings to promote that focus. There are six strategies for accomplishing this goal:

- Copy and distribute professional articles on helpful topics, such as incorporating reading into the content areas. During the staff meeting, divide the staff into cooperative groups and assign an activity that will stimulate discussion and learning on the topics.
- Ask each staff member to bring an example of how he or she is using in the classroom a strategy learned at any recent professional-development training. Divide the staff into content-area groups and direct each person to share his or her use of the strategy with colleagues.
- During the meeting, have teachers demonstrate for all of their colleagues their effective use of strategies.
- Have teachers in small groups **agree or disagree** with the following three statements and discuss their responses:
 1. All students can learn — nearly all of them at a high level.
 2. Success in school depends upon ability.
 3. Ability is unalterable.

After about five minutes of small-group discussions, ask teachers to identify specific elements that affect student performance. Then identify existing classroom and school practices that encourage student effort and those that may hinder effort.

- Ask staff members to bring to the next faculty meeting copies of the last three homework assignments they gave their students. Divide faculty into groups of four or five — across disciplines — and have them share those homework assignments with one another and discuss the assignments’ appropriateness, motivational content and push for high expectations.

- Engage the staff in looking more closely at performance data. Take an entire session to guide the staff in examining the school's progress toward meeting the MSW performance goals and the school's improvement goals. Have content-area teachers meet to determine which school practices work and which courses lead to higher student achievement. This review of the data will lead to discussions of student and teacher needs.

Communicating high expectations for learning by walking around — Middle grades and high school principals who often are in classrooms have opportunities to talk with students and teachers about learning. In many school districts, administrators' presence in classrooms means they are conducting formal evaluations of teachers. **Most district-based evaluation programs put the administrator's focus on the teacher and his or her teaching. Increasing the amount of time that administrators spend in coaching teachers can move the focus from teaching to student learning and can provide teachers with important assistance.** If students are to reach higher standards, most classrooms need less "teacher talk" and more student-centered learning. Administrators should direct teachers' focus to the learning that takes place during various classroom activities.

Administrators should search for teachers who link challenging academic content to real-world applications. In all classes, students should be engaged in the following activities:

- conducting research and analyzing and interpreting data;
- solving problems and defending conclusions;
- using scientific investigation methods;
- reflecting on material and constructing oral and written responses to it; and
- working in teams.

Having an accountability system for teachers and students — It is important to create a system that keeps students from falling through the cracks. In its 1996 report "Breaking Ranks," the National Association of Secondary School Principals said that every student in the middle grades and high school should have a personal adult advocate. A teacher would be responsible for 12 to 15 students and would remain with those students through the middle grades. Another teacher would serve as their mentor/adviser through the high school years. Teachers could provide individualized attention at important times, particularly when students make important transitions (from the middle grades to high school; from high school to postsecondary study or work). The teacher-advocate would help students tailor a personal progress plan that begins at grade six and serves as a map or guide throughout and beyond high school. The teacher-advocate would facilitate students' dealings with guidance counselors, other

teachers and parents. The power in such a program is that each student is known by an adult at the school and knows that he or she will not get lost in the crowd.

Creating an effective guidance program — Each student and his or her parents should be involved with the student’s adviser in creating an individualized advisement plan. Middle grades students and their parents need to understand by sixth grade what courses students must take and how they must perform in order to succeed in rigorous studies in high school. Students need to know that their hard work today will pay off in the immediate future.

In “The Future-Focused Role Image,” Benjamin Singer indicates that low-performing students have almost no sense of the future. Their focus is strictly on the short term, and they believe their future will be determined by fate. On the other hand, successful students — who have received early advisement and assistance in the middle grades from teachers and counselors — have a much greater sense of personal control and can think five or 10 years ahead. Students who receive help in planning a high school program of study when they are in eighth or ninth grade generally have higher achievement than those who do not receive such early assistance.

Administrators, guidance counselors and teachers at improving schools ask the following questions:

- Do sixth-graders and their parents understand the eighth-grade exit requirements that will prepare students to take college-preparatory courses in high school?
- Are entering freshmen and their parents informed of the choices and options that are available after high school if they complete a rigorous, challenging academic and technical program?
- Does the senior year strengthen student learning and achievement? Schools can use several strategies to strengthen the senior year:
 1. The **reality check strategy** is based on the idea that high school should equip graduates to go on for further study without taking remedial courses and to pass employers’ exams for higher-paying careers. Schools need to work with colleges and universities to administer their placement exams and with community businesses to administer their employment exams to 11th-graders. These exams will help students determine their strengths and weaknesses before their transition to the real world. Many students will have deficits in reading, writing, grammar, the ability to synthesize and organize information, and mathematics. An analysis of the data will help determine the skills and knowledge students need to acquire in the senior year.

2. The **focused high school strategy** is to create a high school that teaches all students a solid academic core and an in-depth concentration in an academic or career area. This approach also requires all seniors to complete projects or exhibitions, provides a strong guidance and advisement system, and gives students the support they need to meet higher standards.
3. The **transition strategy** is one in which high school and middle grades administrators and teachers work together, especially in grades six and seven, to identify students who are not ready for college-preparatory work. There also must be accelerated instruction in grades seven through 10 that results in an increased percentage of students who complete Algebra I, geometry and two college-preparatory English courses by the end of 10th grade. A second part of this strategy is to increase graduation requirements to at least 28 Carnegie units, including four credits each in language arts, mathematics, science and social studies.
4. The **accountability strategy** allows states to emphasize certain factors that will strengthen the senior year. This strategy seeks to increase the percentage of students who 1) take Advanced Placement classes; 2) complete a solid academic core and the additional requirements for a concentration; 3) spend at least half of the senior year in advanced academic studies; and 4) score at the proficient level on exams such as the NAEP-based *High Schools That Work* or MSW assessments.

Agreeing on readiness indicators aligned to the school mission — Student achievement is the most important thing in schools. It is the focus of all accountability initiatives and of countless reports in the media and in professional journals; it should be the focus of every administrator and teacher in America. As part of a comprehensive school-improvement effort, it is important to identify major readiness indicators for the transition from eighth grade to high school and from high school to college or work.

MSW promotes the following readiness indicators for the transition from grade eight to high school:

1. Students score at the proficient level on the NAEP-based MSW Assessment in reading, mathematics and science.
2. Students complete pre-algebra or Algebra I in grade eight and score at the proficient level on an end-of-course algebra test.
3. Students read many (at least 25 per year) and varied books across the curriculum on at least the eighth-grade level.
4. Students find and organize information and write reports to answer questions or solve problems.

5. Students write competently.
6. Students select and use appropriate technology to complete school assignments.

The following indicators signify readiness for moving from grade 12 to postsecondary education and/or the workplace:

1. Students score at the proficient level on the NAEP-based MSW Assessment in reading, mathematics and science.
2. Students complete the MSW-recommended academic core and either an academic, a career/technical or a blended concentration.
3. Students write proficiently, can do research and can organize or synthesize information into coherent papers with proper documentation.
4. Students produce and present logical oral reports.
5. Students use time, money and materials wisely.
6. Students work well in teams, teach and lead others, and negotiate solutions.
7. Students acquire and evaluate data, organize information, interpret and communicate information, and use computers to process information.
8. Students select and use appropriate technology.

TEACHERS — Teachers need to incorporate high expectations into their instructional and assessment strategies. Students will take most of their cues from teachers as they decide how much effort to put forth.

Requiring quality work — First, teachers must agree on standards for quality, and students must see examples of quality work against which they can assess their own work. Only students who are able to assess themselves can excel. Teachers need to get students to believe that they can do better. This message is called “the coaching voice.”

Students frequently have more experiences with quality work in extracurricular activities than in the classroom, partly because of the coaching voice. Students’ performances in sports or music frequently are followed by a coaching voice that says, “You can do better.” This encouragement convinces students that greater effort will lead to improved performance. In the classroom, however, a grade of C on an assignment frequently is seen as a conclusion and a move to the next task. Coaching voices need to become as common in the classroom as they are on the athletic field. The coach says, “You can do better; stay late and practice.”

Students and teachers too often say that students are not required to redo work to meet standards. However, at job sites, most adults would report that they must redo work that does not meet standards. Redoing work to meet quality standards is a fact of life. Why, then, would teachers not require students to redo their work until it meets standards? Teachers must determine quality standards for their classrooms and demand that students meet those standards, regardless of how many times they must redo the work.

Increasing live performances and live-event learning — Oral presentations increase student learning by allowing students to practice and develop essential communication skills needed in the workplace and in colleges and universities. Live performances also consistently increase the quality of student work. Students' reports could be given at the mall, rather than at the school. Envision a mall that serves coffee and cookies to

A High-Expectations Story

A middle grades teacher feels it is important for his students to learn that quality means going above and beyond. Early in the year, he presents students with a project that is not too complicated and takes about two weeks to complete. He spells out specific requirements for the project. He grades the students' finished projects, and each student who meets his requirements receives a grade of C. He then hands back the projects, tells students to take a few minutes to look over them and waits at his desk for the first grade-conscious student to appear.

A student shows up rather quickly and asks, "What's wrong with my project?" The teacher spends some time looking over it and responds: "It's perfect. You nailed it." The student gives the teacher a perplexed look. "A perfect C? I never got one of those before." The teacher informs the student that he did exactly what the teacher had requested, and that's how one receives a grade of C. The student quickly responds, "Well, how would I get a B or maybe an A?" The teacher tells the student: "In order to get a B, you would have to go beyond what is asked for. To get an A, you would have to go above and beyond." He suggests that "A" and "B" stand for "above and beyond." The student quickly responds, "Like what?" The teacher says, "I cannot tell you or it will be a C."

One might disagree with the teacher's grading policy, but his idea is that, up to this point, students have equated following directions with quality. However, quality requires going above and beyond — for students, teachers, administrators and board of education members.

retired people each day as students give presentations. Students who know that there is an audience for their work increase their effort. Imagine telling a 10th-grader that his report on Guadalcanal will be given at the mall on April 3 and that some of those in the audience may have been at Guadalcanal.

The most powerful performances are connected to live-event learning, in which student performances are followed by real consequences. When students are given real problems to solve, their solutions are tested in the real world. For example, students may design surveys to assess market preference for objects to be sold in a school store. When they purchase those objects and open the store, they quickly can tell the success or failure of their decision-making. This live-event consequence is a powerful motivator. Many schools use simulations involving the stock market to motivate student learning. These simulations frequently produce high student performance because they become so real that the student behaves as if the consequences were real. A school in Minneapolis decided to make its stock-market study a live event. Freshmen invested \$25 apiece for a four-year ride in the stock market, aimed at paying for their senior prom. Real consequences increase student interest and effort.

A group of students and teachers interviewed a restaurant owner to see whether he had a real problem for them to address. The restaurant owner reported that each time the national chain did a survey of his restaurant, he received low scores for parking, but he did not know why. He asked students to come up with a recommendation.

Students prepared survey forms and handed them to customers entering and exiting the restaurant. They measured traffic flow at various times of day and studied survey drawings of the parking lot and road entrances. They met with town officials regarding parking ordinances. At the end of six weeks, students presented the restaurant owner with their recommendations. When he implemented some of those recommendations, students recognized the value of their work. Projects such as this help students understand the importance of what they are learning and help them transfer that knowledge into useful skills for life.

Establishing required examinations that are common and demanding — All students in the middle grades and high school should be required to take and pass common examinations at the end of each course and grading period. Allowing students to be exempt from final examinations does them a disservice. Every profession requires rigorous examinations before licensure. Data from the MSW Teacher Survey indicate that many students aren't expected to know or be able to do much. It is essential that all those who teach a subject decide together on clear, explicit objectives on which students are going to be assessed. These same teachers jointly should develop examinations to measure those objectives and should develop scoring guides for grading the exams.

Six A's of Good Project-Based Learning

The following criteria for determining the quality of project-based learning provide a checklist for teachers and administrators to use in assessing learner-centered activities. Quality activities can find applications of academic content in the real world or can take real-life problems and search for solutions in academic content.

- **Authenticity** — Use the context of the workplace and the community to teach academic and technical skills.
- **Academic rigor** — Require higher-order thinking skills and research methods from academic and technical fields.
- **Applied learning** — Require students to use academic and technical knowledge in acquiring the problem-solving, communication and teamwork skills they will need in the workplace.
- **Active exploration** — Extend beyond the classroom to involve work-based learning, community-based activities and technical labs.
- **Adult relationships** — Involve adult mentors from the school and the community.
- **Assessment** — Include exhibitions and assessments of students' work according to the students' personal standards and performance standards set by the school and the community.

Teachers and administrators would do well to examine the practices at Marion County High School in Lebanon, Ky. Every senior is required to complete a senior project, a major research paper, an oral presentation and a project that is judged by an outside committee. Students are treated as adults and are responsible for their work. Such accountability measures improve student work.

Leadership brings everyone on board ---

How do leaders generate the efforts of many to focus on the success of every student?

Achieving high academic standards for all students requires leaders to elicit high effort from almost everyone. This section outlines some immediate steps that any leader could take on his or her own. It also examines a team strategy for getting a core group to increase the number of leaders working toward high standards.

In “A Passion for Excellence,” author Tom Peters notes that leaders have five important roles:

- **to educate** — to inform when conditions change;
- **to sponsor** — to spotlight/celebrate outstanding performances;
- **to coach** — to provide on-the-job assistance as people tackle new skills;
- **to counsel** — to offer support and services when off-the-job problems cause on-the-job problems; and
- **to confront** — to inform individuals when their behavior or performance is unacceptable.

Peters points out that confrontation is the most difficult of the tasks and the most often avoided. Sometimes it is avoided because of “leadership guilt.” A leader who has not spent the time educating, sponsoring, coaching and counseling feels that confrontation might be considered unfair. By attending regularly to these other four tasks, a leader can feel more comfortable stepping into the difficult role of confrontation. It is important to remember that all confrontation should be done with the “door open” — after the confrontation, the leader should offer education, coaching or counseling. The following are examples of how each of the five important roles applies to different leaders within and outside the school.

EDUCATE

Local board and central office — The superintendent and board members should inform the community and parents about the higher standards for student achievement. Educate everyone about changes in the workplace that place new demands on student learning. Provide all staff members with time and resources for job-specific professional development.

Administrators — The principal must use every moment to teach that effort is important. Consider every interaction with students and teachers as an opportunity to teach.

Talk with teachers and students individually and in small groups about the value of taking challenging courses. View yourself as selling the concept of effort to everyone — students, teachers and parents. **Just because you have expressed the idea of effort to others does not mean they have learned it.** School leaders must stay focused on a few things and persistently repeat a consistent message.

Teachers — Provide students with continuous access to information and people that reinforce the need for high academic achievement. Middle grades teachers can invite 10th-graders back to tell seventh- and eighth-graders what they wish they had done. High school teachers can invite graduates to do the same for juniors and seniors.

SPONSOR

Local board and administrators — Spotlight effort and success by staff and students. Reward hard work and celebrate milestones as indicators of potential — not finish lines.

Teachers — Recognize students for their effort. Reward growth in learning and celebrate the times when students really work hard to achieve high goals. In one school, a middle grades teacher rewards “knock-your-socks-off effort” with a pair of socks taken from a clothesline in her classroom. Students say that the socks represent the teacher’s faith in them and her belief that they can succeed.

COACH

Administrators — Middle grades and high school principals should provide teachers with support in the classroom and with outside follow-up as teachers modify instruction to help all students excel. Use peer coaching to have academic and vocational teachers support one another’s efforts. Invite special education, reading and learning-support teachers into more teachers’ classrooms, rather than pulling the students out of those classrooms.

Teachers — Coach student performance. If the student has a very long way to go to high-level work, break it into manageable tasks. Help early, then back off. Some students may need lots of help to produce their first quality effort. That first experience of quality is very important.

COUNSEL

Administrators — Middle grades and high school principals can take the lead in counseling by bringing every possible community resource to assist students whose personal problems create learning problems. Use personal adult advocates (described on page 18) and help guidance counselors to develop a comprehensive guidance model that gives them more time to counsel students.

Teachers — Those who know students well can alert guidance counselors for early interventions when there are problems. Teachers also can assist with counseling students by participating fully in advisement programs.

CONFRONT

Local board and central office — Hold everyone accountable. Ask for the numbers. Ask for the plans. Ask for the new plans. Refuse to put more effort into what doesn't work. The Memphis school system began having principals meet in small groups with the superintendent to present their plans for improvement.

Administrators — Principals should stress the importance of data. Only when teachers confront the hard data on student performance do they fully understand what students actually are learning, what they are not learning and how the curriculum needs to be changed to improve student achievement. Looking at the data keeps everyone focused on student learning. Ask teachers to attend not only to their own students' work, but also to that of students in other classrooms and in other schools. Work with staff in resetting goals continuously to outdo the last best performance. Remember to confront with the door open, allowing the confronted person to return to teaching, coaching or counseling.

Teachers — Force students to assess their work according to quality guidelines. Consider requiring students to write three sentences about the quality of each project before submitting it. Have students keep portfolios of their best work and compare subsequent assignments to those examples. Ask them, "How long has it been since you surpassed your last best effort?"

Leadership is ongoing

How can leaders put these ideas into practice?

A recent Southern Regional Education Board research brief, "Improving Reading and Writing Skills in Language Arts Courses and Across the Curriculum," illustrates the need to have everyone's efforts to achieve goals. School boards, administrators and teachers need to **confront** the issue that students who are not taking college-preparatory English and those whose teachers accept low-quality work are being shortchanged. It is essential to **sponsor** teachers whose programs are making a difference and to provide staff development and **coaching** to help all teachers teach reading. **Educating** students and parents about the importance of reading and writing skills can prepare them to accept requirements such as the following:

- Read 25 to 30 books outside of class across the curriculum per year.
- Read outside of class at least three hours per week.
- Make oral presentations at least twice a year.
- Write two major research papers each year.
- Write often and revise for quality.

Educators at all levels also must **confront** the issue that, according to the latest Making Middle Grades Matter data, only one-third of students leaving grade eight have completed algebra or pre-algebra. Principals must **educate** parents on the importance of students' taking a more challenging curriculum in the middle grades and in high school. School boards must **sponsor** continuing-education opportunities for mathematics teachers in the middle grades who lack the necessary content background to teach algebra and pre-algebra.

School leaders also face the challenge of **confronting** the lack of connection between career/technical classes and academics. Only about half of the students in career/technical classes say they have had to apply academic skills to complete work-related assignments. As career/technical teachers become more aware of higher requirements in the workplace, they are asking for professional development to upgrade their academic knowledge and to learn ways to integrate this knowledge into student assignments. Principals need to arrange appropriate professional development.

VISIONS AND BELIEFS

Leaders of high-performing schools have visions of what a school should do. They know how to support their visions with funding, time and other resources. They can retain their focus and carry most students, parents and teachers, as well as the community, along with them. These leaders know that developing leadership potential in others is essential to large-scale efforts and is a key to the primary goal of making and sustaining gains in student achievement. Continuously examining visions and beliefs about the future sets the stage for motivating change and improvement. Principals must focus on getting almost all eighth-graders ready to enter college-preparatory courses in ninth grade and almost all 12th-graders ready to begin postsecondary education without remedial studies.

Creating visions should disrupt the status quo. Leaders must invite new people in to plan visions and to help "sell" the visions to others. Leaders should take a vision statement apart and put it back together often, each time getting the perspectives of different staff and members of the community. As expectations of students and teachers are raised, administrators and teachers need to explore several beliefs about schooling:

1. We believe that the mission of the middle grades is to prepare all students to succeed in college-preparatory classes in high school.
2. We believe that the mission of the high school is to prepare all graduates to succeed in postsecondary education and in the workplace.
3. We believe nearly all students successfully can complete the MSW-recommended curricula in the middle grades and in high school. (See page 3.)
4. We believe in supplying support to help students complete the recommended curricula, and we believe that this support requires effort from everyone.
5. We believe in doing what it takes — investing the necessary time, resources and creativity — to reach goals.
6. We believe we owe this effort to every student.

CREATIVE PLANNING

While exploring visions for the future, consider the need to improve and the need to change. If student achievement remains flat, the school is not going to get better. Educators too often embrace the notion that schools improve only when the quality of students improves. This notion is a myth. Schools improve when they change what is taught, how it is taught and what is expected of students. Schools that are serious about improvement study what effective schools are doing and customize those strategies to meet their own needs. Leaders should emphasize the strategies that work in improving student achievement and should institute new strategies that address problems. For example, improving direct instruction methods won't increase students' problem-solving skills. That challenge requires a new instructional strategy.

RISK-TAKING IMPLEMENTATION

Change requires risk-taking, experimenting and living with failure. If procedures are not working, change them. Initial failure — at the school level as well as at the classroom level — must be seen as feedback. If students and teachers are to maintain high expectations, early failures are no surprise. In spite of the possibility of failure, principals who want their schools to improve must be willing to take risks in areas that make a difference. Some risks include eliminating low-level classes, requiring a challenging curriculum for all students, raising expectations for student achievement in career/technical classes and adopting the MSW-recommended academic core. By celebrating attempts, effort and hard work, teachers encourage the perseverance required for achieving high standards.

Each school needs teachers and students who develop ideas of how to increase learning. When an idea fails, they raise their expectations again. Students and teachers never are complacent with success.

The following survey can help you explore how much risk-taking is encouraged at your school:

	Always	Often	Seldom
1. Teachers learn and seek new ideas.			
2. Administrators seek staff input before making decisions.			
3. Teachers are encouraged to experiment with their teaching.			
4. The community actively supports instructional efforts.			
5. Teachers and administrators work as a team to improve student achievement.			

MEASUREMENT AND MODIFICATION

A plan for constant measurement and modification is necessary to support creating, planning and risk-taking. MSW provides schools with data from test scores, surveys and site visits to aid in this ongoing process. Teachers can use various assessments to gather data continually as feedback to use in future planning. As students work with scoring guides and are engaged in self-evaluation, they learn the important process of doing, assessing and redoing to achieve quality.

Principals should examine closely what the MSW data and the state and national test data reveal about their students' performance. Principals constantly should be talking about, displaying and analyzing data and teaching others to analyze it. Everyone associated with the school — including the students — should be conscious of what the most recent data show about the school, teachers' attitudes and student performance and constantly should work to improve that picture.

CELEBRATION

Celebrating success is essential to maintaining motivation and effort. A winning team celebrates after the game and returns to practice the next day to continue developing skills. Celebrations build unity around group goals of high expectations for every-

one. Celebrate individual and group success. Build a culture of encouraging everyone; no one needs to be at the bottom for someone else to be at the top. As students individually and collectively meet performance goals, be sure to celebrate!

Where Does Effort Need to Be Focused?

Ken Prichard, former principal of Loganville High School in Georgia, shares the following success story about bringing everyone on board for school improvement. He says: “Begin with a clear idea of what your school is capable of doing. What does your school look like when everyone is doing demanding work?”

Loganville High School made its goals to implement creative ideas, to set high expectations and to gain support for improving student performance. Changes included the following:

1. All parents were required to meet with their children’s teacher/advisers to plan the next year’s schedule. (This procedure raised the level of courses in which students enrolled.)
2. Essay questions were added to all content-area exams.
3. Prichard conducted seminars to review writing skills for juniors who were not taking an English course during the semester in which the writing graduation test was administered.
4. As a graduation requirement, every senior had to submit a five-paragraph business letter to the principal. (Prichard responded to each letter.)

Prichard says a consistent focus is essential. When some parents had not scheduled the necessary conference with advisers, their children were not allowed to enroll in fall classes until the parents arrived at school for the conferences. (Most parents now attend these meetings regularly.)

At the urging of their sons or daughters, some parents lobbied the school for less-demanding class loads when the students were involved in certain time-consuming sports. Staff met with the parents to explain the larger context in terms of the students’ preparation for further education or future careers. Some parents were convinced and others were not. In any case, the meetings caused parents to consider the ramifications of their choices.

Loganville’s efforts have brought cause for celebration. The school was recognized by “World News Tonight,” U.S. News & World Report, and other news media. In addition, 100 percent of Loganville High School’s 240 juniors passed the state writing requirements in 2000.

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