

# Research Brief

## Dynamics of Change

### Questions:

1. What are the major dynamics of the change process?
2. What tools are available to support a principal's work with staff and community?
3. What are current print and online resources about the change process?

### Summary of Findings:

School communities feel pressure to dramatically improve the educational experience of students and principals are confronted with the need to lead their staff and community in examining current practice and implementing changes that respond to these demands. Leading school change is one of the most complex tasks faced by a school leader. The September 2007 Feature Article at *The Principals' Partnership* website describes how several principals transformed their schools [www.principalspartnership.com/feature907.html](http://www.principalspartnership.com/feature907.html).

### Dynamics of the Change Process

An analysis of the change process conducted by the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory identified several key components of change. The study found that successful school improvement, and associated changes, required managing six critical components:

1. A clear, strong and collectively held educational vision and institutional mission;
2. A strong, committed professional community;
3. Learning environments that promote high standards for student achievement;
4. Sustained professional development to improve learning;
5. Successful partnerships with parents, health and human services agencies, businesses, universities and other community organizations; and
6. A systematic planning and implementation process for instituting needed changes. (p. 2)

The NCREL report, *Leading and Managing Change and Improvement* is available at [www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/educatrs/leadrshp/le500.htm](http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/educatrs/leadrshp/le500.htm).

Louis and Miles (1990) looked at several case studies of urban high schools and emphasized the importance of planning. They found that "Substantial change programs do not run themselves. They need active orchestration and coordination." Michael Fullan suggests that change even with thoughtful planning, is often chaotic and that leaders should expect that groups such as School Improvement Teams or other collaborative decision-making bodies, will react in unanticipated ways. He suggests that while organized problem solving and planning can be very useful, leaders should be prepared to cope with "informal, turbulent, and spontaneous change" that doesn't follow established patterns.

### Stages of the Change Process

The Oregon Small Schools Initiative ([www.e3smallschools.org](http://www.e3smallschools.org)) provides useful guidance about launching a school reform initiative. A multi-stage process is suggested that is built around the

following components:

*Study* – A time devoted to examine and learn about an issue and associated reforms. School, district and community members can examine current practices and programs, identify gaps in student learning, and learn about ways that the proposed reform supports equitable and rigorous learning for all students.

*Stage* – During this component schools review current programs and practices, create a shared vision for the future and involve a diverse group of people to support, nurture and sustain the effort.

*Design* – This phase includes the creation of frameworks or guidelines that align with the agreed upon vision and that will guide development of specific program improvements.

*Build* – During this part of the change process, the design frameworks are used to develop comprehensive school improvement plans.

*Launch* – Implementing the school plan involves mobilizing human and financial resources for success. It includes appropriate professional development to support the change.

*Sustain* – Monitoring implementation and building capacity to sustain the initiative after launch is included in this phase. It also includes gathering and analyzing data about the impact of the change.

Greater detail is included at the initiative's website ([www.e3smallschools.org/cas.html](http://www.e3smallschools.org/cas.html)).

#### **Four Components of Change**

Key components of the change process were summarized in *Planning for Success* (Williamson & Johnston, 1991), a publication of the National Association of Secondary School Principals. Four critical components were identified:

1. A Clear, Compelling Rationale – Unless provided with a compelling rationale for changing programs and practices, school communities resist change. It is important to use data that is clear, meaningful, and linked to student success.
2. Appropriate Participation – Staff, students and parents should be appropriately involved in planning reform initiatives. Such participation should include known supporters as well as known dissenters, in order to build a cadre of people who understand the issue and can advocate for recommended changes.
3. Specific Task and Timeline – Groups charged with recommending reforms frequently flounder unless there is a clear and specific statement of the task, an explicit timeline for their work, and clearly identified parameters, including human and financial resources.
4. Support for Implementation – Once reforms are launched it is important to support implementation with professional development directly linked to the initiative, and with time for those involved to routinely meet, debrief and make appropriate modifications. It is also important to routinely collect data about both implementation and the impact on student learning. Monitoring and adjusting reforms is critical to their success.

## Getting Started

Virtually all recommendations for change suggest that the most important place to begin is to establish clear goals. In order to do so it is important to recognize the need to work collaboratively with others in the school to build a culture of teamwork and collaborative endeavor. This critical step builds leadership capacity broadly in the school community and has a direct impact on problem identification, design and implementation of any reform

[www.essentialschools.org/cs/resources/view/ces\\_res/101#sidebar3](http://www.essentialschools.org/cs/resources/view/ces_res/101#sidebar3). Principals can build systems for participation and can support participation with professional development that nurtures the work of collaborative groups. Several specific tools to start the conversation and build capacity are included later in this Research Brief. The Coalition for

Essential Schools suggests four key ideas for starting the conversation:

1. Clarity and Focus – Concentrate on one or two big and achievable changes at a time
2. Recognition – Recognize the effort adults make, as well as their successes.
3. Participation Without Paralysis – Don't create a cumbersome decision-making process that can be a barrier to change
4. Confront Entrenched Resisters – First in private and then more publicly, the leader must mount a defense of the schools mission and values.

[www.essentialschools.org/cs/cespr/view/ces\\_res/90#4](http://www.essentialschools.org/cs/cespr/view/ces_res/90#4)

## Tools and Resources for Principals

There are many tools that principals can use to work with their staff and community as they lead school improvement efforts. Several of the most noteworthy online sites for tools and other resources include the following:

*Employers for Education Excellence* ([www.e3smallschools.org](http://www.e3smallschools.org))

This site provides a comprehensive set of readings and other online resources about creating small schools. The materials, however, provide useful guidance about change in general. Most noteworthy is their **School Change Rubric** ([www.e3smallschools.org/resources\\_program.html](http://www.e3smallschools.org/resources_program.html)). This self-assessment tool includes four school improvement strands: School Structure and Culture, Teaching and Learning, Leadership Development, and Community Engagement. Both a condensed and extended version is available.

*Coalition of Essential Schools* ([www.essentialschools.org](http://www.essentialschools.org))

The Coalition's **Change Lab** provides access to information and tools from participating schools. A free registration is required in order to access the site.

[http://www.ceschangelab.org/cs/clpub/print/cl\\_docs/10](http://www.ceschangelab.org/cs/clpub/print/cl_docs/10)

*Center for Adaptive Schools* ([www.adaptiveschools.com](http://www.adaptiveschools.com))

This center, built on the work of Robert Garmston, offers a variety of tools for facilitating the work of collaborative groups. Garmston's *Seven Norms of Collaboration* are widely used to promote thoughtful conversation. The site includes two tools: **This Week's Skill Builder** (check out the archive) ([www.adaptiveschools.com/thisweekssb.htm](http://www.adaptiveschools.com/thisweekssb.htm)) and the **Seven Norms of Collaboration Toolkit** (<http://www.adaptiveschools.com/pdf/SevenNormsToolkit.pdf>)

The June 2007 Feature Article on The Principals' Partnership website discussed the power of the Adaptive Schools model to shape school reform.

[www.principalspartnership.com/feature607.html](http://www.principalspartnership.com/feature607.html)

*Annenberg Institute for School Reform* ([www.annenberginstitute.org](http://www.annenberginstitute.org))

**Tools for School Improvement Planning** is a comprehensive set of tools to use for all aspects of planning. There are multiple tools for each task. Link to the section labeled *Tool Collection* ([www.annenberginstitute.org/tools/index.php](http://www.annenberginstitute.org/tools/index.php)).

*North Central Regional Educational Lab* ([www.ncrel.org](http://www.ncrel.org))

The lab's **School Improvement Through Data-Driven Decision-Making** site provides a variety of tools to gather and examine data as well as use it with groups to support decision-making. [www.ncrel.org/datause/tools.php](http://www.ncrel.org/datause/tools.php)

*Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory* ([www.nwrel.org](http://www.nwrel.org))

The lab provides a **Self-Study Toolkit** that includes ways to collect data from students.

[www.nwrel.org/scpd/scc/studentvoices/diad.shtml](http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/scc/studentvoices/diad.shtml)

It also provides a **Structured Reflection Protocol** that can be used with groups to frame thoughtful conversations about school improvement.

[www.nwrel.org/scpd/scc/studentvoices/srp.shtml](http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/scc/studentvoices/srp.shtml)

*Chicago Learning Collaborative* ([www.lasw.org](http://www.lasw.org))

The Collaborative worked with the Annenberg Institute for School Reform to create a site that provides several protocols for conversation. Many of the protocols are designed for faculty study of student work but can easily be adapted for other collaborative tasks.

[www.lasw.org/protocols.html](http://www.lasw.org/protocols.html)

*Oregon Small Schools Initiative* ([www.e3smallschools.org](http://www.e3smallschools.org))

This site includes several tools for examining rigor and relevance, decision-making, and small learning communities. [www.e3smallschools.org/resources\\_tools.html](http://www.e3smallschools.org/resources_tools.html)

*School Improvement Toolkit*

This toolkit, provided by the Kentucky Department of Education provides some interesting resources for schools. It is built around the Kentucky School Improvement Framework but can be adapted for use in other settings.

[http://www.education.ky.gov/SISI\\_Toolkit/SISI%20Toolkit%20v.2005.htm](http://www.education.ky.gov/SISI_Toolkit/SISI%20Toolkit%20v.2005.htm)

## Print Resources

DuFour, Richard, DuFour, Rebecca, Eaker, Robert, Many, Thomas (2006). *Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

Lambert, Linda (2003). *Leadership capacity for lasting school improvement*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Marzano, Robert, Waters, Timothy, McNulty, Brian (2005). *School leadership that work: From research to results*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Reeves, Douglas (2006). *The Learning Leader: How to focus school improvement for better results*.

<http://www.educationpartnerships.org/>

Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Senge, Peter (1999). *The Dance of Change: A Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*. New York: Doubleday.

Senge, Peter (2000). *Schools that Learn: A Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*. New York: Doubleday.

Tichy, Noel & Bennis, Warren (2007). *Judgment: How Winning Leaders Make Great Calls*. New York: Portfolio Press.

### Online Resources

In addition to the online tools described earlier these resources offer information about the dynamics of change and the leader's role in facilitating change.

- **School Redesign Network** ([www.srnleads.org/](http://www.srnleads.org/)) – The network was established at Stanford University to build and share research-based knowledge to transform secondary schools and school systems. It includes an online study kit with access to materials and resources. The site requires free online registration.  
<http://srn2.stanford.edu/studykitdir/home/index.php>
- **Horace, the Coalition of Essential School's quarterly journal** combines educational research with resources and examples of innovative and effective practices from Coalition schools around the country. The archive is accessible without charge.  
[www.essentialschools.org/pub/ces\\_docs/resources/horace/horace.html](http://www.essentialschools.org/pub/ces_docs/resources/horace/horace.html)
- **So Now What? Managing the Change Process** – This article describes the change process and systems for facilitating reform. It includes a description of one high school's consensus decision-making process and the "Three by Three" planning process used during their planning.  
[www.essentialschools.org/cs/cespr/view/ces\\_res/90](http://www.essentialschools.org/cs/cespr/view/ces_res/90)
- **Essential Leadership in the School Change Process** – This article discusses leadership strategies for facilitating change with an emphasis on building shared leadership capacity. It provides an extensive step-by-step process for how leaders can help a group construct new learning.  
[www.essentialschools.org/cs/resources/view/ces\\_res/101](http://www.essentialschools.org/cs/resources/view/ces_res/101)
- **Staff Development and Change Process: Cut From the Same Cloth** – This article from the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory series *Issues...about Change* discusses the role of staff development as a support for change in schools.  
[www.sedl.org/change/issues/issues42.html](http://www.sedl.org/change/issues/issues42.html)
- **The Essential Conversation: Getting It Started, Keeping It Going** – Often the most difficult part of school reform is starting the conversation. This article discusses ways to launch the conversation and includes key questions and suggested conversation starters.  
[www.essentialschools.org/cs/resources/view/ces\\_res/94](http://www.essentialschools.org/cs/resources/view/ces_res/94)



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