NDTAC

The National Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center
for the Education of Children and Youth Who Are Neglected, Delinquent, or At-Risk

NDTAC PRACTICE GUIDE:

Addressing the Unmet Educational Needs of Children and Youth in the Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare Systems Requires Within-Agency and Cross-Agency Leadership

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Contents

Preface

In May 2010, the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform (CJJR) at Georgetown University released the monograph, *Addressing the Unmet Educational Needs of Children and Youth in the Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare Systems*. A revised version of the monograph was released two years later (Leone & Weinberg, 2012). The monograph examines a number of topics relevant to the education and experiences of youth in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, and "crossover youth" who find themselves at some point in their lives involved with both systems. The authors review issues concerning, and provide information about, youth whose educational needs have been inadequately addressed by the agencies responsible for meeting some of these youths' other pressing needs. The monograph serves as a source of information for policymakers and practitioners interested in improving education services for these vulnerable youth. It examines challenges faced by these youth, barriers to providing effective services for them, and the policies and practices of several jurisdictions that have attempted to meet their unique needs. The monograph concludes with a discussion of principles and the design of systems "to serve these youth and ensure they experience more positive outcomes in school and ultimately, in the community as young adults" (p. 8).

In partnership with CJJR, the National Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center for the Education of Children and Youth Who Are Neglected, Delinquent, or At-Risk (NDTAC) has developed a series of practice guides that build on the monograph by providing the field with concrete strategies for adopting the principles and practices discussed in the document. The strategies were developed by NDTAC and draw from the experiences of the authors and are supported by general research. It is NDTAC's and CJJR's hope that these guides provide administrators and practitioners in juvenile justice, child welfare, and beyond with the "how-to's" they need to achieve the type of comprehensive system envisioned by the CJJR monograph.

This NDTAC practice guide primarily examines the principle that **change requires within-agency and cross-agency leadership** and includes secondarily the principle of **outcomes that matter are measured** as data collection and analysis of key indicators are so critical to effective leaders and their reform efforts. This principle, pertaining to effective leadership, recognizes that leaders must be communicators who clearly share their vision within the entire agency as well as with cross-agency stakeholders and establish and build strong relationships within and across agencies and establish accountability standards for programs, themselves, and others in the organization. The importance of effective leadership cannot be underestimated. "Across juvenile justice, child welfare and education agencies, administrators and their direct service staff need to lead through redesign of service delivery and perhaps most importantly, by example" (Leone & Weinberg, 2012, p. 48). Ideal leaders are effective in changing the status quo of practice within agencies and across systems in order to promote positive youth outcomes, communicate effectively within and across agencies, unite internal teams and interagency groups behind change, utilize data to inform immediate and future decisions, hold themselves and others accountable, and strive to continuously improve upon practice. Such leaders are catalysts for meaningful, sustainable change in addressing the unmet educational needs of children and youth in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems.

Introduction

Young people who are involved in the juvenile justice and/or child welfare system face many barriers to achieving their full potential and short- and long-term positive outcomes. Factors such as poverty, mobility, substance abuse, school failure, and mental health issues constitute the barriers impeding the availability of knowledge, resources, and supports to make good decisions that impact and improve their future. Leaders in child-serving agencies "need to provide unambiguous expectations about how youth are served; in most cases, this will involve doing things differently and challenging common practices" (Leone & Weinberg, 2012, p. 48). When States, agencies, and/or facility schools are successful in making positive changes in addressing the education of youth who are system-involved, an effective leader is likely to be the agent or sponsor of the change.

Title I, Part D-funded programs, as well as other Federal, State, and local programs, can have a positive effect on educational services and ultimately a youth's educational achievement. One of the goals of Title I, Part D funding is to "level the playing field" for youth who are neglected, delinquent, or at-risk of academic failure, dropping out of school, or entering or re-entering the child welfare or juvenile justice systems. Title I, Part D funds and programming are designed to:

1. Ensure that youth who are neglected or delinquent have the opportunity to meet the same challenging State academic standards that all children are expected to meet

2. Improve educational services for children and youth who are neglected or delinquent

3. Provide children and youth who are neglected or delinquent with the services needed to make successful transitions from institutions to schools and/or employment

4. Prevent youth who are at risk of academic failure from dropping out of school

5. Provide children and youth who have dropped out of school, or who are returning to school after residing in an institution, with a support system to ensure their continued education

This and previous NDTAC practice guides are based on the six overarching principles found in "Addressing the Unmet Educational Needs of Children and Youth in the Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare Systems" (Leone & Weinberg, 2012):

- Quality education services are critical.

- Early education is essential.

- Outcomes that matter are measured.

- Individually tailored support services for youth are provided.

- Interagency communication and collaboration are vital.

- Change requires within-agency and cross-agency leadership.

The resulting practices and strategies presented in the NDTAC practice guides are designed to assist child-serving agencies address long-standing barriers and challenges that can overwhelm agencies and the children and families they serve. The practices and strategies range from policy-related recommendations to actionable items that agency leaders and staff, including State coordinators of Title I, Part D programs, can take to ensure better outcomes for youth who are system-involved. For instance, it is expected that systems assess the needs of the youth and families they serve; however, assessing need is only the initial step in serving youth and families. It is also essential for agencies and partners to enact policy that dictates practice that ensures identified needs are met to foster more positive outcomes.

Table 1 depicts the practices and strategies of four previous NDTAC practice guides derived from the Leone and Weinberg monograph. These practices and strategies focus attention on the importance of interagency communication and collaboration, providing individually tailored academic and behavioral support services for system-involved youth, opportunities for early learning to address the needs of young children at-risk for system involvement, and quality education services that are critical for youth involved with the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. These four guides can be found on the NDTAC Web site at www.neglected-delinquent.org.

Table 1. Previous NDTAC Practice Guide Practices and Strategies

		Strategies
Guide	**Improving Educational Outcomes for Youth in the Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare Systems Through Interagency Communication and Collaboration (2011)**	
Practices	Practice 1. Engage in Collaborative Decisionmaking	1. Memoranda of understanding to share information 2. Consolidated/single case management and a "no wrong door" approach 3. Align relevant policies and corresponding practices of child-serving agencies
	Practice 2. Share Resources and Expertise	1. Co-location of staff 2. Share databases 3. Cross-agency training
	Practice 3. Target Services To Meet the Needs of Children, Youth, Parents, and Caregivers	1. Engage youth and family as key decisionmakers and assets in determining needed supports and services 2. Implement evidence-based and best-practice programming that supports individual students' success in school and life
Guide	**Providing Individually Tailored Academic and Behavioral Support Services for Youth in the Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare Systems (2012)**	
Practices	Practice 1. Collect and Use Data To Identify Needs and Develop Learning Plans	1. Provide a systematic process for using data to identify needs, screen for indicators of larger issues, monitor outcomes, and make educational decisions 2. Develop and maintain personalized learning plans (PLPs) 3. Share information across all stakeholders to facilitate students' success and well-being
	Practice 2. Implement Procedures To Ensure Smooth Transitions	1. Include transition activities in student PLPs 2. Establish formal mechanisms for the exchange of educational data and records 3. Prioritize and allocate funds for transition supports and programs 4. Conduct ongoing monitoring and continuous quality improvement of transition efforts
	Practice 3. Address Gaps in Academic Skills and Accelerate Learning	1. Base instruction on functional and curriculum-based evaluation of student needs 2. Provide tiered academic intervention programs 3. Use explicit, scaffolded instruction
	Practice 4. Instruct Students in Ways That Engage Them in Learning	1. Personalize the learning environment and instructional content 2. Build conditions and opportunities that demonstrate to students their success 3. Provide engaging, interactive, and hands-on learning opportunities 4. Engage youth in educational decisionmaking
	Practice 5. Address Behavioral and Social Needs To Promote Educational Success	1. Manage student behavior with positive rather than punitive approaches 2. Engage the family to gain greater insight into youth's behavioral needs 3. Create a structured learning environment 4. Align behavior management approaches across settings and domains

		Strategies
Guide	**Early Education Is Essential: Addressing the Needs of Young Children Potentially at Risk of System Involvement (2014)**	
Practices	Practice 1. Conduct Early Identification of Vulnerable Children	1. Provide effective screening and assessment, including effective use of data for decisionmaking 2. Ensure coordinated case management, including collaboration with education, health, and mental services
	Practice 2. Provide Access to Evidence-Based Early Intervention Practices	1. Provide access and exposure to high-quality early childhood education (ECE) 2. Implement evidence-based behavior and social development support services 3. Address health and nutritional needs that affect development
	Practice 3. Identify and Promote Authentic Family/Caregiver Involvement	1. Implement evidence-based parent/caregiver training and support services 2. Promote and facilitate family/caregiver collaboration 3. Facilitate practices that support cultural competency
Guide	**Quality Education Services Are Critical for Youth Involved With the Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare Systems (2015)**	
Practices	Practice 1. Implement Principles That Impact Teacher and Learner Outcomes	1. Recruit and retain credentialed teachers and administrators qualified to work with a student population that is at high risk of dropping out 2. Implement a systematic and rigorous evaluation process 3. Provide professional development opportunities for teachers and administrators based on staff and student needs 4. Promote and nurture staff with demonstrated effectiveness in engaging and connecting with youth
	Practice 2. Instruct Students in a Manner That Prepares Them For Productive Citizenship and Decisionmaking in the Future	1. Offer a rigorous and relevant curriculum that establishes high-level goals with formal and informal assessments 2. Provide educational opportunities comparable to those provided for non-system-involved peers 3. Provide access to postsecondary programming
	Practice 3. Implement Effective Transitional Practices and Services	1. Implement "best practices" for transition that promote educational success 2. Establish practices to ensure family engagement in the educational decisionmaking process 3. Establish specific policies to ensure meaningful cross-agency collaboration and communication
	Practice 4. Implement Policies and Practices That Prioritize Quality Educational Services That Meet the Unique Needs of Youth Who Are System-Involved	1. Require timely exchange of information/records (information sharing) 2. Utilize comprehensive needs-sensing and data collection and analysis to design individualized learning pathways 3. Provide dedicated and adequate funding that facilitates and supports learning

Education Across Multiple Settings

Students involved in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems receive educational services in a wide range of settings, from traditional nonrestrictive community-based public and private schools to highly restrictive residential detention and correctional facilities. Regardless of setting, these youth are generally considered "at-risk" students.[1] To meet the unique needs of this at-risk population, all schools should provide educational services that are of high quality and comparable to the educational services of their non-system-involved peers. To do so, educators and administrators across all educational settings need to be prepared with a comprehensive and coherent set of proven practices for serving at-risk students.

This guide provides practices and strategies that are suitable for implementation across five categories of educational settings in which youth may be placed. Each is described below and presented from the least to the most restrictive.

Community-Based Traditional and Alternative Schools

At-risk students can receive educational services in such community-based nonrestrictive settings as public or private schools. These could be charter or alternative schools or ones that encompass a broad-based student population, such as community high schools. The placement may be within or outside of the student's neighborhood or home school district.

In most residential and moderately restrictive school settings, educators understand that all of their students are at-risk. However, when students involved with the child welfare and/or juvenile justice system enter into community schools, especially large comprehensive middle and high schools, educators may not fully understand the needs of this student group and may have limited experience working with these youth. Thus all community schools, including charter and private schools, need to be prepared to address these students' challenges and to help them succeed. It is important for community schools to assimilate at-risk students into the school culture as quickly as possible while acknowledging the unique challenges they face (Dynarski et al., 2008).

Day Treatment Centers

In many ways, day treatment centers (DTCs), whether for youth in foster care or the juvenile justice system, are similar to many alternative schools. Although alternative schools

may have a focus on students who experience discipline problems or serve gifted students, DTCs, as the name implies, typically operate to serve students with mental and/or behavioral health needs that are not easily met by traditional community schools. Students may attend DTCs for various lengths of time to address both acute and chronic needs and may do so voluntarily or under order of a juvenile or family court. Although treatment in DTCs is focused on helping students overcome challenges and return to their regular community school, the emphasis on treatment, especially an overemphasis, can pose a challenge to fostering educational success for students in these settings. Time in a DTC, although beneficial to the mental well-being of youth, can disrupt their normal educational progress and separate them from their friends and peer groups. It also places them in an environment with other troubled youth, which can have strong adverse effects. Additionally, youth who have attended DTCs may face the stigma of having a mental health need and teasing or bullying from peers once they return to a community school.

Group Homes

Although most youth residing in group homes receive their education in community-based schools, some attend schools on the grounds of the home. Group homes may be private residences designed or converted to serve as a nonsecure home for unrelated youth who share common needs and characteristics. Although attention to group homes typically focuses on youth in need of foster care, youth in the juvenile justice system may also reside in group homes at some point during their involvement. The educational needs of youth in group homes are not altogether different from those of at-risk students in traditional community schools. However, in determining how best to address academic, behavioral, and social needs, providers should consider the fact that such youth are isolated from peer groups and family members and other caring adults.

Residential Treatment Centers

Residential treatment centers (RTCs) represent the next level of restrictiveness for placements where students receive educational services. These centers are live-in care facilities providing therapy for substance abuse, mental illness, or other behavioral issues. Youth in both the juvenile justice and child welfare systems may live in an RTC at some point, again voluntarily or by court order; but these facilities are not reserved for only those youth populations. For example, a facility may include youth who need a 24-hour residential program to address their special education needs.

Within RTCs, youth receive a wide range of programs and services in many different types of settings, from self-contained facilities with secure units to campus-based

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[1] An "at-risk" student is generally defined as a student who is likely to fail at school. In this context, school failure is typically seen as dropping out of school before high school graduation (Kaufman & Bradbury, 1992).

facilities, community-based apartments, and large group "cottages" or "camps." The youth—and sometimes their families—in these placements typically receive a mix of services: counseling, education, recreation, primary care, behavioral health therapy, nutrition, daily living experiences, independent living skills, reunification services, and aftercare services (Child Welfare League of America, 1991). Like DTCs, "residential treatment programs are traditionally organized around a medical model and are intended to be short in duration and high in intensity of treatment, with the goal that youth quickly move to a lower (and less expensive) level of care" (Lee & Barth, 2009).

Like youth educated in group homes, students in RTCs face the same circumstances of receiving education in or around the same environment in which they live. This isolates them not only from their established friends and peer groups but also from their family members and neighbors. There is also some concern that being surrounded only by those in need of mental/behavioral health treatment may have a negative impact on the overall well-being and academic success of youth in RTCs. The RTCs are typically small settings with minimal education staff, so it is critical to ensure the quality of instruction and adherence to Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) required for students eligible for special education services and other education plans. Also important while they reside in an RTC is ensuring some level of connectedness between youth and their family members, other caring adults, and pro-social peers.

Detention and Correctional Facilities

A final setting where system-involved youth may receive educational services is in a detention or correctional setting. Youth in these residential secure-care placements typically have higher rates of school suspension and/or expulsion than their non-system-involved peers (Sedlak & Bruce, 2010), are more likely to have literacy and numeracy skills below grade level than their age-equivalent peers, and are three times more likely to have educational disabilities compared to non-system-involved youth (Leone & Weinberg, 2012).

Detention usually refers to placement in a secure facility under delinquent or criminal court authority at some point between the time of intake and referral to court ("predispositional"), and following case disposition, or "sentencing" (postdispositional). The reasons for postdispositional detention generally include awaiting subsequent placement, short-term sentencing to detention, or being a danger to self or others (OJJDP, n.d.).

Because detention is typically a short-term stay—on average 14 days, although it may be much longer for some youth—it is usually impossible to "plug" a youth into a prescribed curriculum that is specially designed for him or her. Instead, it is advisable to have a short-term curriculum designed to address major/core skill areas found in the public school curriculum. The general overarching purposes of educational programming in detention are to screen for educational disabilities, gather data to inform future educational planning, and re-engage the youth in the educational process.

Corrections usually refers to larger scale secure-care facilities to which youth who have been adjudicated delinquent are committed for periods generally ranging from a few months to several years. Often, juvenile correctional facilities are funded and/or operated by State juvenile justice agencies and tend to have a more robust array of services as compared to detention facilities, mainly because of length of stay.

For youth who find themselves in correctional facilities, educational services usually accompany other rehabilitative practices and typically include academic instruction, vocational/career technical training, and/or social skills training. Many facilities offer a full continuum of academic services, including traditional course work that leads to a General Education Development (GED) or high school diploma and the ability to earn postsecondary credits. Career technical courses are often also available based on current labor trends in the area. The curriculum typically follows a "State-established" career technical course outline and should not be implemented solely for the purpose of "doing the work of the facility." Efforts are usually made to ensure that all content, activities, and course work completed in a correctional school setting is aligned with State and/or district school guidelines to ensure the greater likelihood of work completed while confined will transfer to the youth's next educational placement.

Leadership in Times of Change

The reforms needed to address the unmet educational needs of children and youth who are involved with or at risk of involvement with the juvenile justice and child welfare systems, as identified by the CJJR monograph, are not always easy to implement. Like any other substantial change to an organization or system, these reforms, like those juvenile justice agencies have undertaken to align with the "Guiding Principles for Providing High-Quality Education in Juvenile Justice Secure Care Settings,"[2] take time, commitment,

> *"Change is a multifaceted course of action that has the potential for planned and unintentional occurrences. Therefore, change calls for leaders who are equipped with the necessary tools, skills, and expertise to enhance the rate of success during such transitions" (Okantey, 2012, p. 43).*

and effort. Juvenile justice, child welfare, and other child-serving agency partners undertaking the changes required to better serve youth in their care also require strong leaders within and between their organizations to plan for and champion the change, elicit buy-in within and across organizations, and steer staff and partners along the path of change over the long haul. "Leading change is not a science, rather, it is a gradual process of discovery that prompts the leader to react to problems, setbacks, and small successes along the way" (Manns & Rising, 2010, Implications for Leading Change section, para. 1). To that end, this guide discusses several practices and related strategies for effective leadership in juvenile justice, child welfare, and other child-serving agencies during times of change. Table 2 presents the three practices and the supporting strategies for this guide.

Table 2. Practices and Strategies Presented in This Practice Guide

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="3" style="writing-mode: vertical-rl">Practices</td><td></td><td>Strategies</td></tr>
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Practices		Strategies
	Practice 1. Create, Communicate, and Reinforce a Path for Change	1. Develop a clear vision and plan for the change 2. Communicate the change 3. Set clear expectations for the change process
	Practice 2. Unite Staff and Partners Behind the Change	1. Galvanize internal staff around the change 2. Form partnerships with other child-serving agencies 3. Identify and agree upon shared goals and objectives
	Practice 3. Sustain the Change and Continuously Improve	1. Be personally accountable and hold others accountable 2. Use data to assess and inform action 3. Foster transparency by communicating with stakeholders 4. Continuously improve quality

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[2] The "Guiding Principles" were a part of the Correctional Education Guidance Package, released by the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice in December 2014. See http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/correctional-education/index.html.

Practice 1: Create, Communicate, and Reinforce a Path for Change

For many juvenile justice and child welfare agencies and systems, which vary significantly by State, the changes necessary to fully address the unmet educational and related needs of youth who are involved with or at risk of involvement in their systems will represent a paradigm shift—toward positive youth development (Butts, Bazemore, & Meroe, 2010), systems of care (Schufelt, Cocozza, & Skowyra, 2010), and trauma-informed (Ko et al., 2008) approaches that use evidence-based practices—and require new ways of thinking about and executing everyday responsibilities. Such reform is highly unlikely to succeed if it is not thoroughly planned for, communicated, and reinforced (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004). In most organizations and systems, individual workers look to their leaders to guide their work. At no time is strong leadership more necessary than during times of reform. Strong leaders are the resounding voice of change. Successful change is often reliant on a leader's belief in the necessity for change, faith that the change is possible, and passion for the change efforts. Often it is a leader's unwavering commitment to change that convinces others to follow in his or her footsteps and that will sustain the change efforts through the inevitable ups and downs (Manns & Rising, 2010). The following sections examine several strategies that leaders in juvenile justice and child welfare agencies and their partners can use to initiate the change process.

Strategy 1: Develop a clear vision and plan for change

Before initiating change of any kind within an organization or system, research shows that it is best for leaders and their advisors to create a clear vision for what they want the change to be (Okantey, 2012). Staff and partners will want to know where they are headed before they agree to go on the journey. Thus, a clear and strategic vision "becomes the stage on which the change process thrives" (2012, p. 44).[3] A deliberate vision elicits support for the change effort among staff and partners and reduces the likelihood of resistance, both internally and externally. "A clear and precise vision creates a mental picture of the desired change and, in turn, builds a sense of security by reducing the level of uncertainty" (2012, p. 44).[4] The vision allows leaders to relay consistent and vital information regarding the change effort to all staff (2012).[5]

Having a clear vision for the change allows leaders to accomplish several important steps leading up to initiating

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[3] As developed by Brenner, 2008.

[4] From Stevens, 2008.

[5] From Woodward, 2009.

> *"Effective leaders keep their eyes on the big picture. They must have a vision and clearly share it with staff."*
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> *– Susan Lockwood,*
> *Indiana Department of Correction*

the change. First, it gives the leader and his or her team the opportunity to work with the new idea on their own, to discover its strengths and weaknesses, and to make any needed adjustments (Manns & Rising, 2010). Leaders might ask themselves whether adequate resources, both human and fiscal, are in place to make the change possible. Second, the planning time allows the leader to connect the change initiative to existing practices within the organization or larger system so that the change is seen as complementary rather than as contradictory or conflicting (Manns & Rising, 2010). Finally, planning for the change affords the leader the opportunity to craft the most compelling reasons and vision for the change, which will be necessary to get the most skeptical individuals on board with the change (Okantey, 2012). Effective leaders in juvenile justice, child welfare, and other child-serving agencies will ensure their strategic plans are informed by a diverse group of stakeholders, including youth and families who have experienced system involvement.

Research shows that it's more effective for leaders of organizations and systems to create a vision and plan for change with assistance from a small, trusted group of advisors, which should include members of the leader's direct staff (Manns & Rising, 2010). In developing the plan for change, effective leaders solicit, listen to, and incorporate the input of their advisory team members. A good advisory team consists of a diverse mix of individuals with differing responses to change and with differing viewpoints from the leader and from each other (Manns & Rising, 2010). In identifying the right mix for such a team, leaders should look for a few different types of people:

1. Individuals who typically get excited about new initiatives or ideas and will most likely be receptive to the leader's initial vision

2. Individuals who respond to new ideas with questions and careful consideration and who will likely be good decisionmakers and opinion leaders

3. Individuals who are typically skeptical of or resistant to either change or to the leader

Although working with individuals with differing opinions and levels of receptiveness may be uncomfortable, a strong leader knows that diversity of thought and opinion will result in a more robust, well-thought-out vision and plan for the future. Emphasizing participatory leadership such

as listening to all staff charged with implementation of the vision or new initiative may prove to be invaluable to the success and outcomes as envisioned by the leader. Supervisory "walk-throughs" combined with effective communication and solicitation of staff feedback or holding formal listening session along the chain of command may help to avoid or solve significant problems with implementation efforts. In the end, a clear and concise vision is essential for leaders in order to shepherd a successful change effort (Okantey, 2012).[6] It is also a prerequisite for the next strategy.

Strategy 2: Communicate the change

Once a leader and his or her advisory team have crafted a vision and plan for the change about to occur, the leader will need to tell others about the change. Fully communicating a well-thought out vision of and plan for the change to all members of the organization is a critical step toward the success of any reform. However, there is a lot to consider when communicating change. How leaders communicate, when they communicate, and where they communicate information about the change has an impact on both how the message is received and how staff respond to the information. Research into effective leadership characteristics shows that, in communicating important changes or reforms within an organization or system, the strongest leaders are open, honest, and clear in their communication (Okantey, 2012; Manns & Rising, 2010). Such leaders know that it is important to communicate information about the change that is concrete and not subject to wide interpretations about what is and isn't going to happen. At the same time, a strong leader knows that connecting with the emotional needs of staff can often be more effective in persuading them to embrace the change than presenting facts alone (Manns & Rising, 2010).

When it comes to implementing change or reform within systems, agencies, or programs, high-quality leaders provide the road map to help staff and others understand the rationale and directions for the change and the change process. During times of change, staff expect their leaders to provide answers to five critical questions:

1. Where are we going?
2. Why is this change important?
3. How are we going to get there?
4. What is my role and responsibility?
5. What will success look like?

In general, strong leaders have found that giving a change effort an identity helps people to consistently recognize that it exists, especially after the fervor following the

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[6] From Knotter, 2008.

initial announcement subsides (Manns & Rising, 2010). Additionally, there are always myths around every change initiative, and effective leaders will document those and be sure to address them whenever necessary. When strong leaders answer questions from staff and partners about why the change is occurring, they keep the focus on the problems they believe have created the pressing need for the change. Further, in order to increase the credibility of a new idea, an effective leader will bring information from sources external to the organization or system, providing data and evidence that further demonstrate the need for the change and illuminate the potential impact of the change. For example, recent research into adolescent brain development has shown the importance of using developmentally appropriate evidence-based practices within juvenile justice and child welfare settings. For instance, approaches like restorative practices may be more effective than punishment administered by adults in changing long-term adolescent behaviors.

When leaders are planning to communicate with staff and partners about the proposed change, the reception of the staff and the organization's partners should be first and foremost on their minds. Individuals are inclined to respond personally to notifications of impending change, and a strong leader must recognize that in order to communicate in ways that reach staff on a personal level. When it comes to convincing staff—and later external partners and stakeholders—of the importance of the change, an effective leader is able to demonstrate how the change can be personally useful and valuable to them (Manns & Rising, 2010). If leaders regularly collect information from staff about their job satisfaction or feelings of safety, through surveys, "town hall" meetings, and the like, the leader will be able to demonstrate the connection.

Leaders concerned with communicating effectively understand that different staff may hear the same message differently. Therefore, effective leaders rely on communication modes that take into account the audience as well as the purpose or goal of the communication. The leader needs to determine the purpose of the communication prior to crafting and delivering it. Effective leaders will ask themselves, "Is the goal of the communication strictly awareness or education? Is the goal to alter the behavior of staff? Or is the goal simply sharing the overall vision of the organization?" Unless the message is clearly thought out ahead of time and delivered clearly, and unless the

leader takes steps to address any confusion or questions, an agency or program leader cannot assume that everyone listening heard the same message and is prepared to respond accordingly.

The method used to communicate is also important. Verbal communication alone is often not the best way to reach all staff members all the time. Leaders working in child welfare and juvenile justice organizations may quickly realize that staff understand and respond to varying forms of communication differently. Sometimes written communication such as emails, memos, and reports will resonate best. Other times verbal communication provided through in-person meetings, phone calls, or video or teleconferences will make the most sense. In the end, the effective leader will be open to all forms of communication, take the time to learn what works best for which staff and at what times, and deliver important messages in the appropriate mode. The purpose of the communication can often dictate the appropriate method to use. Although emails and memos may be good for sharing general information, one-on-one or small group conversations and meetings are more likely to lead to behavior change (Manns & Rising, 2010). Additionally, these types of interactions help build trusting relationships and further encourage staff and partners to engage in open dialogue about the change and how they feel about it.

A final point that leaders should keep in mind when communicating change is keeping the message pertinent after the initial communication. Simple tactics such as posting easy-to-understand flyers or posters that follow the core vision will help keep the reform efforts fresh in people's minds (Manns & Rising, 2010). These posters or flyers can serve as reminders to staff of the new vision and the practices to be implemented as well as staff members' important and valuable role in achieving the vision. They should be placed in obvious places such as staff break areas, staff restrooms, daily "sign in" areas, and areas where staff conduct role call or professional development activities.

Strategy 3: Set clear expectations for the change process

Making the change real in the minds of staff and partners and gaining their buy-in requires more than simply planning for and communicating about the reform. A strong leader will set very clear expectations—for himself or herself, for staff, and for the organization and/or system as a whole—in order to solidify the vision for the change and begin to unite others around that vision. Leaders working in child welfare and juvenile justice systems can do several things to make sure everyone is clear about expectations. First, when it comes to reforms, the leader should obtain as many facts surrounding the proposed change(s) as are available. In

"In order to maintain momentum during a change effort, leadership must set clear and precise expectations for the organization's followers. Setting such goals and objectives enables each member to have a comprehensible understanding of the change taking place. Goals and objectives facilitate the creation of a new way of doing things within the organization and provide support to ensure success for the change process" (Okantey, 2012, p. 45).

conceptualizing and laying out the path ahead, leaders must be very clear about the big picture as well as the small details, and when communicating with staff and partners, the leader must be clear about what is changing and what is not. Leaders must set clear timelines for staff, partners, and other stakeholders, letting them know what is going to change immediately and what will change over time. Creating and sharing a strategic plan is one way to accomplish this. Attention to detail within the plan makes it easier for staff to understand the big picture *and* to be able to navigate the smaller nuances.

Second, in ensuring that he or she is adequately setting and communicating expectations, an effective leader should anticipate the most likely staff concerns. When implementing change, the first concern of staff is likely to be, "How is it going to impact me and my job?" Effective leaders need to recognize that, while the change is beneficial and necessary, staff may perceive legitimate problems and downsides to the change for themselves. Although a leader cannot guarantee that change or reform will not impact staff roles and responsibilities, the leader should clearly state the changes expected for staff across all levels and responsibilities and work closely with staff who feel they will be made worse-off due to the changes. Change is not always easy and may require more work or even better work from everyone, including staff who will have to carry out duties in a different manner from what they have become accustomed to. A good leader will acknowledge any staff concerns early in the change process and help staff understand the potential impact and work together to mitigate any undue hardships or challenges.

Finally, the leader needs to be open to further clarifying and revising expectations as change starts to happen and its initial impact is realized by staff. Although clear expectations are important to staff understanding and execution, overly rigid expectations may result in backlash from staff and a view among staff that the leader cannot relate to the work they do or how the change affects them. In the end, compromise will likely be necessary to realize a leader's vision for reform while maintaining staff buy-in and commitment to making change happen. In juvenile justice and child welfare agencies, as is true across any child-serving agency,

the best-conceptualized reform efforts will likely fall short of the leader's vision if those expected to implement reform feel the changes necessary to improve services and care for youth negatively impact their day-to-day work. If this is a legitimate concern in an organization, leaders may have to make significant changes in personnel—including reassessment of job classifications and qualification requirements, creating new positions, and expanding roles and responsibilities—in order to achieve the reforms necessary to ensure better outcomes for youth under their care.

In the end, expectation setting is one big way strong leaders can solidify the vision, goals, and objectives of the impending change. Expectation setting is also a means of reinforcing a leader's expectation of high performance from staff. While high-performance expectations alone do not define organizational goals, they do demonstrate a leader's values and expectations of performance in achieving those goals (Leithwood et al., 2006). Further, "demonstrating such expectations is a central behavior in virtually all conceptions of transformational and charismatic leadership" (p. 36).

Practice 2: Unite Staff and Partners Behind the Change

> *"Once a leader has decided on a course of action, he must get things moving quickly. Momentum is important."*
>
> — *Susan Lockwood*

Once a leader has planned for and communicated about a change, the next step will be to initiate the change. Although a leader can simply use his or her position of power to mandate that the change happen and push it forward from the top down, this is far less likely to result in successful, sustainable change (Manns & Rising, 2010).[7] A strong leader knows that making the change a reality requires the support and commitment of staff, external partners, and, inevitably, the community at large. In order for reforms to be successful across juvenile justice, child welfare, and other child-serving systems, support is necessary from partners such as courts; law enforcement; mental, physical, and behavioral health agencies; families; educational agencies; advocacy organizations; and many others. Being a leader during times of change is challenging and takes a lot of energy, but it is even more difficult if the leader tries to create the change by oneself (Manns & Rising, 2010). Forming teams within the agency and interagency partnerships and leading everyone under a single vision toward shared goals will help juvenile justice and child welfare leaders and their fellow leaders of child-serving agencies make the changes necessary to fully address the unmet educational needs of children and youth in their care.

Strategy 1: Galvanize internal staff around the change

Effective leaders typically have already gained the trust of their staff. Trust is often the foundation of functional relationships within organizations, but change can challenge traditional relationships and test the trust between staff and their leaders. To maintain this trust, an effective leader will remain committed to seeking the input of and involving all staff members in decisions regarding the change effort

(Springer & Roberts, 2006). A strong leader knows that for change to be successful, everyone must have the opportunity to support the change and make their own contribution to the change (Manns & Rising, 2010). Research into effective leadership during times of change suggests that effective leaders—as early as possible in the change effort and regularly thereafter—bring together as many staff as possible to solicit feedback, build support, and get new ideas. Further, once a leader has sparked interest in and garnered support for change efforts, the leader should be sure to check in with staff and maintain their enthusiasm and commitment.

For any leader in any time of reform, there will be skepticism and resistance from at least some staff. As such, leaders may be inclined to take two approaches to dealing with resistance. One is to ignore naysayers and focus instead on those who support the change efforts. The other is to focus almost exclusively on those resistant to change, putting every effort into convincing them to get on board. However, an examination of what makes for good leadership in times of change shows that neither approach is effective. Too much time and energy spent on convincing resisters is not recommended, while actively listening to them is highly advised (Manns & Rising, 2010). Working with those who most readily disagree with you can be difficult for any leader, but overcoming that discomfort as early as possible in the change process affords leaders the opportunity for greater examination into their vision for the change, their plan for implementation, and insight into how some staff feel the change will have a negative impact. In the end, leaders should not necessarily focus on winning over resistors but need to respect their opinions and appreciate any limitations in the leader's approach to change they reveal. In this way, issues can be addressed frankly and honestly. Another way that leaders can improve the likelihood of success for a change effort is by using "bridge-builders" within their organizations. This involves pairing or teaming staff who accept and support the change with those who do not (Manns & Rising, 2010). Leaders should meet regularly with bridge builders to learn more about the progress of change efforts from the staff's point of view, match roles within the

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[7] From Green & Hevner, 2000.

organization to skill and preference of staff, and learn what steps the leader can take to encourage progress.

Although coalition building within an organization is necessary for any leader ushering in a new reform, it is not sufficient by itself. In particular, with juvenile justice, child welfare, and other child-serving agencies, the tremendous need to work together to meet the needs of the children and youth they serve—be they educational, therapeutic, rehabilitative, or other needs—requires that agency leaders look outside their own organizations to form partnerships that will enable systemwide reform.

Strategy 2: Form partnerships with other child-serving agencies

Although a strong leader and advisory team can initiate meaningful change within a single organization, through the practice and strategies described above (and many others), to truly address the unmet educational needs of children and youth in juvenile justice and child welfare takes more systemic reform. And systemic reform requires leaders and agencies to work together. Interagency partnerships provide "strength in numbers" behind any change effort and, in the case of juvenile justice, child welfare, and other child-serving agencies, demonstrate a heightened level of commitment on the part of the *system* to do what is necessary to truly meet the needs of children and youth. The full extent of the work needed to establish and maintain successful interagency partnerships is beyond the scope of this guide. However, it is important to examine the leadership characteristics and practices that help make such partnerships possible and more effective.

What makes a leader effective within his or her own organization can help him or her provide strong leadership for and within an interagency group. Through research into what makes effective and efficient interagency groups, expert practitioners and change-agent officials indicate that strong leaders possess five basic competencies:

1. Work well with people
2. Communicate openly with a range of stakeholders
3. Build and maintain relationships
4. Understand other points of view
5. Set a vision for the group (GAO, 2014)

Although these and other characteristics may make leaders effective and supported in their own agencies, they may not be enough to overcome skepticism and resistance from the larger system outside the agency. Staff from some agencies may not know, like, or trust leaders from other organizations. Therefore, each agency leader must be a champion for whole-system change. They must ensure that their staff see the big picture and demonstrate how their agency's vision,

goals, and objectives support the larger system reform effort. Although leading an interagency group is different from leading a single agency, the combined strength of effective agency leaders can help unite, mobilize, and sustain a larger body of change agents. Specifically, when forming interagency groups during times of change, systems should look to the "connectors" available to them, those individuals who have connections to and are trusted and looked up to by many different agencies or organizations (Manns & Rising, 2010).

> "Given the context of cross-agency reforms, leaders must be able to articulate where they think the system should establish a starting point and then construct the long-term vision across all agencies."
>
> —Judge Michael Nash

Assuming there are at least some strong leaders within the juvenile justice, child welfare, and other child-serving agencies within a State or other jurisdiction, the potential for strong interagency partnerships exists. However, forming effective interagency groups is not easy. In many cases, the challenges faced by leaders from within their own agencies are magnified in a larger body made up of unique organizations. Each child-serving agency has its own mandates and responsibilities. In addition, these agencies often have their own languages, cultures, and behavioral norms. Location, funding streams, and hierarchies add yet more potential barriers to a cohesive interagency reform effort. Reconciling all of the different and sometimes competing variables can seem overwhelming. But research has shown that these challenges can be overcome and that strong leaders are often a prerequisite for surmounting them (GAO, 2014). Some approaches leaders can use to overcome the challenges of forming effective interagency groups include:

1. Start groups with the staff most directly affected by the change effort and gradually broaden to others.
2. Conduct early outreach to participants and stakeholders to identify shared interests.
3. Hold early in-person meetings to build relationships and trust.
4. Identify early wins for the group to accomplish.

These are just a few of the leadership practices that can help establish successful and sustainable interagency groups. Many others exist, but regardless of what approaches juvenile justice, child welfare, and related agencies and their leaders take to implement changes focused on improving outcomes for youth in their care, research and practice clearly demonstrate the necessity of working collaboratively and cooperatively across agencies.

Strategy 3: Identify and agree upon shared goals and objectives

Forming interagency groups is a critical first step toward establishing large-scale commitment to change. Moving the change forward as a group requires many structural, philosophical, cultural, and bureaucratic adjustments, but chief among the concerns of leaders of interagency groups is identifying and agreeing upon shared goals. Just as each agency's goals for a change effort unite and guide staff, an interagency group's shared goals can be the driving force behind systemic reform. For example, agreeing to use proven risk-and-needs assessments across child-serving agencies can ensure each youth's unique needs are met. But even when strong leadership has helped guide agencies through the challenges of forming a group, it does not mean that agreeing upon the direction and charge of the group will be easy. When it comes to mobilizing a group around what needs to be done to make change happen, familiar resistance and conflict can emerge. Some of the biggest challenges to forming a shared identity arise when agencies are asked to incorporate the larger group's ideas for actions to be taken into their everyday practice. If the proposed outcomes of an interagency group and the steps through which to achieve them are not carefully aligned with each agency's previously established plans, the group's effectiveness may be in jeopardy. Because while concepts may be more easily agreed upon within a group, the *actions* necessary to execute those concepts within individual agencies can be far more challenging.

There are several strategies that agency and interagency leaders can employ to help the group more easily identify and agree on shared goals that are more likely to be carried out. First, interagency groups should craft and select only those goals that represent the collective interests of each participating organization (GAO, 2014). If only one or two agencies drive the goal-setting process and impose outcomes that reflect or favor their specific mandates or responsibilities, the resulting goals will not garner enough broad-based support to result in effective or sustainable change. Rather, goals should be "conceptualized at high enough levels that participants [can] reach agreement," while ensuring "enough specificity that participants feel they [have] a stake in the group's goals" (GAO, 2014, p. 19). Second, as within agencies, interagency leaders should develop a plan to regularly communicate (1) progress on selecting goals, (2) the final accepted goals, and (3) progress toward *reaching* those goals. As will be discussed later, honesty and transparency in the execution of system reform is critical for stakeholder and community understanding and support. Through the reporting and feedback processes, goals should be systematically revisited and adjusted as necessary. Finally, interagency groups should consider using goal leaders—individuals identified by the group who, for each goal agreed upon, is responsible for coordinating efforts to achieve that goal (GAO, 2014). Dividing leadership responsibilities within the group will help the group achieve shared goals more easily.

Overall, uniting interagency groups around a shared set of desired outcomes, and, eventually, the steps necessary to achieve those outcomes is essential for giving a systemic reform effort the "teeth" it needs to succeed. Although agency leaders may play leadership roles within interagency groups, leadership within such groups is not limited to them. Interagency groups provide the opportunity to tap into a broad base of agency staff with complementary but unique strengths. While forming, organizing, managing, and sustaining such groups take time and focused effort, the collective strength of interagency groups can be the resounding force that ushers in true reform.

Practice 3: Sustain the Change and Continuously Improve

The tireless effort and commitment that go into planning for, communicating, and mobilizing behind a change effort—both within and across agencies—are not only what creates the momentum behind systemic reform, but also what builds the foundation for sustaining that reform. However, any effective leader knows that much more than a strong start is necessary to create change that lasts. Sustainability requires uncompromising accountability from the top of every organization to each staff person, constant examination of where a change effort has been and where it is going, an unwavering commitment to sharing the status of the change effort openly and honestly, and the resolute belief that there is always room for improvement. The remainder of this guide provides several strategies leaders can employ to sustain change efforts, with a focus on continuous quality improvement.

Strategy 1: Be personally accountable and hold others accountable

A respected leader generally holds a "the buck stops here" view of the success or failure of his or her organization. Although agency directors, facility superintendents, school principals, and the like are expected to bear the responsibility of leading, change efforts require still another level of leadership in which leaders hold themselves responsible for the success of the change and expect their staff and partners to do the same.

A true culture of accountability during times of change means not only celebrating and taking credit for success along the way, but also holding people responsible—be it the leader or any staff person—when things do not go according to plan and expectations are not met. An effective leader knows that there will be times when staff and interagency groups face challenges in implementing change and will support his or team or the group and show them how to respond effectively to setbacks. A strong leader will demonstrate that the success of a team or system matters but will also reduce pressure by making it clear that it is ok to make mistakes as long as everyone learns from those mistakes and they do not compromise the safety of youth or staff. An effective leader supports a healthy culture of accountability by focusing the energy of internal and cross-agency teams on what needs to be done to achieve success and how members can support each other in getting there (Boot, 2014).

Although leaders may be more accustomed to holding themselves accountable and being held accountable, examination into successful change efforts has shown that for staff, feeling accountable results from feeling in charge of their own success, and true accountability is hindered by a lack of clarity around the results expected and each player's

role in achieving those results (Boot, 2014). Therefore, as change occurs, staff for all child-serving agencies need regular training and professional development to understand new roles and responsibilities and reinforcement of their critical part in the change process. Strong leaders will recognize this and ensure staff are fully supported. Overall, by following the path toward change outlined previously in this guide, leaders lay the foundation for each individual involved in any change effort to own a piece of the change and thus feel accountable to its success.

Strategy 2: Use data to assess and inform action

> *"In today's professional juvenile justice and education worlds, we measure everything."*
>
> — *Susan Lockwood*

A strong leader knows that you cannot change what you do not measure, and more importantly, in times of change, that you cannot determine success without evaluating progress. Measuring performance and progress toward achieving desired outcomes requires some level of data collection and use. Just as statistics and data inform the initial action plan to launch an important organizational or systemwide change, so too must data drive reform along the path of implementation. The right data, collected and analyzed systematically, allow an organization to both learn from the past and, at regular intervals, evaluate what is working well and what should be done differently (Manns & Rising, 2010). At no time is this more important than in the midst of systemic reform. In such times, "rather than guessing or hoping for the best, leaders can use data effectively to develop and foster a culture in which all members of [an agency or system] understand, apply, and manage data as a dynamic entity to support the [system's] focus and improve outcomes" (Mills, 2011, p. 2). In the fields of juvenile justice, child welfare, and the like, data on outcomes such as recidivism, school reenrollment, and permanency rates often drive agencies' policies and practice.

There are many approaches that agency and system leaders can take to adopt and promote a culture of data-conscious decisionmaking. One such approach, aimed at program improvement, includes the following steps for data collection, analysis, and use: (1) determine the question(s) to be answered by data; (2) identify what data are currently available to answer the question(s), data sources, and what data are not available; (3) identify and collect data that were not previously available; (4) use all available data to answer the question(s); and, finally, (5) use the answers to the questions to inform future practice.

Much has been written about data-driven change efforts—much more than the scope of this guide can accommodate. However, there are several steps agency and system leaders can take to sustain reform efforts through the collection, analysis, and use of data. For example, in a 2011 white paper focused on educational leaders, Mills summarizes three steps leaders can take to help agencies and systems make informed, proactive decisions (whether about change efforts or otherwise) by accessing and integrating data. First, leaders should model the behaviors indicative of a "data culture" within their organizations and across groups. Examples of such behavior can be as simple as starting meetings with, or including in communications, reviews of agency or system data. By putting data front and center, leaders set the expectation that data will be used to inform decisions. Another approach is to identify a small set of data indicators—perhaps focused on student academic performance or transition outcomes—for staff to initially focus on in their daily work. This helps staff ease into change and the use of data and also allows agencies and systems to work out any "kinks" in their data collection and data use processes. Overall, the role of an agency or system leader at this point is to encourage and emphasize success and being able to demonstrate to all staff how data are being used and the impact on outcomes will assist in doing so (Mills, 2011).

Secondly, leaders can establish meetings specifically focused on the collection of data and/or what the data indicate (Mills, 2011). These meetings can be a means for an organization or system to examine how they are doing, where they want to go next, and how best to get there. Further, "these meetings provide opportunities to monitor progress and barriers, reinforce the focus of the change and introduce new ideas and goals" (Mills, 2011, p. 7). Meetings should initially start with a focus on the indicators first rolled out to staff, allowing them time in the meeting to discuss their work on and progress toward affecting the indicators. The meetings are an opportunity to celebrate incremental successes but also discuss any setbacks or negative data trends that emerge along the way. It is important that, as part of these meetings, agency and system leaders state and reassert what they believe to be "good," "average," or "in need of improvement" when it comes to what the data are indicating.

Finally, leaders should use their power and influence to remove or modify any organizational or systemic barriers to data collection and use (Mills, 2011). Using data as a driver of change may require "realignment of staff and resources, changes in policies or procedures, capital outlay issues or a host of activities that require the [leader's] stamp of approval and delivery" (p. 8). Regardless of what adjustments are needed to make data collection and use successful, agency and system leadership is critical to making them happen. Another role for leaders in ushering in a

> *"Leaders must understand data analysis and may have to rely on leadership team members or a consultant to assist with this and to advise on how best to use the data."*
>
> — *Leonard Dixon*

data-focused culture is to address agency and system policies that impact data collection and use. For juvenile justice, child welfare, and related child-serving agencies, privacy protection policies are often seen as a barrier to effectively sharing data between agencies. Understanding what current laws and policies require (and what they do not) and working to revise data-sharing policies that unnecessarily impede progress toward improving outcomes for children and youth, through the expertise of attorneys and other advisors, is one of the key responsibilities for a leader in any systemic reform effort.

Regardless of exactly how leaders promote and enforce the use of data to steer the change process, successfully convincing staff and stakeholders of the need for change, monitoring progress toward accomplishing change, and setting the course for future efforts in support of change require the use of data. Data, when used correctly, present an objective picture of where things stand and provide a foundation for action free of judgment or bias. For juvenile justice, child welfare, and other child-serving agency leaders, using data to inform action goes a long way toward garnering trust and support for agency and system leaders among staff, partners, and stakeholders at large, including parents, youth, and the community as a whole.

Strategy 3: Foster transparency by communicating with stakeholders

The openness and honesty that leaders exhibit to build trust and respect among their staff and interagency partners is also important in communicating with stakeholders at large. Effective leaders realize the "messaging" that comes out of their agency or system is critical to their success as leaders and to the agencies and system realizing their vision. For juvenile justice, child welfare, and other partner agencies, one of the best ways to garner support for change efforts among families, youth, advocates, community members, and other stakeholders is to operate within a framework of transparency and regularly share outcomes that matter. This

> *"Leaders need to share data with stakeholders and they must be transparent with the data they share. Stakeholders must believe in the validity of the data."*
>
> — *Judge Michael Nash*

is especially true in the highly political areas of juvenile justice, child welfare, education, mental health, and others.

During reform efforts, transparency is ultimately about sharing with others the changes that are occurring, why the change is necessary and why the system is taking the approach it is, and what the system and its leaders aim to accomplish through the change—namely, the intended outcomes for those served by the system. Creating reports, holding press conferences, and hosting town hall meetings are all ways in which leaders can ensure that they report on system activities. Using the data collected along the way—and reporting them fully and accurately—will help ensure that the reporting is transparent. When stakeholders feel they have a full, accurate picture of what is going on within a system, particularly in times of change, they are more likely to feel they can make an accurate assessment of the change. Effective leaders will ensure that agencies and systems are open to hearing the feedback of stakeholders, including concerns and suggestions, and incorporating that feedback into the change efforts. This type of feedback loop helps further establish a culture of transparency. In the end, stakeholder understanding and support are critical to the success of any change effort. Many systemic reforms are derailed by a lack of trust among stakeholders. This is the reason why it is critical for leaders to engage all partners—even difficult stakeholders—in the process early on to develop and enforce the mechanisms necessary to maintain transparency, largely through regular reporting and open dialogue.

Strategy 4: Continuously improve quality

This guide's final strategy can be summed up simply as "never settling for good enough."

> *"The change agent is never satisfied."*
> — *Leonard Dixon*

A resounding quality of highly effective leaders is their insistence on constantly improving. For juvenile justice, child welfare, and their partner agencies, embarking on the change process necessary to better address the educational needs of the children and youth in their systems is in itself indicative of a commitment to improvement. Although many systems around the country are instituting research-based programs and practice-proven techniques that result in high levels of academic achievement and transitional success for the youth in their care, there is still more that can be done. A strong leader uses that understanding to continually motivate his or her staff to do more.

A commitment to continuous quality improvement involves two basic elements: (1) celebrating instances where practices and/or outcomes met expectations and building on those successes, and (2) identifying where practices or outcomes could be better and identifying what is needed to make improvements. To the first point, change, especially systemic reform, takes time. Therefore, it is important for leaders to make it regular practice to appreciate each victory along the path to change, no matter how insignificant it may seem (Okantey, 2012; Manns & Rising, 2010). Recognizing and rewarding staff will go a long way toward sustaining support for change, especially when faced with challenges or setbacks. To the second point, change, especially systemic reform, is difficult. It will be necessary to regularly examine progress, and even in the most successful of change efforts, that examination will uncover areas where expectations are not fully met and change efforts are not fully implemented. Finding these areas where improvement is needed provides opportunities to reexamine priorities and correct course. It also presents leaders with an incentive to offer additional training and professional development to staff to help them solidify good practice and gain new knowledge and skills.

Change is a lot of work, and ensuring that hard work is perpetually focused on improvement will better enable change to be successful. Strong agency and system leaders never settle for "good enough," and, when it comes to change and systemic reform, they ensure that their drive to always do better is a force that pervades over the change effort. At the end of the day, a commitment to continuous quality improvement is the difference between saying "we did what really needed to be done" instead of "we did only what we could."

Conclusion

The CJJR monograph, "Addressing the Unmet Educational Needs of Children and Youth in the Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare Systems" highlighted the fact that too many children and youth who are system-involved—especially those involved in more than one child-serving system—do not receive the high-quality education and support services they need to succeed during and following system involvement. Systemic change is needed to address this problem, and strong leadership within and across agencies is necessary to implement and sustain that change. Research into effective leadership, including interviews with highly regarded agency and system leaders, identified several important leadership practices that agency administrators, program directors, facility superintendents, school principals, and other leaders should employ in times of change.

First, change should be carefully planned for, with leaders creating a vision for the change with the input of trusted advisors. Change needs to be appropriately presented to staff and partners, with leaders inviting and incorporating feedback into the plan for change. Leaders should set clear expectations for change efforts, being clear with staff and partners but not overly rigid or uncompromising. Second, systemic change like that proposed by the CJJR monograph requires whole-agency support as well as interagency collaboration and coordination. Leaders should drive teams and groups to unite behind a shared vision for the change process and to identify and agree on shared goals and objectives for reform. Finally, strong leadership is needed to sustain change efforts over the long term through (1) a commitment to across-the-board accountability, (2) the use of data to assess change efforts and make informed decisions, (3) a culture of transparency through communication and dialogue with stakeholders, and (4) the drive to never stop improving. This guide explores these practices and related strategies in an effort to assist juvenile justice, child welfare, and other child-serving agencies and leaders through the change process, with the hope of making the type of systemic reforms necessary to truly address the unmet educational needs of youth served in those systems.

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Appendix: Resource Interviews With Recognized Leaders

To inform the practices and strategies in this guide, NDTAC conducted interviews with three recognized leaders. One was a member of the judiciary, with considerable cross-agency experience. The second leader interviewed was a current facility director with past experience leading several juvenile justice agencies and facilities. The final interview was with a life-long educator who currently directs a State educational program within a juvenile justice agency. The three leaders were asked many questions referencing their experiences as effective leaders. This section focuses on three questions that pertain to the main characteristics of effective leadership; the importance to leaders of establishing a culture of data collection and use, and data's impact on leadership, agencies, and programs; and the significance of within- and cross-agency partnership in effecting change. The summary of these interviews serves as guidance for leaders in juvenile justice, child welfare, and other child-serving agencies.

About the Leaders Interviewed

Judge Michael Nash was appointed to the Los Angeles Municipal Court in 1985. In 1989, he was elevated to the Los Angeles Superior Court and served in the Juvenile Court from 1990 until his retirement in January 2015. From 1995 until his retirement, Judge Nash served as either Presiding Judge of the Juvenile Court or Supervising Judge of the Juvenile Dependency Court. Prior to being appointed to the bench, Judge Nash was a Deputy Attorney General in the California Attorney General's Office from 1974–1985. Serving in the criminal division, he handled hundreds of cases in the Courts of Appeal, including multiple appearances before the California Supreme Court. As a juvenile court judge, Judge Nash played a role in bringing numerous changes to the juvenile courts in Los Angeles. Some of these include the creation of drug courts in both Dependency and Delinquency Courts; development of psychotropic medication protocols for juvenile court youth; development of protocols to foster communication and coordination between Dependency and Delinquency Courts; and projects to enhance and define the role of attorneys in juvenile court. Judge Nash has served as President of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, the nation's oldest judicial member organization. He is also past chair of the Juvenile Court Judges of California and past co-chair of the California Judicial Council's Family and Juvenile Advisory Committee. He also previously served as a member of the California Judicial Council and the California Blue Ribbon Commission on Children in Foster Care.

Leonard Dixon is currently the Superintendent of Cook County (Illinois) Juvenile Temporary Detention Center (JTDC). He is responsible for JTDC's $53.3 million operating budget and staff of more than 700 and the administration and management of all operations of JTDC, including custody, medical/mental health services, social services, fiscal services, maintenance services, human resources, labor relations, and other services. Prior to coming to Cook County, Mr. Dixon was the Executive Director for the Children and Family Services Juvenile Detention Facility in Wayne County, Michigan. In Wayne County, Mr. Dixon was responsible for the operations of detention and alternatives to detention from June 1995 to October 2004 and returned to the facility from June 2007 until February 2015. Mr. Dixon was the Bureau Director for Juvenile Justice for the State of Michigan Department of Human Services from October 2004 to May 2007, where he was responsible for the care and supervision of delinquent State wards. Mr. Dixon is a member of numerous national organizations and has presented at several national conventions on juvenile justice issues. Mr. Dixon has more than 36 years of juvenile justice experience.

Dr. Susan Lockwood is the Director of Juvenile Education for the Indiana Department of Corrections, Division of Youth Services. Dr. Lockwood also serves as the chair of the Education Outcomes Task Force of the Governor's Commission on the Improvement of the Status of Children in Indiana. She is a past member of the American Correctional Association's Delegate Assembly, representing Juvenile Education, and a past President of the Council of State and Federal Directors of Correctional Education the Executive Board of the Correctional Education Association. Dr. Lockwood and her colleagues have published several research articles on the impact of correctional education on employment and recidivism.

Summary of Leader Interviews[8]

Qualities of effective leaders or change agents

Nash: Change agents lead by example by showing that they are as willing and able to accomplish as much, if not more, work than anyone else in the organization. The effective leader is a good listener and articulates his or her vision clearly and loudly. Nash went on to say that, given the context of cross-system reforms, the leader must be able to articulate where they think the agencies or systems should establish a starting point and construct the long-term vision across all agency leaders. The agency leadership will look to the cross-system's leader for direction and guidance along the journey to achieving the vision. The effective leader convenes appropriate stakeholders and keeps them talking to each other even when the conversation is difficult. In this

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8 The summaries are presented as paraphrases of each interviewee's responses to the questions asked and in most cases are not direct quotes. The views expressed by the interviewees are their own and do not necessarily reflect the views of NDTAC or the U.S. Department of Education.

way the leader can secure consensus or buy-in so there is the greatest likelihood of it becoming institutionalized and capable of living on beyond the leader.

Dixon: When thinking about vision, the effective leader is not necessarily a manager—the manager helps to build the bridge and gets you there while the leader helps you cross the bridge and achieve your goals. The change agent is never satisfied and must look at himself or herself and identify their own weaknesses before they can address issues or challenges in reaching the organization's goals. They must also assemble a leadership team made of a diverse group of individuals within and outside the organization in order to address areas he/she has identified as their own weaknesses. The job of a leader is to identify the best roles for those who work with them and make sure that each person is serving in the best and most effective role. Diversity is critical in your leadership team.

Lockwood: The effective leader is one who keeps his or her eyes on the big picture—he or she must have a vision and clearly share it with staff. Lockwood stated that the effective leader, who desires to be a change agent, must engage in active listening and must be willing to learn. That learning may be from professional development opportunities or the lessons learned from both successes and failures. The quality leader is tenacious—never giving up in the face of adversity. It is fine for the leader to take a step back, take a quick assessment of where the organization is, and move forward in a strategic manner. To be an effective leader, you must not only be visionary but missionary as well. The leader must be mission driven; however, he or she also needs to feel that true change in the agency must occur in order for young people to achieve the outcomes necessary for them to be successful.

The importance of collecting and utilizing data and data's impact on leadership

Nash: Obviously you need to collect and examine data to know where you are and where you need to go and alter your course of action along the way, if necessary based on the analysis of the data. You need to share the data with stakeholders and you must be transparent with the data you share. Stakeholders must believe in the validity of your data. You must continuously monitor your data or results, share the results, and answer stakeholder questions about your data. As an effective leader and change agent, Nash has learned from others who have gone before him and accomplished this important work of system reform. There are lessons to be learned from others—both their successes and challenges and the manner in which they addressed their challenges.

Dixon: Looking at the data gives you insight as an effective leader. As a change agent, we must always ask the question

"why." Data analysis is an important component to the answer to the questions a leader might encounter when promoting change and reform. Having quality data is important, but the effective leader does not stop there. He or she must act on the data. The leader must understand the data analysis and may have to rely on leadership team members or a consultant to assist with the understanding of the data analysis by the agency. It is fine to seek help when it comes to data collection, analysis, interpretation, and assessment of progress toward meeting one's vision or goals.

Lockwood: In today's professional juvenile justice and education worlds, we measure nearly everything. You can become so inundated with data that it is difficult to glean a clear understanding of the data to help drive future decisions and policy change in the agency. We can utilize our data to demonstrate results and progress that you might otherwise have difficulty articulating to stakeholders and staff. The sharing of data will help the momentum going forward as you attempt to demonstrate the impact you are having on the well-being of the youth under our care.

The significance of within- and cross-agency partnerships in effecting change

Nash: A key component of both within-agency and cross-agency partnerships is to stay focused on the mission—and the youth must be at the heart of that mission. You must focus on what is doable within the short term and long term. You know you have accomplished cross-system partnerships when you move from cooperation across agencies to the sharing of resources across agencies, based solely on the needs of the youth and their families. You are no longer operating in silos. The same is true for within-agency partnerships. Department heads readily share both service resources and human resources for the greater good of the organization and achievement of the vision. The leaders often measure these partnerships through assessing the work output of the individual as well as the entire department or group.

Dixon: With the complex needs of our youth, one agency cannot accomplish the necessary tasks that must be done in order for our young people to thrive. It takes both within-agency and cross-agency partnerships in order to be successful in achieving a leader's vision and ensuring success for the young people in your care, especially as they reenter the community. Within-agency and cross-agency partnerships may assist the youth and their families with reentry efforts especially to secure quality education and mental health treatment. Both types of partnerships can assist leaders at times of adversity that come from the political or social arenas. These strong partnerships will allow staff to work more cohesively during tough times and speak in a knowledgeable manner about the changes that are underway.

Lockwood: In order to truly address reforms, leaders understand that we must work with staff within the agency and leadership across agencies to ultimately achieve their vision. It simply takes all parties (within and outside agency) sitting at the table and talking through what each of us is trying to accomplish and getting a better understanding of ideas and a thorough understanding of the resources (human and fiscal) that exist to support the effort. Once you have had the discussion and decided on a course of action, you must get things moving quickly. Momentum is important and within-agency and outside agency partners want to see results, especially if they are working differently and harder and have placed additional resources on the table to promote the overall vision of the agency.

Finally, all three leaders stated that they have learned from multiple mentors during their careers. Their mentors continuously let them know that there was someone who cared about them, spoke to them in a frank and honest manner, and supported them every step of the way during their journey as change agents. Some of their best mentors were individuals who were effective leaders and change agents in similar roles or positions. All three of our leaders agreed that change and reform take time and always seem to take longer than one plans for initially. They stated that leaders must be strategic in planning and realistic in setting goals and timelines to achieve the vision. Leaders and their staff, including their leadership team, must be in total agreement on the implementation or structure of the reform or change and it was suggested by all three leaders that systems start on a smaller scale and then increase expectations as the earlier goals are met.

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