

# Sustainable School Leadership: The Teachers' Perspective

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*Sustainable school leadership is essential to the academic growth of students and professional growth of faculty and staff. Shedding light on what constitutes sustainable leadership from the perspective of teachers will increase our understanding of how specific leadership practices and processes impact those in the learning community who are directly responsible for the academic growth of students. This study examines the importance and need for sustainable school leadership, how sustainable school leadership is perceived by teachers and what elements, according to teachers, are essential to the development of sustainable school leadership.*

## **Introduction**

Teachers and their professional performance are directly impacted by the leadership in their respective schools. At this time of increased accountability a teacher may serve under the leadership of a number of different principals during his/her tenure. In many instances principals remain at the helm for a short time and are soon removed and replaced by school boards impatient for more rapid improvements in school outcomes.

Legislative federal mandates such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) and current literature on school quality consistently focus on the school principal as the individual who is responsible and accountable for the continuous academic growth of students. The accountability reform efforts of NCLB according to Tirozzi (2001) place the brunt of school improvement and the need to meet accreditation standards on the shoulders of the building leader – the school principal. Additionally, the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory published a summary in June, 2005 that stated “principals live in challenging times and are faced with leadership preparation and professional development that may not be tuned to NCLB requirements” (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory [NREL], 2005, p.2).

High-stakes testing and the political and public pressure to improve schools across the nation has generated considerable impatience with schools and school principals who are perceived as unsatisfactory and not meeting the academic needs of students. However, sustainable school leadership can be misinterpreted or perceived as the continuation of a principal in a leadership position, rather than the continuation over time of a strong, positive school culture and the consistent implementation of rigorous, high quality instructional practices.

The responsibilities of the school principal are complex, challenging, disjointed and often incoherent. The lack of effective principal mentoring, appropriate professional development, and adequate use of human resources contributes to the challenges of leadership. Schools depend on leadership in order to shape productive futures through self-renewal (Marks and Printy, 2003). However, Shen (2001) makes the following point: “To make teachers and principals’ perceptions congruent is a daunting task facing us in this new era of school leadership.”

## **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this research study is to examine how teachers perceive the need for sustainable school leadership and what elements teachers perceive are essential to the development of sustainable school leadership. Teachers are also asked to provide information regarding their perceived role in the development of sustainable school leadership.

The research questions are:

1. What is the importance and need for sustainable school leadership?
2. How is sustainable school leadership perceived by teachers?
3. What manner can teachers contribute to the development of sustainable school leadership?

The protocol questions used in this survey were developed in part based on the standards developed by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) and input from 3 school principals and several former students of the university’s principal preparatory program.

## Literature Review

The establishment of high-quality sustainable educational leadership is essential to the continual growth of schools beyond the leader's tenure at the school. To seek sustainable educational leadership the school principal, faculty, school board and stakeholders must be committed to the development of a school culture that develops strength and refinement with the passage of time according to Owens and Valesky (2011, p. 55). According to Glickman (2002); Stoll, Fink and Earl (2002), sustainable leadership goes beyond temporary gains in achievement scores to create lasting improvements in learning. This is consistent with Fullan (2005) who views sustainability as the capacity of a system to engage in the complexities of continuous improvement that is consistent with deep values of human purpose.

Sustainable leadership, as described by Hargreaves and Fink (2003), is a shared responsibility, which does not unduly deplete human or financial resources, and cares for and avoids exerting negative damage on the surrounding educational and community environment. Sustainable leadership has an activist engagement with the forces that affect it, and builds an educational environment of organizational diversity that promotes cross-fertilization of good ideas and successful practices in communities of shared learning and development. This statement supports the importance of developing a school culture of collaboration through shared beliefs, values and vision within the school community. It is on this culture that the foundation of sustainable leadership is developed, communicated and nurtured.

Hargreaves and Fink (2003) developed The Seven Principles of Sustainable Leadership based on the previously mentioned description of sustainable leadership: 1) sustainable leadership creates and preserves sustaining learning; 2) sustainable leadership secures success over time; 3) sustainable leadership sustains the leadership of others; 4) sustainable leadership addresses issues of social justice; 5) sustainable leadership develops rather than deplete human and material resources; 6) sustainable leadership develops environmental diversity and capacity; and 7) sustainable leadership undertakes activist engagement with the environment.

Danielson (2002) maintains that school leadership requires the capability to develop, communicate and put in place a vision for school improvement that marshals the energies of disparate members of a staff around common goals. This statement suggests the exercise of leadership should include teachers, ancillary personnel and even the school secretary. Mendez-Morse (1991) point out that "principals have a vision – a picture of what they want students to achieve. They engage teachers, parents, students and others to share in creating the vision. They encourage them to join in the efforts to make the vision a reality. They keep the vision in the forefront" (p.2).

Leadership sustainability is not a function of whether some person or some program can last or be maintained. Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2001), explain that leadership succession is more than grooming the principal's successor. It means distributing leadership throughout the school's professional community so others can carry the torch after the principal has gone. This perspective suggests the need to identify and make use of formal and informal leaders within the school organization. It invites teachers and other staff members, either individually or collectively to assume leadership roles and responsibilities. The teachers are the ones who carry the brunt of the responsibility of implementing the vision, but are often overlooked as contributing to the role of leadership.

Davies (2007b, p.2) point out that sustainable leadership builds a leadership culture based on moral purpose which provides success that is accessible to all. Maxwell (2007) provides

further credence to the legacy of succession. He indicates that leaders who leave a legacy of succession lead the organization with a long view, create a leadership culture, pay the price today to assure success tomorrow, value team leadership above individual leadership, and walk away from the organization with integrity.

Planning for succession can best be initiated by distributing leadership responsibilities and roles throughout the school community to assess specific skills and dispositions. Hall (2008) describes a succession plan as a process that identifies leadership positions and communicates how the school district prepares and develops individuals to become eligible for these positions when they are left vacant through retirements, resignations, promotions or dismissals.

Christiana, Aravella and Yiannis (2012) contend that key elements for sustainable school leaders involve placing sustainability within the heart of their school's mission, as an ethos that permeates all aspects of the school (curriculum, policies and culture) and its external partners; continuing opportunities for all staff members to develop an understanding of the principles of education for sustainable development; and reorganizing internal structures and cultivating cultural norms to develop the collective power of the whole school staff and community for learning and action on education for sustainable development.

The aforementioned statement regarding culture is echoed by Collins (2001) in his book *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't*. Collins makes 2 key points; 1) a culture of discipline involves a duality. On one hand, it requires people who adhere to a consistent system; yet, on the other hand, it gives people the freedom and responsibility within the framework of that system and 2) all personnel and stakeholders in the organization adhere to and strive for sustainable results consistent with the goal of the organization.

The practice of helping others to reach their full potential is at the heart of school leadership that is sustainable over time. In a school system this would indicate all school personnel share a common vision to work individually and collectively to not only accomplish the goals but contribute to the sustainability of the results. The leader who communicates and advances a widely understood school vision, fosters and facilitates a positive school culture, encourages collaboration and shared-decision-making, and promotes and encourages faculty leadership capacity is promoting leadership sustainability within the learning community.

The whole school staff as a learning community creates an environment of learning for everyone within the school with the dual intent of positively impacting the stakeholders outside of the school. Support for this statement is provided by Hargreaves and Fink (2003): "School leadership is a system, a culture. Schools are places in which principals, teachers, students and parents should all lead. To sustain high-quality leadership, school systems must apply systems thinking to all their initiatives. They must come to see leadership as a culture of integrated qualities rather than as merely as aggregate of common characteristics. This is the essence of the holistic approach to sustainable leadership."

For purposes of this study, sustainable leadership focuses on the integration of stakeholders and structure into the school culture in order to ensure continuous school improvement beyond an individual principal's tenure.

## **Methodology**

The participants for this descriptive research study are graduates of Governors State University's Educational Administration Program. An email from this researcher was sent to 220 proposed participants. The email consisted of an Informational Letter describing the research study and a

Letter of Informed Consent for the proposed participants. Proposed participants were requested via email to access <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/Z959PZP> to provide demographics regarding their gender, age, grade level of school and number of years teaching. A total of 83 participants consented to participate in this study.

The participants were requested to respond anonymously to questions 1 through 10 (on a Likert Scale). Questions 11 and 12 were open-ended and constituted the remaining questions for this research study. (See all questions below)

1. The principal communicates and advances a widely understood school vision.
2. The principal provides faculty with continuous job-embedded professional development.
3. The principal leads by positive example.
4. The principal promotes and encourages leadership capacity in faculty.
5. The principal fosters and facilitates a positive school culture.
6. The principal invites and encourages collaboration and shared decision-making processes.
7. The principal promotes 2-way communication with faculty.
8. The principal practices consensus building.
9. The principal models and encourages skills and habits of self reflection.
10. The principal encourages strategic problem solving among faculty.
11. Please explain how you might improve or add to any of the leadership characteristics identified here.
12. Please describe any role(s) or activities teachers can engage in to promote sustainable school leadership.

### **Data Analysis**

Females constituted 74.68 % of the participants for this study and males represented 25.32 %. There were 4 participants who skipped this question. (see Table 1.)

**Table 1**  
*Gender*

Answer Choices	Responses	
<b>Male</b>	25.32%	20
<b>Female</b>	74.68%	59
Total Participants		79

The age distribution indicated that 1.22 % of the participants were between 21 to 25 years of age; 10.98 % were between 26 to 30 years of age; 34.15 % were between 31 to 35 years of age; 19.51 % were between 36 to 40 years of age; and 34.15 % of the participants were over the age of 40. One participant skipped this question. (see Table 2.)

**Table 2**  
*Age Distribution*

Answer Choices	Responses	
<b>21 - 25</b>	1.22%	1
<b>26 - 30</b>	10.98%	9
<b>31 - 35</b>	34.15%	28
<b>36 - 40</b>	19.51%	16
<b>Over 40</b>	34.15%	28
Total Participants		82

The number of years participants served as teachers indicated 9.64 % had served as teachers between 2 and 5 years; 50.60 % served as teachers between 6 and 10 years; 20.48 % served as teachers between 11 and 15 years; and 19.28 % had served as teachers over 15 years. (see Table 3.)

**Table 3**  
*Number of Years as Teacher*

Answer Choices	Responses	
<b>2 - 5</b>	9.64%	8
<b>6 - 10</b>	50.60%	42
<b>11 - 15</b>	20.48%	17
<b>Over 15</b>	19.28%	16
Total Participants		83

The grade level of the schools where the participants were teaching indicated 32.93 % of the participants taught at elementary schools; 26.83 % of the participants taught at middle schools; 12.20 % of the participants taught at junior high; and 39.02 % of the participants taught at the high school. One participant skipped this question. (see Table 4.)

**Table 4**  
*Grade Level of School*

Answer Choices	Responses	
<b>Elementary School</b>	32.93%	27
<b>Middle School</b>	26.83%	22
<b>Junior High</b>	12.20%	10
<b>High School</b>	39.02%	32
Total Participants		82

**Table 5**  
*Survey Questions and Responses*

	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
1. The principal communicates a widely understood school vision	36.49% 27	33.78% 25	12.16% 9	0%	0%
2. The principal provides faculty with continuous job-embedded professional development	31.08% 23	35.14% 26	12.16% 9	17.57% 13	4.05% 3
3. The principal leads by positive example	33.78% 25	33.78% 25	13.51% 10	16.22% 12	2.70% 2
4. The principal promotes and encourages leadership capacity in faculty	43.24% 32	29.73% 22	6.76% 5	14.86% 11	5.41% 4
5. The principal fosters and facilitates a positive school culture	40.54% 30	31.08% 23	9.46% 7	16.22% 12	2.70% 2
6. The principal invites and encourages collaboration and shared decision-making	43.84% 32	30.14% 22	9.59% 7	10.96% 8	5.48% 4
7. The principal promotes 2-way communication with faculty	39.73% 29	34.25% 25	8.22% 6	12.33% 9	5.48% 4
8. The principal practices consensus building	27.03% 20	33.78% 25	14.86% 11	21.62% 16	2.70% 2
9. The principal models and encourages skills and habits of self-reflection	26.03% 19	31.51% 23	19.18% 14	20.55% 15	2.74% 2
10. The principal encourages strategic problem solving among faculty	31.08% 23	33.78% 25	16.22% 12	16.22% 12	2.70% 2

**Question # 1 – The principal communicates a widely understood school vision.**

A total of 36.49 % of the participants reported a response of strongly agree; 33.78 % reported a response of agree; 12.16 % reported a response of neutral; and no participant reported a response of disagree or strongly disagree. The aggregate responses for strongly agree and agree totaled 70.27 % indicating the majority of participants believe their principal communicates a widely understood school vision.

**Question # 2 – The principal provides faculty with continuous job-embedded professional development.**

A total of 31.08 % of the participants reported a response of strongly agree; 35.14 % reported a response of agree; 12.16 % reported a response of neutral; 17.57 % reported a response of disagree; and 4.5 % reported a response of strongly disagree. The aggregate responses for strongly agree and agree totaled 66 % indicating that the majority of participants believe that their principal provides faculty with continuous job-embedded professional development. The aggregate responses for disagree and strongly disagree indicate that 21.62 %

of the participants do not believe their principal provides faculty with continuous job-embedded professional development.

**Question # 3 – The principal leads by positive example.**

A total of 33.78 % of the participants reported a response of strongly agree; 33.78 % reported a response of agree; 13.51 % reported a response of neutral; 16.22 % reported a response of disagree; and 2.70 % reported a response of strongly disagree. The aggregate responses for strongly agree and agree totaled 67.56 % indicating the majority of participants believe their principal leads by positive example. The aggregate responses for disagree and strongly disagree indicate that 18.90 % of the participants do not believe their principal leads by positive example.

**Question # 4 – The principal promotes and encourages leadership capacity in faculty.**

A total of 43.24 % of the participants reported a response of strongly agree; 29.73 % reported a response of agree; 6.76 % reported a response of neutral; 14.86 % reported a response of disagree; and 5.41 % reported a response of strongly disagree. The aggregate responses for strongly agree and agree totaled 72.97 % indicating the majority of participants believe their principal promotes and encourages leadership capacity in faculty. The aggregate responses for disagree and strongly disagree indicate that 20.27 % of the participants do not believe their principal promotes and encourages leadership capacity in faculty.

**Question # 5 – The principal fosters and facilitates a positive school culture.**

A total of 40.54% of the participants reported a response of strongly agree; 31.08% reported a response of agree; 9.46% reported a response of neutral; 16.22% reported a response of disagree; and 2.70% reported a response of strongly disagree. The aggregate responses for strongly agree and agree totaled 71.62% indicating the majority of participants believe their principal fosters and facilitates a positive school culture. The aggregate responses for disagree and strongly disagree indicate that 18.92 % of the participants do not believe their principal fosters and facilitates a positive school culture.

**Question # 6 – The principal invites and encourages collaboration and shared decision-making.**

A total of 43.84% of the participants reported a response of strongly agree; 30.14% reported a response of agree; 9.59 % reported a response of neutral; 10.96% reported a response of disagree; and 5.48% reported a response of strongly disagree. The aggregate responses for strongly agree and agree totaled 73.98 % indicating the majority of participants believe their principal invites and encourages collaboration and shared decision-making. The aggregate responses for disagree and strongly disagree indicate that 16.41 % of the participants do not believe their principal invites and encourages collaboration and shared decision-making.

**Question # 7 – The principal promotes 2-way communication with faculty.**



A total of 39.73% of the participants reported a response of strongly agree; 34.25% reported a response of agree; 8.22% reported a response of neutral; 12.33% reported a response of disagree; and 5.48% reported a response of strongly disagree. The aggregate responses for strongly agree and agree totaled 73.98 % indicating that the majority of participants believe their principal promotes 2-way communication with faculty. The aggregate responses for disagree and strongly disagree indicate that 17.81 % of the participants do not believe their principal promotes 2-way communication with faculty.

**Question # 8 – The principal practices consensus building.**

A total of 27.03% of the participants reported a response of strongly agree; 33.78% reported a response of agree; 14.86 % reported a response of neutral; 21.62% reported a response of disagree; and 2.70% reported a response of strongly disagree. The aggregate responses for strongly agree and agree totaled 60.81 % indicating that the majority of participants believe that their principal practices consensus building. The aggregate responses for disagree and strongly disagree indicate that 24.32 % of the participants do not believe that their principal practices consensus building.

**Question # 9 – The principal models and encourages skills and habits of self-reflection.**

A total of 26.03% of the participants reported a response of strongly agree; 31.51% reported a response of agree; 19.18 % reported a response of neutral; 20.55% reported a response of disagree; and 2.74% reported a response of strongly disagree. The aggregate responses for strongly agree and agree totaled 57.54 % indicating the majority of participants believe their principal models and encourages skills and habits of self-reflection. The aggregate responses for disagree and strongly disagree indicate that 23.39 % of the participants do not believe their principal models and encourages skills and habits of self reflection.

**Question # 10 – The principal encourages strategic problem solving among faculty.**

A total of 31.08% of the participants reported a response of strongly agree; 33.78% reported a response of agree; 16.22 % reported a response of neutral; 16.22% reported a response of disagree; and 2.70% reported a response of strongly disagree. The aggregate responses for strongly agree and agree totaled 64.86 % indicating the majority of participants believe that their principal encourages strategic problem solving among faculty. The aggregate responses for disagree and strongly disagree indicate that 18.92 % of the participants do not believe their principal encourages strategic problem solving among faculty.

The majority of the participants believed that their respective principals engaged in the practices listed in the 10 survey questions. Less than 25 % of the participants did not believe their respective principals engaged in the practices listed in the 10 survey questions.

Questions that were skipped by the participants are as follows: 22 participants skipped Question 1; 9 participants skipped Questions 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9 and 10; and 2 participants skipped Questions 6 and 7.

## **Question # 11**

**Please explain how you might improve or add to any of the leadership characteristics identified here.**

All of the participants responded to this question and many indicated the leadership characteristics of their respective school principal could be improved. The participants reported similar perceptions regarding the need for the leadership to improve the school culture, cultivate professionalism and encourage collaboration through modeling and example.

A consistent perception among the participants included the need for principals to include faculty and staff in the decision-making process and include the community by holding parent advisory meetings at the school building level. Perceptions among participants included the need for the school leadership to reflect on strengths as well as weaknesses to present a balanced logical approach to tasks, challenges and future goals.

It was echoed throughout the responses that the school principal would be well-served to put forth great efforts in establishing a shared sense of community and partnership among all stakeholders in order to remove traditional barriers and move forward as a solidified team.

Participants placed high value on the leadership quality of principals who encourage professional development and growth that result in improved student achievement.

A few selected quotes provide verbatim responses from the participants:

I think more collaborative decision making among faculty that benefits the students is a good leadership characteristic. Although the final decision is made by administration, input from faculty and the best interest of students are discussed and should be considered. Also, I believe in developing the growth and professionalism of each faculty member. Allow faculty to attend professional development meetings and provide in-services that would benefit other teachers in the building. Furthermore, encourage a positive climate that is conducive to student learning and collaboration among faculty members. You should remain neutral and un-biased in handling conflict.

I do believe that a great deal of a principal's leadership and their ability to convince teacher buy-in comes from the core of who they are as a person. To possess empathy, a sense of humor, a safe environment, encourage an extended "family" feeling in the building...these are qualities that are equally as important and parallel the leadership aspect. Something I think few principals have figured it out and it's the easiest concept...teachers are fairly easy to please and, in turn, can be your biggest advocate. Once your teachers are on board, there are many to carry the torch and your leadership vision is multiplied. As a result, a happy building is more successful. Hence, the answer to sustainable school leadership!

Consistency and leadership by example is key for any organization to be successful. That leadership has to start at the very top with the school board members and central office administration leading by example. Vendettas, personal agendas, and power trips have no place in schools. Schools have to focus on what's best for the kids and hold them accountable for their actions. Training, open communication without fear of retribution and holding the top accountable is what is needed.

Additional leadership characteristics that were reported by the participants included the need for the school principal to be transparent, create an environment conducive for students and teachers, build better rapport with all of those involved within the educational process, facilitate two-way communication, discuss a shared vision of what the goals and measures of what constitutes success, and promote consensus more on issues that directly impact teachers.

### **Question # 12**

**Please describe any role(s) or activities teachers can engage in to promote sustainable school leadership.**

Many of the participants reported the significance of collaborating across disciplines and departments to develop and enhance leadership skills that would be beneficial to the school community. The need to willingly participate on committees requested by the school principal was viewed as being supportive of the principal's ideas. It was also reported that teachers who speak on behalf of the school principal and the positive school climate help to promote sustainable school leadership.

A number of the participants indicated the promotion of sustainable leadership occurred when teachers created an environment in which the school represented a village, and the goal of the village was to produce citizens for our society. Consistent with this concept of the school as a village, teachers reported that being team leaders for grade levels was a small way to begin the promotion of school leadership. Participants suggested that the collaboration of all staff members (custodians, lunchroom staff, aides, etc) allowed for the sharing of ideas, discussion of issues and learning from each other. Obviously, this would help to promote the learning community.

The participants also valued the practice of providing teachers opportunities to shadow the principal to better understand the role and responsibilities of leadership and learn how teachers might play a more vital role in sustaining leadership.

It was a consistent theme among the participants that two-way communication between faculty and the principal was important to establishing transparency and a culture of mutual respect within the school community. The participants pointed out that two-way communication has an impact on promoting shared decision-making and a more cohesive environment. It was also stated by the participants that teachers who took more initiatives and thought of themselves as one with the administrators would allow the administrators to feel less overwhelmed and more reliant to depend on teachers to take the lead and make decisions.

A few selected quotes provide verbatim responses from the participants:

Teachers have to take some initiative in order to make the administrative team successful. Too many times teachers wait in the weeds for a principal to make a mistake instead of working with him or her to improve the school. A teacher's realm is not just his or her own classroom. They are part of the bigger picture and need to have a vested interest in the entire school. In today's accountability-driven society, it is vital for principals to give their teachers the keys to car sometimes. In my experience there are always those teachers who want to take on leadership roles, so the more of those teachers a principal can give more responsibility to, the more kids will benefit and the more the culture of the school will shift to one where the principal guides the school instead of "runs" the school.

A Professional Learning Community in which shared professional development and encouragement take place in an integrated population of teachers and administrators within the district is a proven method of building partnerships and establishing sustainable leadership. Further, sustainable leadership is nurtured through community outreach, involvement, and partnership; all with the sole focus of promoting excellence in student growth and achievement.

Teachers can be team leaders for their grade level and this is a small way to start promoting school leadership. Teachers can also run and coordinate after-school programs such as student council that will not only show the leadership of the students but that of the coordinator as well.

Committee work help promotes sustainable and transparent school leadership. It helps promote accountability since more than one person gives and receives the communication. However, the committee work is only good and useful if the recommendations or actions made by the committee are backed up and followed by administration. If the committee has "no power", the entire system fails.

Teachers can promote sustainable school leadership by: 1) heading leadership tasks; 2) supporting peers; 3) sharing expertise; 4) providing feedback to administration; 5) challenging leadership in a positive manner; 6) making suggestions; 7) promoting institution's vision to all stakeholders; and 8) being at the forefront of profession in terms of knowledge, skills, and understanding issues.

One participant opined that teachers cannot promote sustainable leadership due to leadership becoming more and more politically manipulated with no regards for the consequences to the overall goal of education. Unfortunately, this particular perspective does little to advance the credibility of the teachers having an impact on contributing to sustainable leadership.

## **Research Questions and Analysis**

### **What is the importance and need for sustainable school leadership?**

According to Hargreaves and Fink (2003), sustainable leadership builds an educational environment based on shared responsibilities with the stakeholders both in and out of the school. The importance of having a school culture committed to the collaboration of shared beliefs, values and vision is part of the foundation of developing and maintaining sustainable school leadership. This is also supported by Danielson (2002) who views all members of the school community as vital in contributing to the creation and stewardship of the school's vision.

Throughout the responses of the participants there were indications that sustainable leadership is a factor in determining the academic growth of students and the professional growth of faculty and staff. The participants viewed sustainable leadership as necessary, particularly in a time of increased accountability and political pressure to maintain the academic growth of students. The ability of the school principal to get everyone on-board was perceived as an important element in achieving short and long-term goals. Getting everyone on-board according

to Maxwell (2010) requires leaders to connect with people at three different levels: one-on-one, in a group, and with an audience.

The participants also indicated that sustainable leadership is necessary for maintaining a positive school culture and high morale among faculty and staff. Sustainable leadership, according to the participants, involves everyone in the school community having a voice and a role which contributes to the culture and learning community.

Young (2013) points out that principals should cultivate a culture of trust that embraces the job-embedded learning of collaborative work among school teams, effectively monitor best instructional practices, and meet and achieve the goals and expectations of the communities they serve. People will work hard in a school where they are able collaborate with colleagues who support them and where there is an expectation that they can improve their school.

The succession of leadership that is built into the culture of the school through collaboration, job-embedded professional development and shared decision-making facilitates the continuation of leadership over time and improves the academic growth of students and the professional growth of teachers. The long-term view according to Maxwell (2007) creates a legacy of succession within the organization that is consistent with maintaining leadership over time.

### **How is sustainable school leadership perceived by teachers?**

The participants perceived sustainable leadership in various ways. Their responses included a focus on the need for faculty to be included in the decision-making process which would provide the teachers with a sense of community and shared responsibilities. This sense of community and shared responsibilities would facilitate leadership capacity among teachers who would no longer be solely relegated to classroom duties.

The encouragement from the principal for professional development to inform practice and promote personal and professional growth was viewed as essential to enhancing skills among teachers that contributed to the success of the school. The continual success of the school is reflected by the type of leadership that is at the helm.

Participants indicated the importance of committee work was necessary for the promotion of accountability, two-way communication and leadership skills. Committee work was viewed as a small way for teachers to engage in positions of leadership that would be helpful to the school principal by promoting his/her vision and ideas.

The need for the principal to be transparent and create an environment conducive for students and teachers were also viewed as promoting sustainable leadership. Participants reported the importance of having a school culture that recognized the school as a village where everyone's input was vital, everyone had creditability and the torch of leadership was carried by everyone. A sustainable culture according to Acker-Hocevar, Cruz-Janzen and Wilson (2012), includes shared leadership and accountability, resourcefulness, additive schooling and humanistic philosophy as variables that sustain organizational efforts for achieving results.

These perceptions of the participants are consistent with the findings of Cherkowski (2012) who indicated that principals need to create conditions that evoke a desire for leadership and commitment from others in the community to contribute to developing and sustaining shared visions, goals and purposes. This is further advanced by Hargreaves and Fink (2006) who state that the ultimate goal for sustainable leadership in a complex, knowledge-sharing society is for schools to become professional learning communities.

## **In what manner can teachers contribute to the development of sustainable school leadership?**

The participants provided responses which indicated that teachers can contribute to sustainable leadership by taking more of an initiative by heading tasks and being supportive of peers. Being a steward for the school's vision and advancing the ideas of the school principal was also seen as a contributing factor for sustainable leadership.

It was also reported by the participants that active participation on school committees promotes accountability and two-way communication between the principal and the faculty. The building of partnerships can facilitate involvement and relationships among all stakeholders in the learning community. The ability of everyone to feel involved in the process contributes to everyone's sense of responsibility regarding the direction and long-term growth of the school. This is further advanced by Maxwell (2010) who point out that team members must genuinely believe that the value of the team's success is greater than the value of their own individual interest and personal sacrifice must be encouraged and then rewarded – by the team leader and other members of the team.

Participants indicated that leadership roles of informal leaders can be nurtured by the experiences and tasks associated with new roles. These roles can facilitate new knowledge and understanding of the leadership position from a whole school perspective. Having a whole school perspective is essential to developing and maintaining sustainable leadership. To restate the idea of a previously mentioned participant:

Teachers can promote sustainable school leadership by 1) heading leadership tasks; 2) supporting peers; 3) sharing expertise; 4) providing feedback to administration; 5) challenging leadership in a positive manner; 6) making suggestions; 7) promoting institution's vision to all stakeholders; and 8) being at the forefront of profession in terms of knowledge, skills and understanding issues.

### **Conclusions**

All of the participants in this study expressed the importance and need for sustainable leadership in order to maintain the academic growth of students and professional growth of teachers. Sustainable leadership was not viewed as maintaining current leadership over time. Sustainable leadership was viewed as leadership that shared in the decision-making among teachers and other stakeholders in the learning community. Although the views of the participants are directly related to their current school principal, their suggestions for sustainable school leadership and how they view proposed individual teacher contributions reflects their own knowledge and perception of what successful sustainable school leadership should look like.

It seemed evident from the participants and the literature that the involvement of teachers and stakeholders in decision-making facilitates leadership skills and develops the capacity for understanding the complexities and challenges of sustaining leadership over time.

The idea of the school principal promoting a professional learning community for all stakeholders was recognized as vital to sustaining leadership due to its impact on the leadership culture. Having a professional learning community that grows and improves over time contributes to sustainable leadership because stakeholders have an understanding of the vision

and an investment in the long-term growth of the individuals that constitute the entire school community.

DuFour (2004) indicates that educators who are building professional learning communities have to work together to achieve a collective purpose of learning for all and by doing so they are creating structures to promote a collaborative culture. The concept requires school staff to work collaboratively on matters related to learning, and hold itself accountable for the kind of results that fuel continual improvement over time. In addition, the practices in a professional learning community according to Green (2013), facilitates two-way communication and accessibility for all members and promotes high morale.

Beyond the “how” and “what” of this study, teachers provided insight regarding their prospective roles as dynamic subordinates. Crockett (2010) describes the dynamic subordinate as being a steward who assumes the responsibility for the well-being of something that belongs to another. The ability of schools to be continuously successful over time is impacted by the school culture and the vision that is universally shared. Having everyone on-board to advance the vision and work collaboratively towards a goal gives credence to the adage that it takes a village.

It is hoped that information gathered from this study will assist school boards and principals in evaluating the components of sustainable leadership relative to the development and maintenance of administrative effectiveness. In addition, the results of this study may also be of significance to administration and faculty involved in principal preparation programs and teacher leader programs.

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