University of Northern Iowa

UNI ScholarWorks

Graduate Research Papers   Student Work

2008

A preferred vision of educational leadership in schools : a reflective essay

Melinda A. Orris

A preferred vision of educational leadership in schools : a reflective essay

Abstract

The state of Iowa has laid the framework for leadership in education through the development of the six Iowa Standards for School Leaders (ISSL). Each one of the six standards details a different aspect of the role needed for successful leadership within the school and the school community. Through these six standards and outside resources, I have found that there are core beliefs and characteristics required to have and maintain success in leadership in education. This paper will cover the essential beliefs and characteristics in educational leadership needed, and their importance for success within the school.

A PREFERRED VISION OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN SCHOOLS:

A REFELCTIVE ESSAY

A Research Paper

Presented to

The Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling,

and Postsecondary Education

University of Northern Iowa

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements of the Degree

Masters of Arts in Educational Leadership

by

Melinda A. Orris

May 2008

Dr. Robert Decker

This Research Paper by: Melinda A. Orris

Entitled: A PREFERRED VISION OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN SCHOOLS:

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

has been approved as meeting the research paper requirements for the Degree of Master of

Arts in Educational Leadership.

Robert H. Decker

2-12-08
_____
Date Approved

_____
Advisor/Director of Research Paper

Victoria L. Robinson

2-12-08
_____
Date Approved

_____
Second Reader of Research Paper

Michael D. Waggoner

2.12.08
_____
Date Received

_____
Head, Department of Educational
Leadership, Counseling, and Postsecondary Education

A Preferred Vision of Educational Leadership in Schools

The state of Iowa has laid the framework for leadership in education through the development of the six Iowa Standards for School Leaders (ISSL). Each one of the six standards details a different aspect of the role needed for successful leadership within the school and the school community. Through these six standards and outside resources, I have found that there are core beliefs and characteristics required to have and maintain success in leadership in education. This paper will cover the essential beliefs and characteristics in educational leadership needed, and their importance for success within the school.

Iowa Standards for School Leaders

The first Iowa standard breaks down the expectations of a successful leader of a school into four goals or focus areas. The development of the school's vision is the main focus of this standard. Making sure that everyone affected by the school is involved in developing the vision, though, is the key. The number one core belief that a good leader in education must always remember is, "People support what they help build" (Wilmore, 2002, p.21). This belief, I feel, is also the theme for all of the other Iowa standards.

As the school changes, so will the school's vision. When change does occur, the leader of the building must keep the lines of communication open with the whole school community and must constantly act as the vision's personal "cheerleader" (Wilmore, 2002). As a cheerleader of the vision, the educational leader is actively helping to ensure the vision continues to move in the right direction.

Everyone involved in the school, including the leaders, staff, students, and community members, must know and understand that there are "no magical answers to

[all of the] problems facing schools [today]" (Wilmore, 2002, p.23). Once that fact is understood by all involved, it is easier to handle mistakes or problems within the school. This also allows *risk-taking* to occur to find the "right" answers and solutions. A successful leader in education must "recognize. . .that there is a variety of power relationships in every school. The more [the leader] understands these [relationships] and works to navigate them the more everyone [involved] will feel they have a place at the table" (Patti & Tobin, 2003, p. 129). The stakes are so high in education that when teachers and staff feel safe enough to experiment in their classrooms with different strategies and curriculum, new motivation levels transpire and new attitudes towards mistakes and *risk-taking* emerge.

It is inevitable that at least one mistake will occur within the school at some point throughout the calendar year. To prevent resentment or hostility during troubled times, the educational leader must persistently work to build strong bonds of trust and camaraderie with all of the stakeholders involved. If all of the school's stakeholders believe and have trust in the school leader and the overall vision of the school, they will feel more comfortable with potential mistakes made by the school leader during a time of *risk-taking*. They may even assume that the mistake was permissible and the mistake process may help build a deeper relationship by showing that that educational leaders "are [only] human" (Wilmore, 2002, p.23).

Good leaders cannot allow themselves, or their schools, to worry about the *"Jonah Complex"* (Mandino, 1975). They instead have to trust in one another that the decisions made are going to benefit all and are deemed to be what is in the best interest of the school community. Known as Mandino's (1975) *"Jonah Complex"*, everyone

possesses the "innate desire to hide from the possibility of failure" (p.51). The vision of the school can only be reached when educational leaders are willing to take risks and try, even if failure is a possible outcome.

The "lifeblood of the school" (Wilmore, 2002), is concentrated in Iowa standard two. Standard two prescribes that the leader of the school, "advocate[s] a school culture and instructional program [that is] conducive to student learning and staff development" (Wilmore, 2002, p.32). To achieve this goal, the leader must first know and understand the culture of the community. Again, Wilmore's suggestion that "people support what they help build," is a key factor to the achievements of the school.

A creditable school leader will actively find ways to include members of the school community in the decision-making process to promote a feeling of responsibility for the final results. By including everyone in this process, the leader will face fewer cases of the "*Disease of Me*" (Riley, 1993), while trying to create and achieve the school's goals. The "*Disease of Me*" is a fundamental belief of Riley's illustrating that a team will never accomplish its expectations if the individual parts care more about themselves and personal accomplishments than the how the team as a whole competed.

Wilmore's (2002) idea of "what gets recognized, gets reinforced" is a core belief that must be realized by the school leader to achieve the vision's success. The principal or educational leader must let the school community know that positive behaviors and progress towards the vision are being noticed. When teachers who are doing a good job of trying to reach the vision are recognized, those particular behaviors will spread like "wildfire" throughout the building. Whitaker's (2003) "power of [authentic] praise" can be used as a way to reinforce and motivate even the most vocal proponents (p. 23),

resulting in strengthening the positive school culture that the vision needs for success (Wilmore, 2002). Through these actions, the leader is "creating a winning team" (Wilmore, 2002, p.34), that will ultimately achieve the victory of the vision within the school.

The instructional strategies and programs within the school are the "meat and potatoes" (Wilmore, 2002, p.35) of the building. The focus of a first-rate school leader must be on the strategies and programs of instruction within a school (C. Hansen, personal communication, September 27, 2005). The use of specific goal-setting is a practice that should be used daily by leaders within their buildings. There "should be many different sets of goals" (Wilmore, 2002, p.35), covering the different areas focused on within the school's vision. These goals must then be adapted to the particular individual or program in need of the goal. When the goal is reached, "new ones [must] be developed" (Wilmore, 2002, p.35).

The focus of the goals developed by the leaders of the building must be concentrated on the learner's needs and wants. It is the job of the educational leaders of the school, including both the administration and staff, to figure out the particular needs and wants of each learner. The teacher or leader must get to know each individual student to find out what teaching strategies and instructional programs work best for each student in the learning process (Wilmore, 2002).

After it is decided which instructional strategies work and which ones do not, it is essential that the school leader monitor whether the teacher is applying those successful strategies within their classrooms (Wilmore, 2002). While "this is more work than the average lesson plan" (Wilmore, 2002, p.37), the school leader should be encouraging this

type of work ethic, noticing it taking place within their school, and recognizing the teachers that are putting forth this extra effort. This reinforcement will be encouraging and motivating, and positive behavior will continue. It is when all of these things occur in a school that the student becomes interested, connected, and engaged in their learning process. According to Wilmore (2002), it is at this point that measurable learning takes place within the classroom, and the school's vision is reached.

Constantly monitoring that all students are afforded the ability to learn within the building is the responsibility of the leadership that can never be neglected. The leader must spend time "find[ing] ways to help students who [have] almost slipped through the [educational] cracks" (Wilmore, 2002, p.37). By paying attention to these students and spending time helping them reach the education goals of the school, the leader is reinforcing the vision of the school for everyone. This also reminds all learners that they are "rare, priceless treasures" (Mandino, 1975, p.98) who, by federal law, deserve the right to a free and appropriate education. Students, who begin to feel like part of the solution in the school instead of the problem, will raise their self-efficacy beliefs and use less of their failure-avoiding strategies creating a win-win culture for all members of the school's community (Alderman, 2004).

Having the ability to make sound decisions is also a characteristic that is highly regarded in the Iowa standards. Good educational leaders make decisions based on law and policy, not based on personal feelings or peer-pressures (C. Hansen, personal communication, September 27, 2005). "Taking a stand that. . .[is] ethically correct, but politically incorrect"(Patti & Tobin, 2003, p.131), will be something that all school leaders are faced with. Quality educational leaders "must build safeguards into [their]

decision-making process to check [themselves], to provide consistency, and to ensure equity and fairness"(Wilmore, 2002, p.81).

> While school leaders – teachers, administrators, and board members – will always use their experience and collective thinking to make the best decisions for "their" schools, they must also be armed with information – laws, policies, and regulations – that will eventually be the bases for determining whether their decisions "stick"(Bosher, 2004, preface ¶ 4)

People within the school community have to feel like they can trust the leader in order to feel comfortable about the school. Even during times of unpopular decision-making, the leader has to show that the chosen outcome is based on facts, rather than favoritism. A good building leader wants the school community to believe that ulterior motives are not a part of the decision-making process, but that the best interest of all involved is the biggest concern. When an effective educational leader acts with "integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner" (Wilmore, 2002, p.80), especially during the decision-making process, it becomes obvious that trust has been earned from the school community, and there will be fewer overall problems within the school.

An effective building leader needs to constantly ask, "How can we do it better?" This question is essential when a leader weighs decisions with major consequences. The leader must continually evaluate the school, teachers, programs, and all of the other parts of the building to make sure that the entire school is aligned with the school's vision and goals. While conducting these evaluations, a good leader must be "consistent, fair, ethical, and equitable" (Wilmore, 2002, p.54), when deciding if the most advantageous student learning is taking place within the walls of the school.

There are many components to personal beliefs of the role of an effective leader within the school setting. Through my research, I have identified specific core beliefs and characteristics needed for good educational leadership. I believe that some people are born with these characteristics, for others the characteristics are developed over time, and for others possession will never happen. However, one of the greatest things I believe about being an educational leader is that the key to success is to get the whole school community involved in the building process of the school's vision and it's goals so that they help make the dreams become reality.

<div align="center">Current Research: Reflective Practitioner</div>

Education is a "kid business." Spending time throughout the day making sure that kids come first within the building is a major part of the job description of a great administrative team. This core value must be a principal's concern everyday. While principal's make rounds checking buildings for good instructional techniques, they need to be aware of the need for reflective practice by their teachers and themselves.

What does *reflective practice* mean? It is the idea of focusing on how an effective leader makes decisions throughout the day to improve student learning so all students are successful within the school. The real key to reflective practice depends upon how well the particular school leader develops methods that work best. To achieve success the school leader needs to focus on describing, informing, confronting, and reconstructing reflective practices during the decision-making process.

Decision-making is the toughest part of an administration job. When faced with tough problems, a good leader must have a concrete decision-making plan that can be utilized as a guide leading to the right solutions. Leaders will not always lead in the right

direction, but good leaders will realize when the direction is "off path" and will make the necessary corrections to get the school community back on the "right path." The most effective decision-making plans are typically based on the leader's personal core values, or what beliefs and ideals internally drive the leader.

Core values, personal beliefs and ideals, tend to reflect a leader's character. Good leaders develop core values over time and through experiences. Good leaders adapt solutions to meet the needs of personal core values while also meeting the needs of the greater learning community. I believe core values can change over time. Personal experiences and maturity can, and will, affect the core values of a good leader. Through personal growth and professional development administrators may change personal beliefs regarding what is "right" and "wrong" in the decision-making process, and this is acceptable.

One of the greatest ways to learn the rights and wrongs of decision-making is to watch others in leadership roles do their jobs. By this I mean, not only to observe teachers during the administrative position, but to observe other leaders in education throughout the state. By finding ways to observe the best leaders in education, regardless of location, a good leader will see best practices being used to take back and use within their own building. At the same time, educational leaders should take the time to watch the leaders who are failing in their positions. By watching bad practices, a good leader will always come up with better ways to deal with the given situation and store for future reference.

While observing these different educational leaders, take the time to write down what practices are effective, and also include which practices are not working. At the end of each observation session, spend time journaling and reflecting how the different

situations observed were handled. Make sure to add personal opinions and reflections in the journaling process, so if ever faced with the same problem, documentation would exist to help in the current decision-making process. Regardless of the outcomes found from the observation, good leaders will always find a way to change their behaviors to become better at their jobs. "The biggest difference between average and great principals lies in *what they expect of themselves*" (Whitaker, 2003, p. 17). Great leaders can use their reflections from different situations to continually raise the expectation bar.

Professional development, within different areas of the school community, will benefit any decision-making process. A good leader must stay up-to-date on what is going on, not only in the field of education, but in the world. Using workshops to find possible solutions to potential problems allows for concrete evidence which will help guide decisions during difficult times. While at workshops or administrator functions, working on building a professional cohort can be key when looking for someone to turn to during times of tough decision-making. Being a life-long learner, and being around the best in the field of education, makes for the best leaders in education.

Good leadership techniques for the decision-making process can be found in many different contextual areas. Books reflecting leadership during tough times can be beneficial. Examples are The Winner Within (Riley, 1993), which focuses on building a successful team from the ground level up, and The Powell Principles (Harari, 2004), which focuses on Colin Powell's personal secrets in his decision-making strategies and leadership techniques that have developed him into a world renowned leader. By taking the time to read books like these, even though they have nothing to do with education per say, can help leaders find unique solutions to possible problems.

I feel reading books that are solely based on leadership, but may have no relation to the educational field, can benefit any administrator. Problems exist in every area of life. How prominent leaders deal with the problems they have faced may shed light on solutions to current school problems. New books with new ideas can help leaders reflect on issues individuals in today's society are facing.

The hardest thing in the decision-making process occurs when a wrong decision is made. Individual convictions have to be met during any decision, but a great administrator must admit when a mistake is made and do everything possible to rectify the situation. A core value needed during all decision-making processes actually comes from the daily treatment of individuals. Whitaker (2003) stresses that great principals treat people appropriately all of the time. The one time that a principal, or person in the leadership role, treats someone unfairly or inappropriately, will be the time that forever tarnishes a leader as ineffective. "People know the difference between right and wrong" and effective leaders, wanting people on their team, will act professionally and appropriately at all times, even under pressure(Whitaker, 2003, p.22).

Major problems arise when the current decision is the right solution, but is not the "popular" decision among the stakeholders within the school community. Standing up for what is right, and not for what is popular, is very difficult; but, great administrators have to have the strength needed to be able to do this, especially during moments of tough decision-making. Believing in the decision and standing up for it will allow the decision-maker to be able to look confidently in the mirror at the end of the day. Sound sleep will come when the administrator crawls in bed knowing that every decision that day was based what is best for the kids (G. Reed, class lecture notes, April 5, 2006).

Being a reflective practitioner is a building process that must be nurtured and developed over time. All good administrators will create decision-making plans based on what is best for students. What is best is sometimes unclear at the beginning, a good administrator will reflect and adapt the plan to meet the school community's needs (N. Pace, class lecture notes, June 14, 2006). A strong school leader will stand behind decisions; but, during times of reflection the leader will make the necessary changes, working towards the best solution. Being honest with the stakeholders and giving praise when things go right will help any administrator grow as a leader since admitting when wrong decisions are made creates a trusting, loyal school community that will stand behind the administration during tough times.

Current Research: Role of the Leader during Educational Change

The word *change* can create many complicated problems regarding the feelings and emotions of teachers within a building. The word *change* can also cause conflict within the school if the change is not facilitated by the school's educational leader in the correct way. A good educational leader has to know, believe, and promote within the school that "people, ideas, and things never stay the same, they either get better or they get worse. . . to be the best school, person, or teacher, one must always be changing and working on getting better, not focusing on staying the same"(G. Reed, class lecture notes, February 8, 2006). The comfortable practices of a district or building must be removed since "the starting point for assessment of everything we do in schools [has to start with] How can we do it better? Nothing is exempt from this question"(Wilmore, 2002, p.54).

When being an advocate of change within a building, one must remember not to be a "bandwagon leader" and to implement change using the proper methods.

"Bandwagon leadership is dangerous. . . which is why it is important during the early stages [of change] to talk, discuss, and develop a vision that truly represents [the] specific school"(Wilmore, 2002, p.23). It is the "school's leaders who will make or break any change effort regardless of where the change is initiated"(Hall & Hord, 2006, p.12).

Hall and Hord (2006) suggest that "when confronted with change, there is a natural tendency to focus on how to defend ourselves from it instead of how to use and succeed with it"(p. 45). There are key foundational principals that are involved with change process that an educational leader needs to focus on during all times of change. Before a change can take place, though, the whole learning community must be under the impression that "change is a process, not an event"(Hall & Hord, 2006, p. 4).

When change is seen as an event in a school, teachers and staff within a school tend to be leery and judgmental of the proposed change before they even give it a chance to work. Change is typically seen as an event when the educational leadership introduces the change at a one-day workshop and then never discusses it again over the course of the year, but expects everyone within the district or school to be implementing the change within their classrooms by the end of the week. Also, when teachers feel like they are being introduced to new educational ideas too frequently, teachers tend to label their leadership as "bandwagon followers."

Good educational leaders understand that "change is a process through which people and organizations move as they gradually come to understand and become skilled and competent in the use of new ways"(Hall & Hord, 2006, p.4). Change is not something that happens over night, but something that takes time to understand, believe in, and accomplish. Many times, when change is an event, it can take three to five years

to actually have the change take place and see the outcomes of the change(Hall & Hord, 2006, p. 5). The first time an educational leader does not give change the proper time needed for implementation before moving on to a different change, will be the last chance at having the majority of the staff support the proposed change.

Frequently, when the word *change* is used at a teacher in-service or staff development day there is usually a quiet "ugh" that filters out of numerous mouths and eye-rolls immediately follow. Teachers who resist change are usually seen as the *"laggards"* of the building. The laggard teachers are typically the teachers who have been in education the longest and have the "I'll wait it out" attitude towards changes within education and in the building. These teachers truly believe that "If I wait long enough without participating in the change, the administration will start some new change soon and will never notice I did not make the last change."

While there are many teachers who possess the laggard attitude, there are equally as many teachers who resist change out of fear and grief of "losing [their] favorite and comfortable ways of acting [or teaching]" (Hall and Hord, 2006, p. 5). A successful facilitator of change will help the grieving or fearful teachers through the change process, instead of shunning them or making them feel guilty for their lack of enthusiasm toward the change.

When implementing a change within a district or building, the leader must have a "large-scale, holistic view" of the change that includes "all factors inside and outside of the [school] that in any way might be related to a particular change effort"(Hall & Hord, 2006, p.39). There must be a strategic and systemic plan for all changes within an organization, and no two plans of change will ever look the same. It is the "leaders who

think systematically [who] are much more effective in leading change efforts"(Hall & Hord, 2006, p.39). If a leader is not aware of or does not pay attention to all of the factors, internal and external, then the forgotten factors will be the demise of the change. "Systemic change. . . will not happen without consistent planning for implementation, taking action, and monitoring the results so that successive actions may be designed and taken"(Hall & Hord, 2006, p. 46).

To facilitate change, there must be short-term and long-term goals and strategies to be applied in the plan of change. The vision of the change and the plan for the change has to be communicated to all of the share holders within the learning community. "To fail to develop a shared vision and its articulation across the system dooms the reform work to an early death"(Hall & Hord, 2006, p. 46).

Communication of the change and how it fits within the school's shared vision is a key to winning the necessary support of the change. Hall and Hord (2006) express the belief that an organization cannot nor will not change until the individuals within the organization change themselves. "As a leader, [it] is your task to help teachers feel safe enough to experiment with new ways of being"(Patti & Tobin, 2003, p. 116).

The rate and speed of individuals to change will vary, and school leaders must account for this in planning the change. "Leaders of organizational change processes need to devise ways to anticipate and facilitate change at the individual level"(Hall & Hord, 2006, p. 7). Regardless, "many interventions must be done with and for individuals" by the educational leader to help each individual handle and accept the proposed change(Hall & Hord, 2006, p. 7). Wilmore(2002) believes that "when one of us

succeeds, we all succeed. We are a team. We are a family"(p.115). This should be a part of a healthy school culture that adopts and executes different changes within the school.

When there are laggards in the building resisting the change presented before them, a good leader will stop focusing on them and instead focus on the "superstar" teachers who are willing to move forward with the change. "Less effective leaders focus [too much] on their most resistant teachers"(Whitaker, 2003, p. 70). According to Whitaker (2003), the school leader should focus on the superstar teacher - - the teacher with enough confidence to take risks in teaching and will bring the teacher on the fence of change along with them. In most cases, the pressures of following the crowd will also bring the laggards along into the given change.

When looking for change and promoting it, good leaders should look within their own buildings to find examples of working practices and then use them as highlights within the school. "When we can draw on role models in our own schools, the chances of expanding acceptance and implementations grows exponentially"(Whitaker, 2003, p. 69).

Change is something that all school leaders have to deal with everyday. Quality school leaders embrace the challenge and persevere through the stages of change to achieve the necessary outcomes. When all is said and done, it is how the educational leader performs during the change process that determines whether or not the school finds success or failure. If the educational leader can take into account the principals of change, be proactive to promote change, and makes sure that all changes revolve around the school's overall shared vision, the work required to successfully accomplish the change will be greatly diminished.

Current Research: Leader of Learners

The focus of public schools has changed greatly since the passing of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. The No Child Left Behind legislation was passed with bipartisan support in the United States Congress because it finally addressed the issue that all U.S. students in public schools were not receiving an equal and appropriate free public education. A requirement of NCLB is that schools now are to create yearly progress reports to be given to each state's Department of Education to prove adequate learning through test scores on annual standardized tests. While this is the requirement to receive federal funding to run our schools, many question if standardized test results are the best method to prove learning in our schools and the effectiveness of the overall learning communities.

No Child Left Behind has created a hysteria revolving around proving academic achievement. Schools are now required by law to have highly qualified teachers teaching in their classrooms. "Research done by Ron Ferguson at Harvard [University] shows the requirement of highly qualified teachers for all students is the greatest in-school factor affecting student performance"(V. Cobb, 2007, p.20). A big concern of Cobb (2007) is that the nation must start investing time and money in community development where students can have "access to the structures, supports and opportunities that yield positive youth outcomes"(p.20). Cobb (2007) feels the nation must address the larger issues of poverty and race in these disadvantaged communities before legislation, such as NCLB, will ever create the educational reform it was passed to accomplish.

Standardized tests and scores are hated by both teachers and students alike. The fear created by these tests is overwhelming at times. Being put on a "watch list" or being

labeled as a "Bubble Kid" are current terms that strike fear in the heart of education. According to Greene and Melton (2007), "test-taking is a life skill"(p. 30) that must be taught to all students to give them the best shot at future opportunities in life. The question always raised with regards to standardizes tests is,

will the teachers teach for depth of understanding, creative thinking, problem solving and application, or will the teachers spend long hours practicing the test format and drilling the students on district [or state]-prepared materials designed to score well on the assessment instruments(Frase & Streshly, 2000, p. 20).

Some schools have decided to break down the test and teach with it, instead of teaching to it.

Schools are realizing that, regardless of subject matter on the standardized test, above all the test is a reading test. To be successful on these state required tests, the student has to be able to read and understand the unique test language used in the questions on the test. In classrooms across the United States, educational leaders must understand that their teachers do not have to spend every waking moment on teaching to the test, but instead, must use different teaching and learning strategies to level the playing field of the standardized tests.

Current research shows there is evidence that proves there are "neurological rationales as to why some [learning] strategies simply work best not only for students' brains but for adults' brains as well"(Tate, 2004, p. xiii). Tate (2004) gives twenty different examples of learning strategies that are based both on learning style theory and brain research. These strategies, Tate (2004) claims, "enable all [educators] to plan and

deliver powerful, memorable, presentations that [will] have the potential to change adults' minds"(p. xiii). Unfortunately, many educational leaders do not model these research-proven strategies in staff development or during in-service days and many times teachers walk away from these required days with no personal or professional growth gains.

Tate (2004) states that the learning required to make a difference in schools starts first with the staff of the school. Regardless of how great or wonderful the professional development activity is, it is what happens after the activity that "makes" or "breaks" the actual goal or desired outcome of the activity. "It is the job-embedded practice, the follow-up and support that most often lead to sustained improvement in professional practice for the majority of educators"(Tate, 2004, p. xiii). Educational leaders must realize that when adults in the building learn new concepts, they must then be assessed and held accountable in using the new information much in the same way students are.

In her book, Tate (2004) gives examples of "professional learning activities. . . which turn fragmented professional learning activities into meaningful opportunities for growth resulting in changes in practice and ultimately increased student achievement"(p. xiii). Overall, when adults in the educational setting decide to improve their learning and grow through knowledge of professional learning, student learning and achievement will increase as a direct result of the adult's actions.

Currently, showing student academic achievement revolves around standardized test scores. Stiggins (2004) feels that there are different ways of assessing student achievements in academics besides just the traditional "fill-in the blank bubble tests." Stiggins (2004) focuses on the differences between assessment for learning and

assessment of learning. He believes that both of these styles of assessment must be used in the classroom, but contends that they must be used at the appropriate time for the best results. When teachers understand the difference between these two types of assessment and when to correctly use them, Stiggins (2004) believes that it is then when "the most effective uses of assessment [are occurring] in the classroom"(p. 37).

Assessment of learning often takes place at the end of a unit or chapter. It is the measurement that determines whether the learning expectations of the lesson were met by the student or were not met. Standardized tests, final examinations, and college admission test are all example of assessment of learning. When using assessment of learning, the outcome goal is to have documentation to prove achievement or mastery for accountability purposes.

Assessment for learning occurs throughout the lesson or unit. It is not a one-time opportunity to prove mastery of a concept or idea. When using assessment for learning, the teacher is helping show the students where they are in relation to understanding the concept or idea, adjusting to the needs of the students for understanding, and allowing students to feel like they control their ability to succeed(Stiggins, 2004, p. 31). In these types of assessment activities, grading is not used and the overall theme is about working on getting better. The focus is improvement, both overall and daily. Stiggins (2004) claims that the primary motivator in the assessment for learning is "the belief that success in learning is achievable" for all students(p. 33).

Learning, assessment, and accountability in classrooms require a collaborative approach within our classrooms and learning communities. "Schools and communities must work together"(Wilmore, 2002, p. 66) to achieve the specific goals and vision of the

school. McNulty and Quaglia (2007) contend that "the elements - rigor, relevance and relationships – together provide the hallmark for education today"(p. 2). All three of these elements must be present in our schools or we, as educational leaders, are not doing our part to prepare our students for success in school, or life.

School leaders have to get the student's family to take an active role in the child's learning process and build a lasting relationship/partnership to allow for the greatest success of the child. "Families are critical stakeholders in the learning community and therefore valuable assets"(Wilmore, 2002, p. 68). Communication is key to the success of the students, teachers, educational leaders and the learning community. Educational leaders have to "develop mutually trusting relationships"(Wilmore, 2002, p.68) between these groups of people to have the learning gains and successes they are expecting and wanting of their schools.

<center>Current Research: Leader of Service</center>

The school is a place for all to learn, and requires constant monitoring to ensure that the actuality of the expectations are taking place. School leaders have the responsibility of making sure their schools are acting as a social service to the community while promoting the school's vision. An "educational leader . . .[acts as an] advocate for all children [and persons], regardless of socioeconomic background, race, ethnicity, gender, learning style, or any other difference"(Wilmore, 2002, p.93). Bartlett, Etscheidt, and Weisenstein (2007) pronounce the federal law, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which requires all children are entitled to a free and appropriate education. Great school leaders develop the "political savvy" needed to make sure that

they "present a standard for the benefit of children and their families and to be a proactive voice and advocate for the needs of every child"(Wilmore, 2002, p.93).

Working as leaders of service for the school and the community, educational leaders must stay current and up-to-date on the ever-changing laws at the local, state, and federal level. Policymakers are constantly changing laws to benefit the greater needs of the community, and educational leaders must stay abreast of these changes to make sure that the greater needs of the school and stakeholders are being met. While staying politically current can become a full-time job, a school leader recognizes the importance of this task and works with the proper channels to assist with this challenge. The proper goal in the school requires that the obligation of social justice for all "must be developed, nurtured, and sustained"(Wilmore, 2002, p. 93).

As a building administrator, reading has to be a part of the daily routine. Through reading, whether it be the newspaper, city council notes, or the idiot's guide to school law, an educational leader can remain sensitive to the changing community or social "mores and values and their possible impact on the school community"(Wilmore, 2002, p.94). In the back of one's mind, a quality school leader always remembers that the school community is made up not only of students, but of their families too.

As a teacher, the first relationships in a new school you want to build are with the secretaries and the janitorial staff. As an administrator, the first relationships you want to build are with your local law enforcement and the local public resource offices. Allowing organizations, such as the local Area Education Association and police departments, to play an active role as a stakeholder in the school, benefits all members of the school community. With the help of these organizations, school leaders ensure equal access to a

safe, nurturing, learning environment. Safety of the learning environment is the highest concern of a superior educational leader.

In recent school tragedies, such as the Columbine and Virginia Tech shootings, the relationship with the local law enforcement has to be one of dependence and loyalty. "Most schools in America rely on the strong communication and trust established with their local police or sheriff's departments"(Bosher, Kaminski, & Vacca, 2004, p. 17). Written communications are currently being used as a way to designate roles and responsibilities following the current laws, and address the gray areas that may be a factor within the school. These written statements allow for school leaders to worry less about who's job it is during a time of crisis and spend more time on making the actual school safe. "Perhaps the greatest challenge to a strong working relationship between law enforcement and school administrators is the failure to understand who is responsible for what"(Bosher, Kaminski, & Vacca, 2002, p. 20).

The biggest responsibility of a school leader is making sure that every child has access to a safe environment(G. Reed, class lecture notes, February 8, 2006). The safe learning environment extends not only to the classrooms, but to the sporting event competitions, the walk home from school, and the field trip bussed across town.

Major decisions require major research and cannot be acted on hastily. The greatest factor in the decision-making process revolves around the question of, "Is this decision legal?" Lawyers are very expensive for school districts, but lawsuits can be career-ending(D. Jones, class lecture notes, November 15, 2006). Working with the superintendent and the lawyer before major decisions are determined will help prevent the wrong course of action taking place. School leaders have to "be persistent in

developing activities and policies that will benefit all students and their families, inside and outside the school"(Wilmore, 2002, p. 95).

School districts offer many services to the community that may not be known to the general public, such as assisted classes for low-income parents to learn how to use the computer, free lunch to students during the summer, and providing clothing and food to families whose parents are unemployed. Being aware of all of the "help" programs within the district is essential to making sure that the school is acting as a service and that the school community's needs are being met. Programs like the Family Resource Department of a district may be a great aid to a school leader in meeting the needs of both the students and parents of the district.

The school in a community is a part of a greater whole with regards to the community. Many people will advocate that when a school leaves a community, the community "dies" or falls apart. In many small towns across the country, communities are vigilant against consolidation and reduction of schools and districts. Seeing the "big picture" that communities want schools in them and want to be a part of the school requires an obligation of the school and district to include everyone into the overall school community. A quality school, with quality leadership, will bring students and parents to an area. Without the strong leadership in education, a school and the overall school community will flounder until it eventually ends. Hurt most in these situations of poor leadership is not the school leaders or stakeholder of the school, but the students of whom the school was originally built for. By utilizing as many of these educational leadership concepts as possible, an effective administrator is on the way to answering the key question of education, "What is best for students?"

References

Alderman, M. Kay. (2004). *Motivation for achievement: possibilities For teaching and learning.* New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

Bartlett, L. D., Etscheidt, S., & Weisenstein, G. R. (2007). *Special education law and practice in public schools.* Ohio: Pearson Education, Inc..

Bosher, W. C. Jr., Kaminski, K. R., & Vacca, R. S. (2004). *The school law handbook: what every leader needs to know.* Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Cobb, V. L. (2007, May 21). Evaluating no child left behind. *Nation, 282*(20), 20. Retrieved September 23, 2007, from the Academic Search Elite database.

Frase, L. E., & Streshly, W. (2000). *Top 10 myths in education: fantasies Americans love to believe.* Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, Inc..

Greene, A., & Melton, G. (2007, August 15). Teaching with the test, not to the test. *Education Week(30)*, pp. 30. Retrieved September 23, 2007, from the Professional Development Collection database.

Hall, G. E., & Hord, S. M. (2006). *Implementing change: patterns, principles, and potholes.* New York: Pearson Education, Inc..

Harari, Oren. (2004). *The Powell principles: 24 lessons from Colin Powell battle-proven leader.* New York: The McGraw Hill Company.

Keefe, J. W., & Jenkins, J. M. (1997). *Instruction and the learning environment.* New York: Eye On Education, Inc..

Mandino, OG. (1975). *The greatest miracle in the world.* New York: Bantam Books.

McNulty, R., & Quaglia, R. (2007, September). Rigor, relevance and relationships. *School Administrator*, *64*(8), 18-24. Retrieved September 23, 2007, from the Professional Development Collection database.

Patti, Janet, & Tobin, James. (2003). *Smart school leaders: leading with educational intelligence*. Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company.

Riley, Pat. (1993). *The winner within: a life plan for team players*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.

Stiggins, R. J., Arter, J. A., Chappuis, J., & Chappuis, S. (2004). *Classroom assessment for student learning: doing it right – using it well*. Oregon: Assessment Training Institute.

Tate, M. L. (2004). *"Sit & get" won't grow dendrites: 20 professional learning strategies that engage the adult brain*. California: Corwin Press.

Whitaker, T. (2003). *What great principals do differently: fifteen things that matter most*. New York: Eyes On Education.

Wilmore, E. L. (2002). *Principal leadership: applying the new educational leadership constituent council standards*. California: Corwin Press, INC..