

# An Engaged and Delegating Building Principal



## NOTABLE PRACTICES FOR K-12 SYSTEMS

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## Introduction

I have been listening. Observing. Taking notes. Noticing patterns.

For the last three years, I have served as a school leadership coach, trained via NYC Leadership Academy protocols. It has been my privilege to come alongside fifteen principals in ten different buildings on behalf of the Administrative Support Program through School Administrators of Iowa. In these schools, I have been listening, observing, taking notes, noticing patterns.

Concurrently, as an instructor of the “Teacher as Leader” graduate course and director of the principal licensure program at Northwestern College, I have engaged in discourse with teachers and principals from all of the country, hearing about what practices support and what practices thwart effectiveness in K-12 educational systems.

Here in Iowa, this kind of constructive discourse has ramped up since the Iowa Legislature passed the Teacher Leadership Compensation Program, now in its fifth year of operation. Its primary focus was to provide a system of distributive leadership that empowered teacher leaders to provide instructional leadership to peers in their respective buildings. The subsequent conversations about instruction and learning have been some of the most robust experiences

that I have observed over a 37-year career as a teacher, principal and superintendent.

Visiting schools during this time of shared leadership between administrators and instructional coaches, I have witnessed different attitudes toward change. We educators realize that change must happen: to stay the same is to fall behind. I have observed school cultures that promote transformative teaching and learning, and other school environments that erect barriers that impede systemic change.

The following nine notable practices that make a compelling difference in creating an effective K-12 distributive leadership system are explained by Instructional Coach **Megan Alexander**, Boyden-Hull Community Schools. Megan is currently a student in Northwestern’s Principal Endorsement program.

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# 1

## A SHARED VISION FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

All staff should have the opportunity to be involved and be heard so that there can be collective agreement on a shared vision.

Having a shared vision and teaching for learning is at the forefront of important principles that should guide a school and all of its operations. What do we, as a collective group, want teaching and learning to look like? Will our emphasis be Daily 5 or Project-Based Learning, Standards-Based Grading, or something differently entirely? Will we use a systemic approach to learning? What do we want our students and classrooms to look like? If a school has a well-developed and intentionally established shared vision for teaching and learning, it should be the driving force for the entire operation. All new programs within the organization should be designed as an effort to more effectively work toward the school vision, and all decisions—no matter how big or small—should be evaluated and discussed in light of the shared vision for teaching and learning.

Without a vision that is collectively established and agreed upon, an organization actually has as many visions as it does members. Each individual is working toward their own goals and efforts but not toward one collective gain. Administrators are not able to unite their personnel in any efforts as all members have their own initiatives and are making decisions based on different goals and directions. Though much growth may be occurring, the growth is inconsistent and does not lend toward greater efficacy as an entire unit. The collaborative efforts and combined problem-solving efforts of teachers as teams do not exist, allowing for lapse in understanding and achievements that do not reach the heights of those that could have been attained through combined efforts and a common goal. Administration, school leaders, staff, and all stakeholders should be consistently working toward continual development in achieving the shared vision. The following eight notable practices as described in this blog cannot be set in place within a school without first establishing the vision for what the school community believes to be the overall vision for what the culture and efforts within the organization should be.

The most crucial element of a shared vision for teaching and learning is the buy-in that all staff and administration have in regard to the vision. Administration and leadership must buy-in, because they will be the driving force in developing the school culture that cultivates efforts in working toward the shared vision of the school. However, possibly even more critical is the buy-in of the teachers. Teachers are the ones making the day-in, day-out decisions about students. Principals cannot oversee every decision that is made in regard to student learning—nor should they—but without a shared vision that is driving the school organization. If a shared vision has been established and collectively agreed upon, the leadership within a school can trust that teachers are consistently making decisions that align with that ideal without having to micromanage.



## 2 | OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEANINGFUL COLLABORATION

Leadership should deliberately seek input from all staff affected by decisions or potential change.

People feel valued and respected when they believe their leaders desire to hear their ideas and input and understand their points of view. Too often, decisions are made in a school by the administrators and school leaders who think they know what teachers think, feel, and need, but actually may not have a clear understanding of what's truly happening within the walls of each classroom. As a whole, good leadership has been shown to improve teacher motivation as well as positivity in the work setting (Five Key Principles, n.d.), so what does "good leadership" really look like? Research would argue that one huge emphasis in establishing a positive school climate in which teachers collectively work toward student achievement is the need for opportunities for meaningful collaboration. Providing teachers the opportunities to work together purposefully and communicating that their collaborative work is powerful and necessary in moving toward the shared vision for teaching and learning increases professional engagement and creates an overall more positive work environment and successful school system.

When principals and teachers share leadership together, teachers' professional relationships with one another and their administration is higher (Five Key Principles, n.d.). Trusting teachers with the responsibility to make decisions and to plan for school reform, engages them more deeply and increases the willingness with which they take on the responsibilities of carrying out the decisions and initiatives made. Empowering others and distributing leadership throughout a school helps ensure that the school environment and culture remains balanced between teachers and administrators, and creates systems of engagement and efficiency that help the school move toward its shared vision for teaching and learning.

Research by the universities of Minnesota and Toronto suggest that increased shared leadership within an organization also actually correlates directly to increased student success. Effectively shared leadership between "principals, influential teachers, staff teams and others" is "associated with student performance on math and reading tests" (Five Key Principals, n.d.). Compared with lower-achieving schools, higher-achieving schools "provide all stakeholders with greater influence on decisions" (Seashore Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). Between the increased collaboration and access to additional ideas in problem-solving and the buy-in that results from teachers being trusted to make decisions, "the higher performance of these schools might be explained as a consequence of the greater access they have to collective knowledge and wisdom embedded within their communities" (Seashore et al., 2010, p. 35).



## 3 | DISTRIBUTIVE LEADERSHIP PROTOCOLS

Professional principles should consistently guide how team members treat each other.

Moving toward the vision Needs to be consistent growth—how? By setting up systems and systems by which the school, learning, and activity within the school is being consistently evaluated and improved. This task is much too great for one person or even one team to take on, and the insights and expertise each staff member are too valuable to dismiss. The collective efforts of the entire staff through distribute leadership are necessary, and teachers must play an active role in helping move toward the school's vision for teaching and learning. Districts and buildings must ensure that a systematic approach to involving and engaging all staff members and the work to be done and the initiatives to be taken. This can effectively be designed through the establishment of a system of core committees.

Committee planning and development must be calculated and in response to specific areas of emphasis the school needs correlated to moving toward its vision for teaching and learning. Each district's—or even building's—committees will be organized differently in efforts to meet these unique goals. Some committees or variation of committees will be more non-negotiable and likely present in most districts, others may be more specific to one building. For example, each building should include a "Vision Team" or something of the like whose efforts are aimed at addressing data and student achievement. Similarly, Student Assistance Teams (SAT) prove to be effective means of addressing individual student needs in a collaborative environment and will likely demonstrate positive outcomes in every school. Other committees may be more reflective of individual schools' specific needs. PBIS, APL, BIST or other committees related to the school's common language or common framework for learning (notable practice 4: "Common Language or Framework of Instruction") will likely serve a school's efforts in moving toward its vision but will depend on the specific frameworks adopted by each school.

Curriculum exists in every district, so some committee work will be necessary under this domain, but the extent to which building-level teachers make curriculum decisions varies greatly by district. Smaller schools may employ teachers more in these efforts, which may benefit from having a building-level Curriculum Committee, while larger districts distribute much curriculum work to curriculum coaches and department heads. Supplementary 'groups' for things that arise during the year (i.e. homecoming, prom, family carnival, social events), can exist in addition to the core committees that meet each month, but participation in those groups should be voluntary or compensated in addition to the work teachers do for core committees whose work emphasizes growth toward the school vision for teaching and learning.

Whatever committees are established, each should be purposeful with well-defined roles and outcomes. Committees should not exist for the sake of existing, but should take on responsibilities under their specific domains in a collective effort to move toward the shared vision. Having random committees who meet only a few times a year or hold only small responsibilities is purposeless and does not allow for collaborative and meaningful growth toward the shared vision. Creating such committees is trivial and results only in frustration and misdirected efforts. Instead, leaders should appoint all staff members to one of the several core committees, ensuring someone from each team is present on each, and then umbrella tasks and responsibilities under those committees. For example, a school does not need an “Accelerated Reader Party Committee” with three teachers to arrange quarterly celebrations for Accelerated Reader achievements. Instead, these responsibilities may fall under the PBIS committee whose work consistently and more comprehensively emphasizes positive behavior interventions and supports for students. Perhaps a sub-committee of those three teachers would be sufficient, but they should be working under a greater umbrella of collective efforts as a member of the core committee.

Because the work for each committee will be so purposeful, committees must meet often and consistently. Though it will depend on an individual school’s needs, a well-established and mandatory schedule should exist to guide committee meetings. Each committee, because it is put in place with the intention of moving toward the school’s vision should gather at least once a month—if not more—throughout the school year to ensure that the most recent data is being considered and changes in teaching practice and accommodations to student learning as designed by the committees is being systematically and consistently gathered, analyzed, and acted upon. Some schools—possibly those with fewer administrators who need to oversee multiple committees—set systems into place in which one day of the week has time before or after school set aside for a rotation of committee work, for example, Vision teams always meet the first Tuesday morning of the month, PBIS teams the second Tuesday, etc. Other schools with more administrators or teacher leaders may opt to have one day of the month set aside during which all committees gather simultaneously. Regardless of the schedule is used, committee meetings must be consistent and mandatory, because their work is purposeful and critical to the school’s movement toward its shared vision for teaching and learning.

To ensure that the purpose of each committee is honored in every meeting, protocols and expectations for committee and team meetings must be set in place. Small group settings emphasizing areas of potential growth can be prone to distraction, unproductively sharing complaints and frustrations, and negativity, so having explicit expectations set for each meeting is critical for productive and meaningful committee work. Setting norms and agendas for committee work can be helpful in establishing the professional principles that guide how staff interact and treat one another during committee meetings and through committee work. Norms ensure focus and attention is given to the work at hand and that the meeting time is set aside for purposeful work, not voicing frustrations or firing off complaints.

At the beginning of each year, the first committee meeting should entail setting the norms for the rest of the year. As discussed in the second notable practice, all committee members and stakeholders must be given a voice in this process, and all decisions should be made in light of the school’s shared vision for teaching and learning. Some examples of effective norms (Carter, 2018), as further discussed in the eighth notable practice, “Productive Professional Learning Communities,” but that also may be appropriate for committee work include:

- 1. We will have an agenda purpose for each meeting.**
- 2. We will avoid side conversations, they are distracting and disrespectful to the speaker.**
- 3. We will limit discussions that will monopolize time.**
- 4. We will start and end on time (time keeper).**
- 5. We will treat members with honesty and trust.**
- 6. Our goal is to help each other.**
- 7. We will practice confidentiality.**



## 4 | COMMON LANGUAGE OR FRAMEWORK OF INSTRUCTION

Whether a district uses APL, NIET, Marzano’s or Danielson’s framework, common vocabulary and assessment expectations are essential.

Preparing our students for the jobs and challenges they will face post graduation continually grows as a challenge faced by those in the education field. As this difficulty elevates, the vitality of high-quality teaching and the complexity of what it means to truly enact it. These obligations and challenges place teachers under an enormous amount of pressure, and teachers are faced with needing to decide where and how to move forward in making changes toward improvement. Just as teachers within a school need a common, unified, and focused goal in a school’s vision for teaching and learning, they also need a specific and common framework of criteria on which to focus their efforts of improving instructional practice. This can be accomplished through a school’s adoption of a common framework of instruction.

An instructional framework can be described as a collectively shared understanding of instructional responsibilities and what it looks like to implement those in the classroom. Frameworks provide a systematic approach to unifying teachers and administration under one set of criteria that have been identified as responsibilities critical to the teaching profession. These systems typically aim also to provide feedback to educators across multiple domains and multiple criteria components within each domain by outlining specific expectations and definitions of measurement toward mastering those expectations. Under a common framework, teachers know exactly what is expected of them, and administrators have an organized system for evaluating teachers and communicating feedback as to areas of strength and areas of potential growth. The specific organization of domains and criteria addressed depends on the individual framework, or combination of frameworks, adopted by a school or district, but consistency is seen across most widely used frameworks to encompass domains of instruction, planning, environment, and professionalism (A new instructional framework for Iowa, 2019).

Frameworks for instruction benefit the field of education through a variety of intended consequences through providing “well-established definitions of expertise” and “procedures to certify novice and advanced practitioners” (Danielson, 2007, p. 2). Successfully enacted, frameworks are designed—and have the power to—improve teaching practices, meeting the needs of inexperienced novice teachers while at the same time outlining areas of growth for enhancing veteran teachers’ practices (Danielson, 2007). Having a common framework for learning makes teachers aware of the components of their profession that they, and all other staff members, will be held accountable for. The Danielson Group describes this as “a vision of instructional excellence, a roadmap for pursuing it, and a set of discrete practices that describe it” (A Vision of Excellence, n.d.).

Additionally, frameworks provide for a common language for instructional practice, allowing and encouraging increased consistency in teacher understanding as to the skills, strategies, and responsibilities that make up the teaching profession. This allows teachers a “means of communicating about excellence” (Danielson, 2007, p. 6) while simultaneously communicating to the greater population that “educators, like other professionals, are members of a professional community” (Danielson, 2007, p. 2). Under the common language of an instructional framework, teachers become better able to learn from one another, enhancing individual teachers’ skills as well as collective group efforts toward increased student achievement and shared visions for teaching and learning. The tool invites teachers to self-reflect on the practices and measures of performance, engaging them in the problem-solving and self-improvement practices.

Finally, frameworks seek to provide feedback to teachers to inform and improve interactions with students (Overview of Three Teacher Evaluation Approaches, n.d.) by guiding and focusing evaluations and conversations of areas of strength and areas of potential growth, enhancing the effectiveness of administrators and building leaders. The structure, organization, and focus provided through a common framework for instruction are critical in developing teacher quality and thereby improving student achievement.



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## COACHING CYCLES TIED TO THE VISION AND FRAMEWORK

Establishing rhythms of nonevaluative feedback leads to partnership, growth, and unified practice.

In the last decade, instructional coaching has sparked interest in schools for many reasons including an increasing recognition that “teacher quality is a critical factor in student success” (Knight, 2012, p. 94). While much research suggests that student learning and achievement is greatly correlated to the quality of the teaching instruction they are receiving, recent findings also suggest that “traditional one-shot workshops” in professional development are ineffective and “sometimes worse than useless,” “foster[ing] feelings of frustration” in teachers who realize they will never be able to implement all of the ideas they learn during these professional development settings (Knight, 2012, p. 94).

Instructional coaching offers a strong alternative to traditional professional development models and thus has increasing advocacy in the field. Not only has a partnership instructional coaching model been found to increase implementation in comparison to traditional professional development methods, it has also shown to be more effective for communicating desired content, engaging staff, and setting expectations for future implementation (Campbell & Stanley, 1963).

A unified school vision for teaching (notable practice 1) and learning and a well-defined framework for learning (notable practice 4) provide the foundation from which schools and districts can build in developing specific teaching practices. This common vision and collective goal allows for successful coaching cycles, narrowing down the emphasis with which skills and practices the building collectively agrees to be worthy of investing in learning. Coaches do not encourage random, haphazard, self-determined best practice, but instead hone in on those practices established in the school’s common framework for learning. Districts and schools should invest in providing training opportunities for instructional coaches and teacher leaders so that they can have a deep and comprehensive understanding of the teaching practices outlined in the common framework for learning.

Developing these skills across grade levels and content areas creates cohesiveness in the school and results in students experiencing skills of the common framework and best practice throughout their entire experience at the school. Students know what to expect when these practices are put into place, and teachers benefit from prior student exposure.

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Additionally, tying the coaching cycle to the vision and framework also adds an element of accountability for teachers to engage in the coaching cycle. If teachers are committed to helping the school reach its ideals and they are aware that their instructional practice is key to doing so, teachers will be more likely to enroll in coaching opportunities, understanding it as a valued tool in improving and developing their own skillset.

Of similar importance is the coaching cycle’s emphasis on data. Each step of a coaching cycle must be tied to student-data related to the instructional practice. Data drives informed decisions and disallows for subjective and ill-informed, hasty actions. Coaches must be trained in effectively collecting, organizing, and analyzing data and consider objective documentation and evidenced-based information throughout the entire coaching process and with each and every collaborator.

Data helps teams identify which practices would be beneficial in any given classroom in addition to the needs of individual students when considering how to implement the intended practice and how to address differentiation for the practice so that it will be well-received by each learner. Finally, data helps objectively make observations and draw conclusions about the efficacy of the practice, ensuring sound decisions in moving forward with implementing a given teaching practice, modifying the practice for future use, and/or trying another teaching practice instead.



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## CLEARLY DEFINED TEACHER LEADERSHIP ROLES

These roles are then communicated to all staff numerous times throughout the school year.

Without defining teacher leadership roles, many districts’ teacher leadership programs are floundering. Though many schools have instructional coaches or other teacher leadership programs put into place, many of these systems fail to enact any actual change and do not actually impact teacher practice or student learning outcomes at all. Because of their roles and responsibilities—and the ways those may differ from other teachers—“teacher leaders’ efforts to share their expertise can be undermined by the culture of teaching” (Moore Johnson & Donaldson, 2007). Teachers often report resistance to teacher leaders’ support as an “inappropriate intrusion into their instructional space,” “an unwarranted claim that the teacher leader is more expert than they,” and “an unjustified promotion of a relative novice to a leadership role” (Moore Johnson & Donaldson, 2007). Instead, teachers prefer to protect their autonomy and avoid what they believe to be criticism from someone who may or may not be qualified to offer it. Teacher leaders avoid this opposition and discouragement by waiting to engage with teachers until their help is solicited and by only working with those who seem willing or open to change.

To implement truly effective instructional coaching and teacher leadership programming, teachers and staff need to know what to expect from their instructional coaches and what accountability and support they will receive from them. Similarly, coaches need to have their expectations clearly outlined to ensure they are meeting the needs of the district’s students and teachers as well as meeting the expectations of their administrators. It is critical that all stakeholders of the teacher leadership and coaching programs are on the same page. Without making certain this is the case, a district or building will—just like as is the consequence of not sharing a common school vision—have as many expectations and intended outcomes for the instructional coaching positions as it does members.

Even if instructional coaches are busy every hour of the day working with different teachers on a variety of outcomes, without a unified goal and well-established teacher leadership roles, teachers will be frustrated with the ‘lack of attention’ their own initiatives are getting, teacher leaders will feel overwhelmed with the unending list of things they ‘should’ or ‘could’ be working on to help develop their peers, and administrators will be frustrated and unaware of the coaching work being done within their buildings and districts. Such a system lends way to chaos and little progress being made toward any goal. With everyone working toward their own goal, the school will fail to move toward the common school vision for teaching and learning.

Few schools have reorganized explicitly and intentionally enough to garner the most meaningful benefits from teacher leadership programming (Moore Johnson & Donaldson, 2007), but highly effective schools do just that. Defining the coaching cycles as discussed in the fifth notable practice and tying those responsibilities into the school vision helps establish a foundation from which teachers and coaches can begin to work toward a common goal. Moore Johnson and Donaldson (2007) suggest that teacher leadership programs are suggestively more viable if roles have well-defined qualifications, responsibilities, and selection processes. Identifying these aspects of a teacher leadership program are critical to the program’s potential for success and impact.

Included an example from Opportunity Culture’s Defining Teacher-Leader Roles (n.d.) as to what these role definitions might look like. Be sure to address all needs within these roles and take into consideration which responsibilities and roles should be distributed to teachers in a classroom and which roles would need to be met by someone whose schedule is exclusively for those responsibilities

Role Title	Description
<b>Multi-Classroom Leader</b>	An excellent teacher who leads a team of teachers, co-teaching, co-planning, and providing on-the-job development, with accountability for team’s student outcomes
<b>Hybrid Teacher-Leader</b>	An excellent teacher who combines part-time teaching with any of the roles below or other leadership roles—such as policy advocacy, recording video lessons many other teachers may use, etc.
<b>Department/ content chair</b>	Acts as liaison between administration and colleagues; may include instructional leadership and administrative duties
<b>Grade-level chair</b>	Acts as liaison between administration and colleagues; may include instructional leadership and administrative duties
<b>Mentor or coach</b>	Serves as role model and coach to a new teacher
<b>Instructional specialist/ coach</b>	Helps colleagues implement effective teaching strategies in a specific subject or for a specific student population
<b>Data coach</b>	Helps teachers interpret student data and identify instructional strategies
<b>Curriculum or assessment specialist</b>	Leads teachers to develop standards and follow curriculum and/or to develop aligned assessments
<b>Professional learning facilitator/ PLC</b>	Facilitates staff professional development
<b>Master teacher</b>	Refers most often to advanced role in a teacher’s career; responsibilities vary
<b>Lead teacher</b>	Leads in co-taught class, leads teacher team, and/or works with new or struggling teachers to improve instruction



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# AN ENGAGED AND DELEGATING BUILDING PRINCIPAL

The principal holds all employees accountable for participation, collaboration, and productivity, but she or he does not micromanage.

There is no doubt that principalship entails a great deal of difficulty and responsibility. Besides classroom teachers, principals are the most important members of the school team. They can't always be in each and every classroom, but they need to be present and aware, checking in often and providing meaningful feedback. They need to be aware so that they can make informed decisions in the best interest of their schools and the students in them. The reality is, however, this ideal is becoming intensively more difficult to enact under the increasing responsibilities falling at the feet of today's principals. Between addressing staff concerns, the paperwork that is now required for state and federal documentation, making both short-term and long-term decisions, hearing requests, handling complaints, and engaging with students who demonstrate behaviors, the ever-growing and surmounting responsibilities and situations that demand the attention of principals can easily become unmanageable.

Principals are no longer able to take on the weight of responsibility by themselves. In all realms of business and life, it has become critical for leaders to develop a skill for encouraging leadership across the organization. Micromanagement is not effective, and schools are no exception to this reality (Five Key Responsibilities, n.d.). Delegation and developing shared leadership are now skills that are entirely necessary for the success of a principal and his or her school.

Micromanagement may get the job done, but it communicates to the organization that without the administrator's own ideas and abilities, others are incapable of successfully carrying out tasks and making decisions successfully.

Wiseman, Foster, and Allen describe the difference in this area of leadership as the comparison between a micromanager and an investor (2014). Unfortunately, most principals and leaders do not enact delegation and shared leadership, instead falling into micromanagement, described by to be the "lowest form of administrative skills" (Wiseman et al., 2014, p. 113). In this failed management style, administrators drive results within their schools and organizations through their personal investment and efforts without holding the other members of their organization accountable for participation, collaboration, and productivity.

Micromanagement may get the job done, but it communicates to the organization that without the administrator's own ideas and abilities, others are incapable of successfully carrying out tasks and making decisions successfully (Wiseman, et al., 2014), often resulting in "inferior results" and a "leader-dependent organization" (p. 113).

A shift from this kind of micromanagement to investment and shared leadership drives successful, highly-effective schools. Delegation by engaged and aware leaders is mutually beneficial for both administrators and staff. As benefit to the principal, delegation and shared leadership divvy up responsibility to other team members and allows the principal to attend to other matters that would not be as successfully taken care of by other staff members. Principals are no longer stuck micromanaging their organization and are able to transfer their focus and emphasis from the immediate to the important. They are no longer expending all of their energy on completing tasks and making decisions—authority now delegated and trusted to other team members—but instead are able to be truly present in the school and its happenings, building and developing relationships and the school culture and ensuring their primary focus is being a leader toward the school's vision for teaching and learning.

Similarly, teachers and other staff who are trusted and trained to take on much of the responsibility and decision making within the organization experience positive impact through this model as well. In contrast to a micromanagement leadership style, a leader who demonstrates shared leadership and investment do not jump in to save the day. Instead, they "invest in the success of others," enabling others to "operate independently" by "giving other people ownership for results" (Wiseman et al., 2014, p. 113). As outlined in the second notable practice, "Opportunities for Meaningful Collaboration," teachers and other staff experience a new level of trust when responsibility and decision making opportunities are handed over from administration, communicating that they are competent and able to handle the tasks and decisions that have been entrusted to them.

Though many models, sharing responsibility can be summarized as either delegation or shared leadership. Delegation tasks are those that are primarily handed off to another to complete. For the most part, the leader steps completely out of the picture and those who take on ownership of the task are responsible for doing so primarily independently (Wilhelm, 2015). Shared leadership involves more of a presence from the leader. Some tasks lend well to complete delegation (i.e. schedules, ordering materials, reports, discipline referrals), while the leader may feel more comfortable maintaining a higher level of presence in other matters (i.e. curriculum, instruction, assessment) (Wilhelm, 2015).



Though the phrases tend to be used interchangeably, it is important distinguish tasks as to which model will be most effective in each given situation. Prior to assigning tasks, a leader must consider the extent to which he or she must remain involved. Regardless of which of these two specific shared responsibility system is used, Wiseman, Foster, and Allen (2014) offer **three practical steps for investing in an organization through delegation and shared leadership:**

1. **Give Others Ownership:** Ensure that there is no confusion as to who the responsibility belongs. Directly and clearly communicate who the responsibility belongs to and who will be held accountable for the outcome of the efforts. Leaving these elements ambiguous leave room for one of two outcomes that will not bear successful outcomes: either no leaders will arise to take on the challenge, or too many leaders will arise, ensuring chaos. Regardless which of these dilemmas arise, little progress will ever be made. When considering to whom ownership should be assigned, the delegator must first be certain that he or she is comfortable with the work that the delegate will produce (Wilhelm, 2015). While input can be shared once the final product is complete, too substantially changing or recreating the product will diminish trust and negate the work that has been put toward sharing leadership. Similarly, a principal should keep in mind the extent to which the potential delegate values and will consider the school's vision for teaching and learning when carrying out the task. The principal must be able to trust that this will be the driving force behind all work done by individuals or committees to ensure the work will move toward the common goal.
2. **Provide Backup:** Investing is not abandoning. To abandon and leave others completely alone to fail or succeed on their own, will result in a principal swooping in to the rescue, communicating mistrust. Instead, a leader should protect those he or she has entrusted with the challenge, ensuring they have access to the resources they will need, backing up those taking on the challenge by "teaching, coaching, infusing means, or running interference" (p. 119).
3. **Hold People Accountable:** Do not fall into the trap of snatching back the ownership on a project of which you have given the authority to someone else. When teachers experience problems, the natural tendency is to return those to the principal for feedback and assistance. Effectively delegating principals are aware of this and intentionally avoid this tendency. Accountability is a "trusted obligation" (Wiseman et al., 2017). Those to whom the responsibility has been given should be expected to uphold those responsibilities and solve the problems that arise throughout them. The ownership should only be returned to the leader in only the most critical situations.

## 8

## PRODUCTIVE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

PLCs should focus on four questions: What do we expect our students to learn? How will we know they are learning? How will we respond when they don't learn? How will we respond if they already know it?

Though the idea of professional learning communities emerged in the 1960s, the research became more explicit in the 1980s and 1990s as Susan Rosenholtz's 1985 study of nearly 80 schools found high correlations between "learning-enriched schools" and "collective commitments to student learning in collaborative settings" (Rosenholtz, 1985) in which teachers worked together toward student learning with emphasis on analysis, evaluation, and intentional experimentation (History of PLC, n.d.). A culture in which this professional collaboration with intentional focus on data-proven results and collaborative problem-solving is critical for schools and teachers to make meaningful impact on the learning of individual students.

The foundation for Professional Learning Communities is again tied back to the school's shared vision for teaching and learning. If it is desired school to be moving toward the vision, how will it get there? The impact Professional Learning Communities can contribute to a school's development is incredible, but to do so the structure of a PLC must be organized and structured with all organization members clearly understanding the expectations and purpose for each PLC meeting. Joe Carter, a principal in Emmetsburg, Iowa, outlines three Big Ideas for PLC meetings that are nonnegotiable as the focus for every single PLC meeting in his building. These three Big Ideas that drive PLC work are: "Focus on Learning," "A Collaborative Culture," and "A Focus on Results" (Carter, 2018). By emphasizing these three Big Ideas for his team's PLC work, Principal Carter has set the framework for expectations that should guide and drive every PLC meeting.

- 1 Centered upon the 4 Corollary Questions:
  - What is it we want our students to learn?
  - How will we know if each student has learned it?
  - How will we respond when some students don't learn it?
  - How can we extend and enrich the learning for students who have demonstrated proficiency?

These four questions are the backbones of PLC work. Investigating and experimenting to find answers to these questions are the reason PLCs exist. Each and every PLC meeting must address and focus on these four questions in regards to different skills that students are expected to learn.

**2** Norms: Norms are the rules and expectations for PLCs as developed by each individual team. Norms help teachers stay on track and allow one another to hold each other accountable for the ideals they've established for their work together. Some examples of norms include (Carter, 2018):

- We will have an agenda purpose for each meeting.
- We will avoid side conversations, they are distracting and disrespectful to the speaker.
- We will limit discussions that will monopolize time.
- We will start and end on time (time keeper).
- We will treat members with honesty and trust.
- Our goal is to help each other.
- We will practice confidentiality.

Agenda: Each meeting should follow a consistent agenda, which can be established by the team or the building leadership. An example of the agenda may be:

### **3 Collect & Chart Data (Prior to the PLC Meeting)**

- School leaders may choose to allow teams to establish their own system of collecting data based on the needs of their learners (see links to Emmetsburg PLC templates for early childhood and third grade), but it may be valuable to establish a school-wide template for data organization and analysis (see links below to Lincoln Public Schools PLC template and the LPS template specific to DRA skills).
- Each teacher should collect and organize all data regarding the skill(s) under evaluation needed for that PLC time prior to the meeting. Identify which students are proficient in the skill, which are close to proficient, which are far from proficient and which are in need of intensive instruction (Lincoln Public Schools, n.d.). This may be a skill that was established as the 'new' skill at the end of a previous meeting OR may be a skill that the team has been working to develop in students for several PLC meetings. Depending on how often a group gathers, it is possible that they may assess interventions on prior skills (and may continue progress monitoring/interventions/etc. on this skill) AND may establish additional skills for future meetings.

#### **Assess Intervention Results from Prior Skills**

How are things going? Have students made gains? How do we know? Are there any students that still have not mastered the skill? (If so, revisit steps 3-6 for this skill).

#### **Identify Strengths & Performance Errors or Misconceptions for Current Skill**

(LPS PLC Template, 2019): For each subgroup (proficient, close, far, intensive) identify what students DO know and what common mistakes the team consistently sees made within next subgroup. Even for intensive students, all students will always demonstrate some strengths for each skill. Work hard to identify those prior to identifying performance errors.

#### **SMART Goal**

As a team, develop a SMART goal for this skill. An example SMART Goal may read: "The percentage of (Insert Grade Level) Grade students proficient or higher in (insert skill) will increase from (insert starting percentage) to (insert goal proficiency percentage) by (insert date) as measured by (insert assessment to be used) administered on (insert reassessment date)" (LPS PLC Template, 2019).

#### **Select Instructional Strategies**

(LPS PLC Template, 2019): For each subgroup (proficient, close, far, intensive, identify instructional strategies to be used to provide intervention or extension. To aid teachers in identifying appropriate and research-based best practices for instructional strategies, districts may provide a list of these strategies organized by author with links to additional descriptions or resources. For example, the Lincoln Public Schools PLC Template linked above includes a page of common instructional strategies including those from Classroom Instruction that Works 2, Hattie Strategies, EL Strategies, Anita Archer, gifted strategies, and additional resources. Describe the instructional strategy to be used, the learning environment, the time of day and duration of instructional strategies, and the materials needed. This ensures that all teachers are providing the same instructional strategies to students in each subgroup and also helps teachers organize their ideas and put an action plan in place prior to leaving the meeting.

#### **Establish Next Skills**

The skills for the next meeting should always be identified before ending a meeting, so teachers have prior notice as to what these skills are. In addition to establishing the next skill, also identify what accuracy/score will indicate each of the proficiency subgroups (proficient, close, far, intensive)

#### **Share Meeting Notes**

All staff should have access to all PLC work for each team. This ensures that specials teachers, special education teachers, teachers of gifted and talented students, EL teachers and others working with students have access to data about all grade levels and subject areas, regardless of whether or not they were able to be at the meeting.



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# An Engaged and Delegating Building Principal



## NOTABLE PRACTICES FOR K-12 SYSTEMS

Megan Alexander  
Boyden-Hull Community Schools

Gary Richardson  
Northwestern College