

Needed: Leadership at All Levels

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Abstract:

Research clearly shows the link between the caliber of school leadership and improved student outcomes. Saint Paul Public Schools, under Superintendent Pat Harvey, has adopted a comprehensive school reform model with a commitment to professional development in order to boost the academic achievement for all students. This work was funded in part through a grant from the Robins, Kaplan, Miller, & Ciresi Foundation.

Introduction:

In 2000, SAINT PAUL PUBLIC SCHOOLS created a Leadership Model to form the basis of its leadership development efforts. The model includes seven clusters of competencies:

- Character / Role Model,
- Working Constructively with Others,
- Managing Staff,
- Resourcefulness / Getting Things Done with Less,
- Getting Results,
- Creating and Leading the Vision, and
- Managing Constituencies Effectively.

Dennis St. Sauver and Kate Wilcox-Harris recently took on the roles of Executive Director and Associate Director of the District's Office of Leadership Development. They found the Leadership Model concise, practical, realistic, and based on a high set of standards. Previously, the District had concentrated on the annual *Leadership Institute* – an intensive three-week learning experience during the summer followed by monthly half-day sessions, targeted at aspiring principals. St. Sauver and Wilcox-Harris wanted to (1) bring awareness of the Leadership Model to a larger audience and (2) offer more services to help people learn how to bring the Model into their daily practice as leaders within the District.

Background:

Dennis and Kate asked The Commonwealth Practice, Ltd. to assist and guide them. Working in partnership, they spent May and June establishing a clear direction. They interviewed about a dozen critical internal stakeholders to determine what the Office could offer. Building on that input, the Office established a mission for its work along with four primary supporting goals. That mission and those goals have guided the activities of the Office since then.

Mission

“To achieve superior positional leadership resulting in superior student achievement”

Primary Goals

In its effort to realize its mission the Office of Leadership Development will ...

- Offer *High Quality Learning Opportunities* designed to foster the development of positional leadership skills and behaviors for Saint Paul Public Schools’ personnel
- Integrate the *Positional Leadership Competency Clusters* broadly into all services
- Support the positional leadership activity of *People in Various Roles*
- Clarify *Organizational Expectations* for positional leadership

They believed strongly in the need to bring into *their* mission an ultimate focus on the students. During July and August, the Office identified a suite of services called simply the *Catalog of Offerings*. It included the Office’s original offering, the *Leadership Institute* and its associated mentoring program. It also included three critical new components:

- a *Core Curriculum* based deliberately on the clusters which make up the Leadership Model,
- a *360°-feedback and individual leadership development program*, emphasizing the competencies in the Leadership Model, and
- *Competency Coaching* as a targeted response to specific competencies.

How it works:

During October through December, the focus shifted from planning to delivering. Recognizing that leadership can occur from countless places within the school district, the Office opened its Catalog of Offerings to *all SAINT PAUL PUBLIC SCHOOLS* employees. As a consequence, the participants have included teachers, principals, parents serving on Site Councils, and administrative staff. In October, the Office offered a coaching workshop to those people who had volunteered to serve as Competency Coaches. Also in October, it offered the first course from the *Core Curriculum*, receiving very positive reviews. In fact, the size of the waiting lists prompted the Office to double the original number of sessions scheduled for the year. The Office also launched its 360°-feedback process in late October, selecting a group of seventeen people from the scores who expressed interest in participating.

Results to date:

As the Office moves ahead this year, it will continue to capture feedback from the participants. It will use that feedback to adjust the content and focus of its work. St. Sauver and Wilcox-Harris view the preliminary results as very encouraging. Superintendent Pat Harvey has challenged the District to incorporate the practices of ‘knowing with precision’ and ‘data-driven decision-making’ into its DNA. The Office of Leadership Development has accepted that challenge and moved ahead aggressively.

The Office uses a brief but targeted questionnaire at the conclusion of each *Core Curriculum* course. The questions include items at both the Kirkpatrick Level I and Level II issues. Level I items concern immediate reactions to the suitability of the environment and approach. Other items focused at Level II relate to what the participants feel they have learned. The results so far show that the vast majority of the participants feel very strongly about the high quality of the courses. Fully 88% of the responses show six or seven on a seven-point response scale (with seven representing the most positive responses).

The Office believes that in order to discover whether the *Leadership Institute* serves its purpose effectively in improving the performance of the participants, it must evaluate it at Kirkpatrick Level III. Beginning with the 2004 *Institute*, they will undertake just that sort of evaluation.

In addition, the aggregate data contained from the individual 360°-feedback reports has indicated which clusters from the Leadership Model require the most attention across the District.

Conclusions and Future Implications:

Building on the foundation established by the Leadership Model, the Office of Leadership Development focused primarily on solidifying the *Leadership Institute* for several years. This year they have made significant progress on two major fronts. Firstly, they have *increased the focus on the importance of positional leadership* in general across the District. Secondly, they have put in place both *means to improve* the caliber of leadership and a *framework to monitor the results* of those efforts as they move forward. With strong administrative support from Superintendent Pat Harvey and financial support from the Robins, Kaplan, Miller, & Ciresi Foundation, the Office has raised the bar in terms of what the District can expect in the future.