

# Learning-Centered Leadership: A Conceptual Foundation

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Foundation Grant on  
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<https://doi.org/10.59656/EL-SB0903.002>

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The purpose of this analysis is to describe the research base that undergirds the emerging concept of learning-centered leadership.<sup>1</sup> We begin with our definition of leadership and observations about the importance of leadership. We then present our model of school leadership. We close with a detailed review of the literature on leadership for learning.

### **Setting the Stage**

*Regardless of whether we are looking at organizations, government agencies, institutions or small enterprises, the key and pivotal factor needed to enhance human resources is leadership. (Bennis & Nanus, 1985, p. 8)*

Leadership can mean many things. In our work, leadership is defined as “the process of influencing others to achieve mutually agreed upon purposes for the organization” (Patterson, 1993, p. 3). First, we note that leadership is a process; it is not a personal trait or characteristic of an individual. Second, leadership involves influence; it requires interactions and relationships among people. Third, leadership involves purpose; it helps organizations and the people affiliated with them—in our case, schools—move toward reaching desired goals. This definition of leadership highlights the fact that leadership can be shared amongst multiple actors and relies on complex, organic interrelationships between leaders and followers.

Our specific understanding of leadership for learning is grounded in the following macro-level core findings:

1. *Leadership matters.* Over the last half-century a great deal has been written about the importance of leadership in general, and in relation to organizational performance in particular. Academics, practitioners, and reviewers from every field of study have concluded that leadership is a central variable in the equation that defines organizational success (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Durbin, 2004; Yukl, 2002).

Looking specifically at education, we have parallel evidence that leadership is a central ingredient—and often the keystone element—in school and district success as defined in terms of student achievement (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Marzano, Waters, &

McNulty, 2005; Murphy & Hallinger, 1988). Indeed, at the school level leadership has been identified as one of the four imperatives and the driver of high-performing schools (Beck & Murphy, 1996).

2. *In difficult times leadership matters even more.* Because of changes in their social, economic, political, and legal environments, organizations often find themselves in trouble (Hambrick & D'Aveni, 1988; Haveman, 1992; Meyer, 1982). That is, they enter a pathway of decline, crisis, and failure from which they either rebound, become only a specter of their former selves, or die (Argenti, 1976; Hager, Galaskiewicz, Bielefeld, & Pins, 1999). The literature is littered with examples of industries and companies that were unable to halt the spiral of failure (e.g., W. T. Grant, International Harvester, A&P). In contrast, those that were able to recover grow even stronger (e.g., IBM). What becomes exceptionally clear as one reviews this literature is that leadership, especially at the top of companies, is *the* key condition explaining organizational success and failure (Bibeault, 1982; Hegde, 1982; Ross & Kami, 1973; Slatter, 1984).

The point we offer here is that a significant portion of K-12 education is in trouble as organizational decline and turnarounds are defined in the literature (Weitzel & Jonsson, 1989). In particular, many urban schools are in a downward spiral in which, despite much hard work, they are headed for even deeper troubles and possible collapse. Effective development and deployment of leadership is a critical element in helping these systems break the cycle of disintegration (Khandwalla, 1983-84; Mirvis, Ayas & Roth, 2003; Schendel, Patton, & Riggs, 1976).

3. *In periods of significant organizational transition, leadership is the major controllable factor in explaining organizational performance.* For a variety of reasons, organizations and entire industries often find themselves in a position where what worked in the past will not successfully carry them into the future. As was the case with organizational crisis, these transitions generally are powered by turbulence in the firm's environment (Allmendinger & Hackman, 1996; Staw, Sanderlands, & Dutton, 1981; Tushman, Newman, & Romanelli, 1988). Scholars from every

sector of work converge on the following conclusion about these periods where the basic equilibrium is disturbed: Strong leadership provides the bridge to successful adaptation and transition (O’Neill, 1981; Slatter, 1984; Tushman & Romanelli, 1985).

Here we note that education is in the midst of a period of major transition, one that is marked by a shift from industrial models of learning, organizing, and governing to one struggling to redefine itself for a post-industrial world (see Murphy, 1991; Murphy, in press). Consistent with the general body of research in this domain, we maintain that leadership will be an indispensable factor in explaining success or failure in making this transition.

4. *Instructionally focused and change-oriented leadership are especially effective frames for education.* An assortment of practitioners and academics over the last three decades have helped us see that not all leadership is equal, and that two particular types of leadership are especially visible in high-performing schools and school districts. One strand can best be labeled “leadership for learning,” or more specifically, “instructionally focused leadership” (see Murphy, 1990, for a review). According to Knapp, Copland, and Talbert (2003), “leadership for learning means creating powerful, equitable learning opportunities for students, professionals, and the system, and motivating or compelling participants to take advantage of these opportunities” (p. 12). The touchstones for this strand of leadership include the ability of leaders to (a) stay consistently focused on learning the core technology of schooling: learning, teaching, curriculum, and assessment; and (b) make all the other dimensions of schooling (e.g., administration, organization, finance) work in the service of a more robust core technology and improved student learning.

The second strand can best be labeled “change-oriented leadership” or “transformational leadership” (Yukl, 2002). The spotlight here is on organizational processes (e.g., supporting staff)—employing effective methods for getting the school and its members (staff, students, families, community agents) to become more productive (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Marzano,

Waters, & McNulty, 2005). As we discuss below, these two foundations are most effective when they are linked (Marks & Printy, 2003).

5. *Team leadership seems to offer promise for enhancing organizational performance.*

Analysts have begun to argue that shared models of leadership can substantially improve organizational health and performance (Argenti, 1976). While not gainsaying the importance of leadership in the executive office, these reviewers maintain that spreading leadership more generally in an enterprise can help lift the firm to heights that simply cannot be achieved by a single leader (Dubrin, 2004).

In education, this more organizationally grounded and distributed perspective on leadership (see Elmore, 2000; Pounder, Ogawa, & Adams, 1995; Spillane, 2006) takes a variety of forms. On one front, we see the addition of more formal leadership roles in schools (e.g., teacher coaches and teacher mentors). On a second front, we discern the spreading of leadership functions and tasks more widely among members of the school community (e.g., a teacher taking responsibility for coordinating the master schedule at a high school). On a third front, we observe the development of professional communities of practice with significant flows of both formal and informal leadership (see Murphy, 2005a, for an analysis of this three-dimensional framework).

In conclusion, we affirm that leadership is critically important for providing high-quality PK-12 education, and that finding ways to thoughtfully and appropriately assess the right leadership can have an important impact on the quality of leadership—and through that, on the quality of education in our schools.

### **Leadership Model**

The larger framework that informs our work on learning-centered leadership is contained in Figure 1. We begin at the left-hand side of the model, where we observe that the leadership behaviors we discuss below are heavily shaped by four major conditions: (a) the previous experiences of a leader (e.g., experience as a curriculum coordinator in a district office will likely

lead to the use of behaviors different than those featured by a leader who has had considerable experience as an assistant principal); (b) the knowledge base the leader amasses over time; (c) the types of personal characteristics a leader brings to the job (e.g., achievement need, energy level); and (d) the set of values and beliefs that help define a leader (e.g., beliefs about the appropriate role for subordinates in decision processes). Consistent with the best literature in this area (see Hallinger & Heck, 1999; Heck & Hallinger, 1996; Leithwood, Riedlinger, Bauer, & Jantzi, 2003), we see that the impact of leadership behaviors in terms of valued outcomes is indirect. That is, it is mediated by school operations and classroom activities. Or more to the point, leaders influence the factors that, in turn, influence the outcomes (e.g., student graduation).

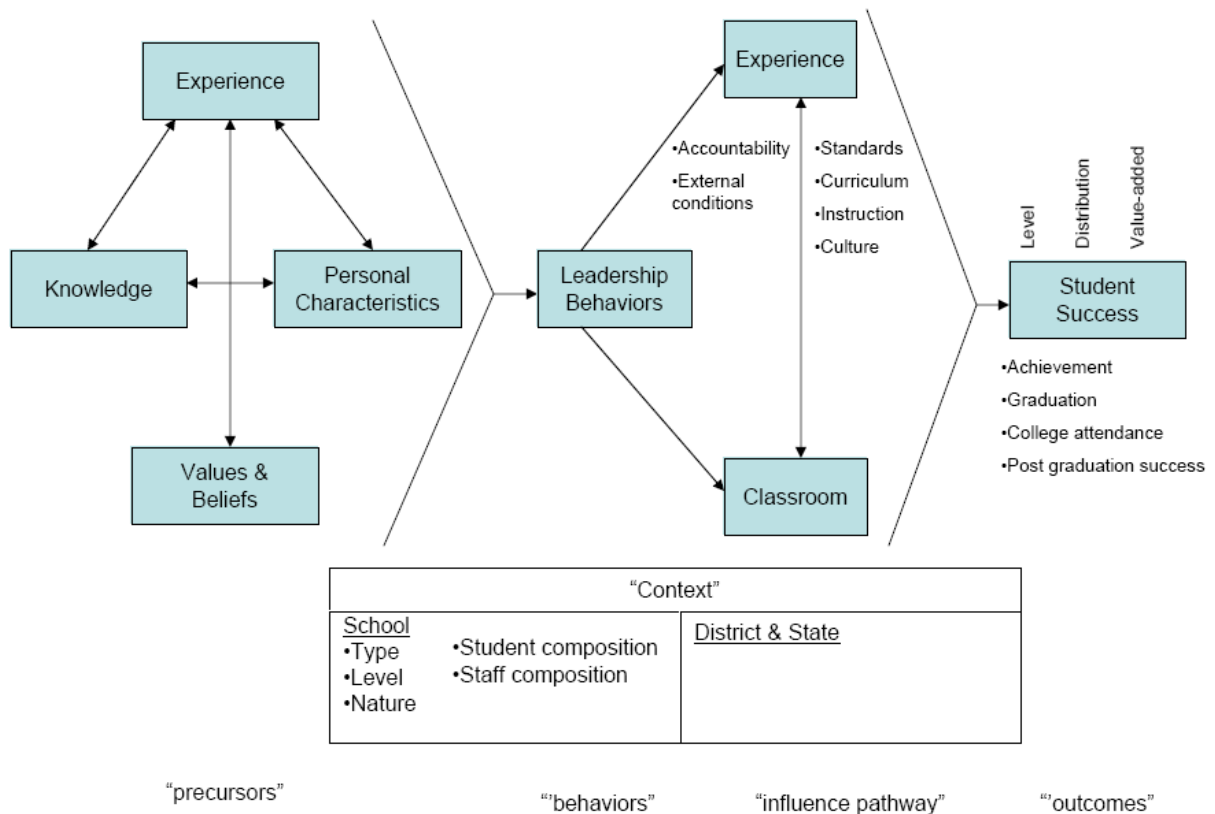


Figure 1. Learning Centered Leadership Framework

We conceptualize leader behaviors as impacting factors both at the school level (e.g., the structure and agenda of a leadership team) and the classroom level (e.g., grouping practices). Not

surprisingly, we underscore the key variables that were harvested from the literature review (see below). We also describe the impact of leader behaviors in terms of a number of valued outcomes at three periods of time: indicators of in-school achievement (e.g., grades on common final exams), measures of performance at exit from school (e.g., graduation), and more distal indices of accomplishment (e.g., college graduation). The model also posits that outcomes be viewed using “a tripartite perspective—high overall levels of student achievement (quality), growth or gain (value added), and consistency of achievement across all subpopulations of the student body (equality)” (Murphy, Hallinger, & Peterson, 1986, p. 154). Finally, the model acknowledges that context plays a significant role in the exercise of learning-centered leadership (e.g., a district’s decision to employ school managers at sites so that formal leaders can devote more time to instructional issues).

### **The Knowledge Base for Assessing Learning-Centered Leadership**

*Effective school leaders are strong educators, anchoring their work on the central issues of learning and teaching and school improvement. They are moral agents and social advocates for the children and the communities they serve. Finally, they make strong connections with other people, valuing and caring for others as individuals and as members of the educational community. ([from the ISLLC Standards for School Leaders] Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996, p. 5)*

If leadership is indeed a hallmark element of school performance, it seems appropriate that we begin by corralling the type of leadership behaviors found in the literature on effective schools and school districts. Based on the role of leadership in school improvement, we illuminate these behaviors in the following pages, employing the framework contained in Table 1. We capture the knowledge base under eight major dimensions: vision for learning, instructional program, curricular program, assessment program, communities of learning, resource acquisition and use, organizational culture, and social advocacy.



Table 1. The Dimensions of Learning-Centered Leadership

- I. Vision for Learning
  - A. Developing vision
  - B. Articulating vision
  - C. Implementing vision
  - D. Stewarding vision
  
- II. Instructional Program
  - A. Knowledge and involvement
  - B. Hiring and allocating staff
  - C. Supporting staff
  - D. Instructional time
  
- III. Curricular Program
  - A. Knowledge and involvement
  - B. Expectations, standards
  - C. Opportunity to learn
  - D. Curriculum alignment
  
- IV. Assessment Program
  - A. Knowledge and involvement
  - B. Assessment procedures
  - C. Monitoring instruction and curriculum
  - D. Communication and use of data
  
- V. Communities of Learning
  - A. Professional development
  - B. Communities of professional practice
  - C. Community-anchored schools
  
- VI. Resource Acquisition and Use
  - A. Acquiring resources
  - B. Allocating resources
  - C. Using resources
  
- VII. Organizational Culture
  - A. Production emphasis
  - B. Accountability
  - C. Learning environment
  - D. Personalized environment
  - E. Continuous improvement
  
- VIII. Social Advocacy
  - A. Stakeholder engagement
  - B. Diversity
  - C. Environmental context
  - D. Ethics

Before we lay out the dimensions and functions of leadership for learning, we begin with a note about our approach to exploring the literature from which the framework was developed. For the most part, we culled information from empirical studies of effective schools, school improvement, and principal and superintendent instructional leadership. A number of points merit mention. To begin with, there is not a rich trove of empirical work. In addition, the majority of the work is qualitative in nature, generally focused on a single or small group of leaders. Third, taken in its entirety this body of scholarship leaves a good deal to be desired in terms of conceptual design and methodological scaffolding. Fourth, as explained in our discussion of the model in Figure 1, leadership effects on organizational outcomes are almost always indirect; that is, they are mediated by conditions of learning such as curricular rigor. Finally, the literature is uneven in terms of strength of findings. Specifically, findings from studies that attend to the most powerful variables in the equation of student learning (e.g., quality instruction, curriculum alignment) produce more robust and reliable data than studies focused on mediating variables that are more distally linked to student outcomes (e.g., personalization).

However, we also included work for review that privileges conceptual and value-based elements as well as empirical evidence. Therefore, our framework spotlights constructs whose logical linkages to learning outcomes for students have not yet been extensively tested. Specifically, we include topics such as ethics, diversity, shared leadership, and communities of professional practice that enjoy considerably less empirical support than constructs such as instructional time and safe and orderly learning environments. In particular, we note that many of the major functions of Dimensions 7 (organizational culture) and 8 (social advocacy) lack the research grounding of the first six dimensions of the framework

### *Vision for Learning*

Learning-centered leaders devote considerable energy to “the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school

community” (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996, p. 10; Murphy & Hallinger, 1985; Wilson & Corcoran, 1988). On the development end of the continuum, leaders ensure that the vision and mission of the school are crafted with and among stakeholders (Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schweitzer, & Wisenbaker, 1979). They also ensure that a variety of sources of data that illuminate student learning are used in the forging of vision and goals (Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982). In particular, they make certain that (a) assessment data related to student learning, (b) demographic data pertaining to students and the community, and (c) information on patterns of opportunity to learn are featured in the development process (Wimpelberg, 1986).

Learning-centered leaders facilitate the creation of a school vision that reflects high and appropriate standards of learning, a belief in the educability of all students, and high levels of personal and organizational performance (Anderson, 1985; Harnisch, 1987; Newmann, 1997). They emphasize ambitious goals that call for improvement over the status quo (Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982; Rutherford, 1985). In particular, instructionally anchored leaders make certain that goals are focused on students, feature student learning and achievement, and are clearly defined (Harnisch, 1987; Rutherford, 1985; Wimpelberg, 1986). They ensure that responsibility for achieving targets is made explicit and that timelines for achieving objectives are specified. In short, they make sure that the school vision is translated into specific and measurable end results (Brookover et al., 1979; Carter & Maestas, 1982; Venezky & Winfield, 1979). They also ensure that the resources needed to meet goals are clearly identified—and made available to the school community.

Effective principals and learning-centered leaders articulate the vision through personal modeling and by communicating with others in and around the organization (Garibaldi, 1993; Goldman, Dunlop, & Conley, 1991; Leithwood, 1992). On the first front, they are adept at making the school vision central to their own daily work (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Dart, 1991). They demonstrate through their actions the organization’s commitment to the values and beliefs at the

heart of the mission as well as to the specific activities needed to reach goals (Dwyer, 1986; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982). On the second issue, communication, instructionally grounded leaders work ceaselessly to promote the school's mission and agenda to staff, students, parents, and members of the extended school community (e.g., business and religious leaders, district office staff) (Edmonds & Frederiksen, 1978; Garibaldi, 1993; McEvoy, 1987). Indeed, learning-centered leaders are masters in keeping vision, mission, and goals at the forefront of everyone's attention and at the center of everyone's work (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Rutherford, 1985; Taylor, 1986). To accomplish this, they engage a wide array of formal and informal avenues of exchange and employ a variety of techniques (e.g., symbols, ceremonies) (Brookover et al., 1979; Venezky & Winfield, 1979).

As the Wallace Foundation's Leadership Effectiveness Knowledge Foundation Exploration Committee (2004) concluded after its review of literature on leader behaviors in highly effective organizations, master leaders are especially well versed at "translating vision into operation" (p. 16; Bryk, 1994; Gilchrist, 1989; Wilson & Corcoran, 1988). The Wallace group holds that each of the following is a core leadership behavior in implementing vision and mission:

- Provide appropriate physical and emotional resources.
- Develop and maintain enabling systems.
- Delegate responsibility and accountability.
- Build consensus and buy-in among staff and faculty for the policies, practices, and supporting systems designed to achieve goals.
- Supervise faculty and staff committees tasked to identify staff and resource requirements needed to achieve teaching and learning goals.
- Supervise the development of performance criteria for achieving teaching and learning goals.
- Supervise the analysis and reform of process system requirements needed to achieve teaching and learning goals.
- Encourage new policies and practices that could achieve goals.

The school improvement literature reveals that learning-centered leaders undertake a variety of actions to steward the school's vision. They are careful monitors, (a) ensuring a continuous examination of assumptions, beliefs, and values; (b) assessing implementation of

goals; and (c) evaluating the impact of school objectives on organizational performance and student learning (Louis & Miles, 1990; Ogden & Germinario, 1995). One way these leaders shepherd goals is through the actions they take to recognize, celebrate, and reward the contributions of community members to the development, the implementation, and, most importantly, the realization of school goals (Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore & Ouston, 1979; Wynne, 1980). At the same time, they do not overlook shortcomings and failures. Certainly a critical dimension of stewarding is seeing to it that school vision and school goals shape routine school activities and anchor organizational systems and structures (Dwyer, 1986). On a personal front, shepherding occurs when leaders act as keepers and promoters of the vision; maintain enthusiasm and a sense of optimism, especially in periods of waning energy; and inspire others to break through barriers to make the school vision a reality (Christensen, 1992).

### *Instructional Program*

As we reported in the introductory section, learning-centered leaders in highly productive schools have a strong orientation to and affinity for the core technology of learning and teaching. In the area of pedagogy, they are knowledgeable about and deeply involved in the instructional program of the school and are heavily invested in instruction, spending considerable time on the teaching function (High & Achilles, 1986; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Wellisch, MacQueen, Carriere, & Duck, 1978). They model the importance of teaching by being directly involved in the design and implementation of the instructional program (Austin, 1978; Weber, 1971; Wellisch et al., 1978). They pay attention to teaching, visiting classrooms and working with groups of teachers on instructional issues, both in formal and informal settings (Clark et al., 1980; High & Achilles, 1986).

Leaders in schools where all youngsters reach ambitious learning targets see teachers as the keystone of quality education. Therefore, they devote considerable time and undertake much careful planning to guarantee that the school is populated with excellent teachers, and with

colleagues whose values and instructional frameworks are consistent with the mission and the culture of the school (Teddlie & Stringfield, 1985 a, b). Learning-centered leaders are also diligent in assigning teachers to responsibilities. They allocate teachers based on educational criteria, especially student needs, rather than on less appropriate foundations such as staff seniority and school politics (Brookover & Lezotte, 1977; Eubanks & Levine, 1983; Rutter et al., 1979).

As we see again and again throughout this review, learning-centered leaders devote abundant time to supporting colleagues in their efforts to strengthen teaching and learning in and across classrooms (Conley, 1991; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990). Foremost, they are aggressive in identifying and removing barriers that prevent colleagues from doing their work well. They provide intellectual stimulation and make certain that teachers have a high-quality stream of job-embedded opportunities to expand, enhance, and refine their repertoires of instructional skills (Cawelti, 1997; Newmann, 1997; Wilson & Corcoran, 1988). They also make sure that the materials teachers require to perform their jobs are on hand in sufficient quantity and in a timely fashion. Consistent with the involvement and investment theme, these leaders demonstrate personal interest in staff and make themselves available to them (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005).

We know from the literature that feedback about performance is essential to the learning process, and leaders in high-performing schools are diligent about providing this information to colleagues on a consistent basis and in a timely manner (Clark, Lotto, & McCarthy, 1980; Wellisch et al., 1978). In supplying performance feedback, learning-centered leaders (a) rely on personal knowledge developed through numerous classroom observations, both informal and formal, and (b) employ a variety of supervisory and evaluation strategies (New York State, 1974). They make student learning the calculus of the exchange process (Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982). These leaders are especially expert in opening up a wide assortment of improvement opportunities for teachers. And they are relentless in counseling poor teachers to leave the

classroom (Russell et al., 1985; Rutherford, 1985; Teddlie & Stringfield, 1985a). In a related vein, instructionally grounded leaders aggressively monitor the instructional program in its entirety, assuring alignment between learning standards and objectives and classroom instruction (Eubanks & Levine, 1983).

Academic learning time is the cauldron in which student achievement materializes (Denham & Lieberman, 1980; Fisher & Berliner, 1983; Seifert & Beck, 1984), and learning-centered leaders work tirelessly with staff to ensure that this precious resource is maximized (Roueche & Baker, 1986). They begin by making sure that the great bulk of time is devoted to instructional activities, that non-instructional time is kept to a minimum. They also see to it that the majority of instructional time is dedicated to core academic subjects (Edmonds & Frederiksen, 1978; Schneider, 1985). Within this learning space, they work with teachers to accentuate the use of instructional strategies that maximize student engagement at high levels of success. On a parallel track, these learning-centered leaders undertake an array of activities that protect valuable instructional time from interruptions, including (a) assigning academic subjects time slots that are least likely to be disturbed by school events; (b) protecting teachers from distractions from the school office; (c) developing, implementing, and monitoring procedures to reduce student tardiness and absenteeism; and (d) ensuring that teachers are punctual (Austin, 1978; Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, & Ouston, 1979; Stallings & Mohlman, 1981). They also foster more productive use of time by coordinating time usage among teachers and across classes (e.g., all language arts instruction unfolding during the first two hours of the day) (Fisher & Adler, 1999; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Hampton, 1998).

Finally, learning-centered leaders in high-performing schools are expert in providing recognition and rewards for quality teaching and demonstrated student learning (Rutter et al., 1979; Wynne, 1980). They systematically celebrate the instructional accomplishments of the school and recognize and reward individual achievements (Russell, Mazzarella, White, & Maurer,

1985). They employ both public avenues of acknowledgement and private praise and encouragement to colleagues. They link recognition and incentives and rewards (Rutter et al., 1979; Wynne, 1980).

### *Curricular Program*

Learning-centered leaders are also knowledgeable about and deeply involved in the school's curricular program (Carter & Maestas, 1982; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Russell et al., 1985). They work with colleagues to ensure that the school is defined by a rigorous curricular program in general and that each student's program in particular is of high quality (Newmann, 1997; Ogden & Germinario, 1995). They establish high standards and expectations in the various curricular domains consistent with blueprints crafted by professional associations and learned societies (Rutter et al., 1979; Teddlie & Stringfield, 1985). They also ensure that each student has an adequate opportunity to learn rigorous content in all academic subjects (Boyer, 1983; Murphy & Hallinger, 1985). These leaders are diligent in monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the school's curricular program (Wilson & Corcoran, 1988).

In the array of factors that define high-performing schools, curriculum alignment enjoys a position of exceptional prominence (see Murphy, Hallinger, & Mesa, 1985). Effective leaders are especially attentive to creating a "tightly coupled curriculum" (Murphy, Weil, Hallinger, & Mitman, 1985, p. 367) throughout the school (Wellisch et al., 1978). They ensure that objectives (standards), instruction, curriculum materials, and assessments are all carefully coordinated (Levine, 1982; Levine & Stark, 1982). Curriculum alignment also means that all special programs (e.g., bilingual education) are brought into the gravitational field of the regular program (Eubanks & Levine, 1983). Finally, it requires a high degree of coordination (a) across subjects within grades, (b) across grade levels and phases of schooling (e.g., from the elementary to the middle school), and (c) among teachers within and across departments and grade levels (Cohen & Miller, 1980; Fisher & Adler, 1999; Venezky & Winfield, 1979).



### *Assessment Program*

As we saw with the instructional and curricular programs, learning-centered leaders are knowledgeable about assessment practices and personally involved with colleagues in crafting, implementing, and monitoring assessment systems at the classroom and school levels (Clark & McCarthy, 1983; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Weber, 1971). They provide the resources—time, funding, and materials—to bring well-developed assessment systems to life. Through personal modeling, they promote a serious attitude about data-based decision making among their colleagues (Brookover & Lezotte, 1977; Brookover et al., 1979).

Assessment systems in schools with learning-centered leaders are characterized by a variety of distinguishing elements. First, they are comprehensive. They address classroom and school-based activity. They feature the use of a wide variety of monitoring and data-collection strategies, both formal and informal. For example, comprehensive designs often include teacher record-keeping systems, end-of-level or end-of-unit reports, student work products, criterion-referenced tests, and standardized measures of student performance. They also highlight information gleaned from direct observations in classrooms. Second, they disaggregate information on the important conditions and outcomes of schooling (e.g., program placement of students, test results) by relevant biosocial characteristics of students (e.g., gender, race, class). Third, they are constructed in ways that foster the triangulation of data from multiple sources in arriving at judgments about the effectiveness of curricular and instructional programs and organizational operations. Finally, as alluded to above, these systems highlight tight alignment between classroom-based and school-based methods of assessing student learning. And—we close here where we began—in schools with effective assessment programs the fingerprints of school leaders are distinctly visible.

Lastly, the literature informs us that learning-centered leaders are master craftspersons in the communication and use of the data that is the lifeblood of the assessment system (Eubanks &

Levine, 1983). On the issue of use, instructionally grounded leaders ensure that assessment data is at the heart of (a) mission development, (b) instructional planning, (c) the evaluation of the curricular program, (d) the identification and design of services for special needs students, (e) monitoring progress on school goals and improvement efforts, and (f) the evaluation of school staff (Edmonds & Frederiksen, 1978; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982; Russell et al., 1985). On the communication front, effective leaders provide teachers and parents with assessment results on a regular basis (Levine & Stark, 1982; Venezky & Winfield, 1979). They also unpack the meaning of results with staff—as a body of the whole, in appropriate groups, and individually (Levine & Stark, 1982; Russell et al., 1985). They make certain that information about student progress is regularly reported to students and parents in an accessible form, at multiple times, across an array of forums, and in multiple formats (Eubanks & Levine, 1983; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982; Wynne, 1980).

### *Communities of Learning*

Learning-centered leaders are especially skillful in creating learning organizations and fostering the development of communities of learning. They are vigorous promoters of professional development, they nurture the growth of communities of professional practice, and they shape school organizations to adhere to the principles of community.

In the area of staff development, these effective leaders thoughtfully attend to their own growth, modeling a lifelong commitment to learning for their colleagues. Unlike many peers, these women and men focus their learning on issues of school improvement. And they assume an active role in planning and evaluating specific staff learning activities and the overall professional development system of the school (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978; Clark, Lotto, & McCarthy, 1980). Attending to professional development is a significant piece of their work portfolios.

In working with colleagues, learning-centered leaders establish an expectation that the continual expansion of one's knowledge and skills focused on helping students succeed is the

norm at their school. These leaders also demonstrate a dedication and a willingness to assist teachers in strengthening their instructional skills (see Rosenholtz, 1985, for a review). They furnish needed resources to teachers (Guzzetti & Martin, 1986; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; McEvoy, 1987), including support to help teachers gain new knowledge (e.g., they fund workshops, hire coaches, facilitate intra- and inter-school visitations), and they provide the materials teachers require to implement new skills in the classroom (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978; Blumberg & Greenfield, 1980; Hord & Huling-Austin, 1986). These leaders are committed to ensuring that their colleagues have both direct and indirect, formal and informal, guidance as they work to integrate skills learned during professional development into their portfolios of instructional behaviors (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978). They are well versed in providing regular “incidental interventions”—casual conversations and suggestions of ideas—that assist teachers in their efforts to improve instruction (Hord & Huling-Austin, 1986; Little, 1982). And, as we outline below, they create systems and procedures that nurture this type of informal learning throughout the school, mechanisms that promote the exchange of professional dialogue about strengthening instruction and improving the school (Venezky & Winfield, 1979).

Learning-centered leaders forge a structure for professional development from the principles of learning theory and models of best practice. They make certain that a robust system for developing staff expertise is in place and that each staff member has the learning experiences necessary to grow his or her instructional skills. They ensure that development opportunities and experiences flow from data on student achievement, link carefully with district and school goals, are integrated into the culture of the school, and focus on student learning (Clark, Lotto, & McCarthy, 1980; Venezky & Winfield, 1979). These leaders also make sure that learning activities are scaffolded on the principles of adult learning and the best professional development standards (e.g., the National Staff Development Council stresses the importance of staff development that is

job embedded, promotes active learning, attends carefully to the provision of feedback in mastering new skills, and nurtures collaboration and shared learning) (Garet et al, 2001).

Learning-centered leaders of effective schools actively promote the formation of a learning organization, the development of staff cohesion and support, and the growth of communities of professional practice (Berman, 1984; Little, 1982; Newmann, 1997). At the broadest level, these leaders endeavor to create a culture of collaboration and the systems, operations, and policies that provide the infrastructure for that collegial culture (Rutherford, 1985; Sizer, 1984). At this level, they also are active in building shared beliefs about the importance of community. They nurture collaborative processes (e.g., shared decision making), forge schedules (e.g., common planning time), and create organizational structures (e.g., team leadership) that permit and encourage shared mission and direction, collaborative work, and mutual accountability for school goals and student learning (Lezotte, Hathaway, Miller, Passalacqua, & Brookover, 1980; Little, 1982; Rutherford, 1985). These leaders are particularly attentive to ensuring that there are a variety of mechanisms for teachers to communicate and work among themselves (Leithwood, 1992; Vandenberghe, 1992). And, to be sure, these women and men are active participants in the various school learning communities, often serving a key linking and pollinating role in the process (Prestine, 1991a, 1991b). They understand, and help others understand, that communities of professional practice offer the most appropriate cauldrons for professional learning and the forging of new instructional skills. Finally, they take advantage of the fact that they are in a unique position to garner and allocate resources to bring communities of professional practice to life (Little, 1982; Rutter et al., 1979).

School organizations in the twentieth century were constructed from building blocks taken from the bureaucratic quarry (Murphy, Beck, Crawford, Hodges & McGaughy, 2001). That is, they featured the principles of hierarchy for example, line authority, impersonality, the separation of management from labor, and the specialization and division of work. Over the years, we have

learned that more effective schools are constructed using building blocks hewn from the community quarry (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Lee, Smith, Croninger, 1995; Lightfoot, 1983; Rutter et al., 1979). That is, they underscore the principles of community, for example, authority based on expertise, personalization, shared leadership, and overlapping work (see Murphy et al., 2001, for an analysis). And, as we observed in the introductory section, there is considerable evidence that leadership is the key factor in rebuilding and reculturing schools in the form of communities (Beck & Murphy, 1996; Copland, 2003; Heller & Firestone, 1994; Smylie, 1992; 1996).

Through their actions, leaders both communicate the importance of community in a school and reveal the meaning of this core idea to students, staff, and parents (see Knapp et al., 2003, and Murphy et al., 2001 for reviews). At the broadest and most comprehensive level, they accomplish this by demonstrating an ethic of care throughout the school (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Miron, 1996). More concretely, they treat all individuals with fairness, dignity, and respect. More specifically still, as Waters and Grubb (n.d.) remind us, these leaders “are aware of the personal needs and interests of teachers” and are cognizant of “significant personal issues within the lives of staff” (p. 6). In the process of doing all this, these leaders form the glue that holds the community together (i.e., trust) and build the foundations that support the three key pillars of community—shared direction, cooperative work, and mutual accountability (Louis & Miles, 1990; Oxley, 1997; Smylie, 1992).

As noted earlier and taken up in more detail in the final section of our report, learning-centered leaders are master craftspersons in the formation and use of group processes, both in their own work and in school community writ large. These leaders model effective skills in the areas of (a) problem framing and problem solving, (b) decision making, (c) conflict resolution, (d) group processes and consensus building, and (e) communication. They also see to it that these important processes permeate the organization (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Prestine, 1991a, 1991b; Squires, 1980).

Leaders in high-performing schools also often promote a shared or team approach to leading the organization (Clift, Johnson, Holland, & Veal, 1992; Goldman et al., 1991). The DNA of this more distributed conception of management—of pushing leadership outward to students, parents, and especially staff and helping others assume the mantle of leadership—is the privileging of expertise, rather than role, in managing the school (Beck & Murphy, 1996). Effective leaders are adept in meeting this challenge. They involve others in the crafting and implementation of important decisions (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). They empower others and provide faculty with voice—both formal and informal—in running the school, not simply their own classrooms (Prestine, 1991a, 1991b). They delegate frequently and effectively, and often form leadership teams to assist in shaping the vision and managing the operations of the school, especially in and around the core technology (Glickman, Allen, & Lunsford, 1992; Christensen, 1992; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990).

#### *Resource Allocation and Use*

As we have already begun to see in our discussions of each of the dimensions of leadership to this point, learning-centered school leaders are adept at garnering and employing resources in the service of meeting school goals. For example, under “Instructional Program,” we reported that leaders in high-performing schools are very attentive to the most critical resource in their care, teachers. We saw how these leaders are religious about hiring quality teachers and then zealous in assigning teachers to the best advantage of students, as defined by their academic success. Under “Professional Development,” we noted that effective leaders actively garner resources to allow teachers to continuously strengthen their instructional skills. Equally important, we observed that these precious resources were thoughtfully linked to school goals and student needs. And in unpacking “Curricular Programs” and “Assessment Programs,” we observed that effective leaders are expert in targeting resources to create systems, operations, and structures that ensure maximum student opportunity to learn.

Here we reinforce those findings, confirming that high-performing school leaders have a gift for acquiring and using resources in support of every student reaching ambitious performance targets (Wallace Foundation's Leadership Effectiveness Knowledge Foundation Exploration Committee, 2004). Indeed, researchers in the areas of school improvement and instructional leadership consistently report that high-performing school leaders are more successful than their peers in locating and securing additional resources for their schools (Clark, Lotto, & McCarthy, 1980; Wilson & Rossman, 1986). In particular, these women and men use the formal and informal channels at their disposal to influence district-level decision making to better the competitive position of their schools in the distribution of resources (Crowson & Morris, 1984; Farrar, 1987; Kroeze, 1984). They also show adeptness in attracting additional funds and materials from the larger school community (Wilson & Rossman, 1986). Evidence is also emerging that effective leaders are more skillful than their peers in building up the stock of social capital at the school level (Knapp, Copland, Ford, Markholt, McLaughlin, Milliken, & Talbert, 2003; Wilson & Corcoran, 1988).

In the areas of allocation and use, two critical dynamics are in play in high-performing schools. First, learning-centered leaders assiduously link resource deployment and use to the mission and goals of the school (Clark, Lotto, & McCarthy, 1980; Rutherford, 1985). All requests and all commitments are not equal in effective schools. Financial, human, and material resources are all directed in the service of improved student learning (Beck & Murphy, 1996). Second, learning-centered leaders are masters at ensuring that the dimensions of work that have historically occupied center stage in school administration—management, politics, organization, finance—are no longer ends in themselves, but rather assume importance to the extent that they strengthen the quality of the instructional and curricular program and enhance student learning (Beck & Murphy, 1996; Louis & Miles, 1990).

## *Organizational Culture*

The importance of organizational culture is clearly visible in the material examined to this point. For example, the research on communities of learning illuminates a number of themes that help define organizational culture (e.g., shared work). Additional patterns will emerge in the concluding section of our review on social advocacy (e.g., respect for diversity). Here, we augment our understanding of culture by introducing five new themes: production emphasis, accountability, continuous improvement, safe and orderly learning environment, and personalized community.

Effective organizations in all sectors, including education, are marked by a strong “production emphasis” (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1982, p. 37). In the words of the Wallace Foundation’s Leadership Effectiveness Knowledge Foundation Exploration Committee (2004), these organizations are characterized by an “ongoing commitment to results” (p. 18). And consistent with the core theme of our review, leadership is a key factor in explaining the presence of this organizational orientation toward outcomes (Edmonds, 1979). On the front end of this condition, learning-centered leaders in high-performing schools work ceaselessly to create an environment of high performance expectations for self, staff, and students (Edmonds, 1979; Lee, Smith, & Croninger, 1995; Wilson & Corcoran, 1988). On a personal front, they “portray a positive attitude about the ability of staff to accomplish substantial things and inspire teachers to accomplish things that might seem beyond their grasp” (Waters & Grubb, n.d., p. 10). They model risk taking in the service of attaining important goals (Prestine, 1991a, 1991b). They regularly communicate a concern for and interest in staff performance and student achievement (Edmonds, 1979). They establish clearly defined, school-wide academic standards to bring expectations to life (Rutter et al., 1979). They carefully ensure that these high expectations are translated into school policies (e.g., all students must take Algebra I by the end of the 9th grade, work below the grade of “C” must be redone) and behavioral expectations (e.g., homework in this school is completed on



time). These leaders make certain that expectations are decoupled from beliefs about biosocial characteristics of students (e.g., the belief that second language learners require remedial work in all subject areas) (Edmonds, 1979).

Learning-centered leaders play a key role in holding teachers and students accountable for learning. Accountability stems from both external and internal accountability systems (Adams & Kirst, 1999). Simultaneously, leaders must integrate these internal and external accountability systems by holding their staffs accountable to building strategies that align teaching and learning with broader achievement goals and targets set by policy.

In the context of federal legislation such as *No Child Left Behind* and state-level standardized assessments, school leaders operate under heightened external accountability to improve student achievement. School leaders stand in a unique position to mediate between external policy and their own school staffs as they direct their school responses to legislation. While a school faculty's acceptance of and investment in these external goals are key in efforts to meet them, there is evidence that many teachers question the effectiveness of these legislative attempts to impact teaching and learning. Such cynicism can quickly hinder staff energy and motivation to address external accountability goals (Leithwood, et al. 2002). Leithwood, Steinbeck & Jantzi, 2002. Leithwood (2001) stressed the "buffering" role of school leaders, in which they connect policy with their unique school community priorities and circumstances in ways that generate local commitment and support for the broader goals despite some teachers' and parents' misgivings. "School leaders, with their staff, parents and other stakeholders, locate and adopt elements of external initiatives that cohere with their school's directions, and that make sense in light of the school's goals and priorities" (p. 228). Such efforts include offering individualized support to staff, challenging teachers to think critically about their teaching, and promoting an atmosphere of collaboration in the school. By appropriating external policies to their own circumstances, school leaders help generate building support that is key to attaining policy targets.

Internally, learning-centered leaders recognize the importance of enforcing the internal goals and strategies of their schools. Schools with higher levels of internal accountability are more successful within external accountability systems (Bryk & Schneider, 2002), and they are more skillful in such areas as curricular decision making, addressing instructional issues, and responding to various performance measures (Elmore, 2005). If external policies help to set some of the broader targets for schools, then internal goals comprise the practical steps that schools take to reach those targets. With internal accountability, learning-centered leaders not only define school goals but also manage teacher incentives, build staff capacity, measure teacher and student progress, and apply both consequences and rewards according to these school goals (Adams & Kirst, 1999). School leaders play an integral role in focusing staff and students on the criteria for success embodied in performance standards and school goals through frequent reference to and use of these criteria in meetings, performance reviews, classroom observations, discussions of curriculum and instructional strategies, and other interactions with staff. Learning-centered leaders recognize the danger of a school staff acting as a group of individuals rather than as a cohesive organization, and their efforts focus on holding teachers accountable to a school's vision and specific goals. Such actions help to transform a school culture from an organization comprised of individuals to one in which teachers' work is influenced by the collective values and commitments of the school, and they see themselves as part of a larger organization pursuing valuable goals (Elmore, 2005).

Learning-centered leaders are the catalysts in school-based efforts at continuous improvement. They understand and communicate that complacency is the enemy of improvement, that the status quo is more tightly linked to decline than to growth. These leaders confront stagnation. They ensure that the school systematically reviews and adopts more productive strategies to accomplish important goals (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). They take risks and encourage others to do so in the quest for better education (Prestine, 1991a, 1991b). They act

entrepreneurially to support school improvement efforts. They encourage initiative and proactiveness. They make sure that the assessment program we described earlier is a driver in the work of continuous school improvement.

From the earliest studies of effective schools, we have known that schools in which all youngsters reach ambitious targets of performance are defined by safe and orderly learning environments (Carter & Maestas, 1982; Rutter et al., 1979). In terms of the physical facilities, this means that the school plant, equipment, and support systems operate safely, efficiently, and effectively. It also means that a safe, clean, and aesthetically pleasing school environment is created and maintained. Finally, it means that problems with facilities are identified, addressed, and resolved in a timely manner (Clark, Lotto, & McCarthy, 1980; Lasley & Wayson, 1982; Wynne, 1980).

As with many of the areas we explore in this review, leaders have a dual role in the domain of learning environment. First, they demonstrate what is valued through their own behaviors. Thus, learning-centered leaders model appropriate behavior by personally enforcing discipline with students and by confronting problems quickly and forcefully (Lasley & Wayson, 1982). Second, these leaders are responsible for the creation and operation of systems and structures and the performance of colleagues (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). In this area, they ensure that operations, rules, and procedures to maintain discipline and order in the school community are developed and monitored on a regular basis. Specifically, they make certain that classroom and school rules and consequences are clearly defined, communicated, and understood by students, teachers, and parents. In the process, they work to secure widespread acceptance and support for the school code of conduct. Learning-centered leaders are masterful at involving members of the school community in the development of the school's discipline processes. They work hard to ensure that school rules are fairly and consistently enforced across the school community. They provide assistance to individual teachers and support for the management system itself. Perhaps

most critically, they demand collective accountability for student behavior (Lee & Smith, 1996; Marks & Louis, 1997; Wilson & Corcoran, 1988).

There is a fair amount of research showing that impersonality reigns in many schools in America, especially secondary schools (Powell, Farrar, & Cohen, 1985; Sizer, 1984). That is, students are neither well known nor particularly well cared for. Since, as we have seen, schools have been constructed using institutional and hierarchical blueprints, both of which feature impersonality, this condition should come as a surprise to no one. Yet the fact that it can be explained is not much consolation to the youngsters in these schools (see Murphy et al., 2001). On the other side of the ledger, we know that in schools where academic and social learning thrive, high “academic press” (Murphy, Weil, Hallinger, & Mitman, 1982, p. 22) is almost always coupled with high personalization (Lee, Smith, & Croninger, 1995; Nauman, 1985). At the broadest level, this indicates that each student is well known and cared for, that each youngster feels valued and important at school (Nauman, 1985; Page, 1991; Romo & Falbo, 1996).

Learning-centered leaders address personalization by forging structures and mechanisms that allow students to form ties to the school and to appropriate adult role models (e.g., the use of teacher advisors and structures to support the advisory process), creating multiple opportunities for meaningful student engagement (Carter & Maestas, 1982; Rutter et al., 1979; Wynne, 1980). They work to link students and teachers in a variety of school-level activities. Leaders in high-performing schools also nurture personalization by (a) creating opportunities for students to exercise responsibility and practice leadership behaviors, in other words, to assume important roles in the school community; (b) offering chances for students to develop the skills needed to assume leadership roles; and (c) crafting programs that acknowledge and reward participation. Effective leaders also understand the significance of symbols (Wynne, 1980). They are expert at fostering the widespread use of school symbols that distinguish the school from the larger

community and that clearly characterize students as members of the school (Clark, Lotto, & McCarthy, 1980; Wynne, 1980).

Recognition and rewards also fill a central cell in the personalization design in high-performing schools (McCormack-Larkin & Kritek, 1982; Rutter et al., 1979). In these communities, an abundance of classroom-based and school-wide recognition systems and mechanisms are in play—systems that are carefully designed to be reinforcing (Lasley & Wayson, 1982). Rewards are distributed frequently and reach a high percentage of students (Wynne, 1980). They are seen as meaningful and important throughout the school community, especially to students. They are often public in nature (Rutter et al., 1979) and highlight the accomplishments of individuals and groups. And while they unquestionably privilege academic accomplishments, rewards are provided for success in a wide array of areas. We close our narrative here with an important reminder: Leadership is the central ingredient in ensuring that these frameworks of meaningful student engagement and widespread rewards and recognition become defining elements of school culture (Russell et al., 1985; Wynne, 1980).

### *Social Advocacy*

In the quotation that opened this review, we briefly encapsulated the central dynamics of leadership in schools where students flourish. One of these forces was defined in terms of moral agency and social advocacy for youngsters and their families (see Fullan, 2003; Murphy, 1992; Sergiovanni, 1992). Indeed, this critical dimension of leadership has been ribboned through our review. In this section, it receives the full weight of our attention. We unravel the concepts of agency and advocacy into four overlapping domains—environmental context, diversity, ethics, and stakeholder engagement—and describe the behaviors of effective leaders in each area.

Working from a research base that overlaps quite extensively with the one we examine in this review, the framers of the ISLLC *Standards for School Leaders* concluded that one of the defining characteristics of highly productive leaders is that they “understand, respond to, and

influence the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context of schooling to promote the success of all students” (CCSSO, 1996, p.25). That is, they actively manipulate the environment in the service of better education for youngsters and their families. The central issue here is understanding contextual trends and influences and their potential impacts on the school and the larger community, particularly how these environments support or hinder learning in classrooms. In their role as social advocates, learning-centered leaders proactively respond to external policy initiatives (e.g., speak at public forums, address civic organizations) to ensure that public policy advantages the students in their schools—and their families.

Learning-centered leaders in high-performing schools also “recognize and utilize the cultural, ethnic, racial, and economic diversity of the school community to meet the needs of all learners and to maximize the performance of students” (Wallace Foundation’s Leadership Effectiveness Knowledge Foundation Exploration Committee, 2004, p. 11). As can be seen in this “driver behavior,” effective leaders demonstrate an understanding of and a commitment to the benefits that diversity offers to the school. They translate this knowledge and commitment into work that creates educational experiences that honor diversity (e.g., the use of culturally rich educational materials) while strengthening instruction and improving student achievement (Ogden & Germinario, 1995; Roueche & Baker, 1986). As we see below, these leaders are also adept at building and using channels of communication that promote ongoing dialogue with diverse groups of stakeholders (Russell et al., 1985).

Ethics is closely related to advocacy for all students. Scholarship on school leadership through the mid 1990s reveals that a conscientious treatment of ethics was conspicuous by its absence from the field of school administration, especially in the preparatory arm of the profession. That same stream of research also explains how a value-free profession was built up over the last half of the 20th century (Beck & Murphy, 1994; Farquhar, 1981). Over the last decade, as the profession has begun to redefine itself (see Murphy, 1999, 2002) ethics has been

pushed onto center stage. At least part of this movement can be attributed to the work of analysts who have noted the central role ethics plays in the work of the women and men leading high-performing schools.

According to the literature (most noticeably the ISLLC *Standards*), effective leaders “act with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner” (CCSSO, 1996, p. 18). On one front, the authors of the *Standards* note that this means leaders fulfill legal and contractual obligations and apply laws and district and school policies and procedures fairly, wisely, and considerately. It means that they guarantee the privacy rights of students and recognize and respect the legitimate authority of others. At a deeper level, it means leaders treat others fairly, equitably, and with dignity and respect—and they establish the expectation that others in the school community act in a similar manner.

On a personal basis, learning-centered leaders are more cognizant than their peers of their own values and beliefs, and they shape their behavior in accord with personal and professional codes of ethics. They are more reflective and self-critical about their own practice and its impact on others in the extended school community. They know the difference between using office and position for one’s own gain and for the benefit of the school community, and they honor the latter. These leaders serve as role models in terms of accepting responsibility for what happens to children and families in their school community.

Finally, the research on high-performing schools reveals that effective leaders are attuned to and expert at linking the school to parents and others in the extended school community (Corcoran & Wilson, 1985; Goldring & Sullivan, 1996; Russell et al., 1985). Much more so than their noneffective peers, these leaders weigh connections in terms of their value in enhancing the academic and social learning of students (Armor, Conroy-Oseguera, Cox, King, McDonnell & Pascal, 1976). That is, they engage families and other community members in the service of school goals, the learning agenda, and student performance (Beck & Murphy, 1996). Inside the

school, these women and men model community collaboration for staff, establish norms about the importance of parent connections, and provide opportunities for staff to develop the collaborative skills needed to work effectively with parents. They also ensure that information about family and community concerns, expectations, and interests inform school decisions (Rowe, 1995; Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 1999).

Learning-centered leaders craft and work from a comprehensive design about school-community relations that is anchored by the school's academic mission. The plan is systematic, not simply a collection of ad hoc and unrelated activities. In the wider community, these leaders develop relationships with influential actors in the religious, business, and political sectors (see Goldring & Hausman, 2001). They are actively involved in the school community and communicate frequently with stakeholders therein. They employ multiple channels and a variety of forums to operationalize these connections. Their objectives are to inform, promote, learn, and link—to ensure that the school and the community serve one another as resources. On the extended community front, effective leaders are also specially attentive to building bridges with (a) other youth and family service agencies that can promote better lives for youngsters and their families and (b) media that can help promote the image of the school.

For learning-centered leaders, connections with parents occupy a strategic position in the algorithm of stakeholder engagement. Leaders communicate with families regularly and through a variety of channels. They create programs and strategies that bring parents from the periphery to the inner circle of school operations. In particular, they foster the development of parent education programs, including activities that (a) encourage and help parents learn about the instructional and curricular program at the school, (b) assist parents in working more productively with their children at home on the goals of the school, and (c) assist parents in extending their own parenting skills.



## **Conclusion**

We conclude our narrative where we began, by reminding the reader of our central premise—that leaders have a good deal to say about how well schools work for America’s youth and their families. In this period of massive change and considerable disquiet in education, leadership assumes even added importance. We also reintroduce our conclusion that not all leadership is equal. Specifically, instructionally focused leadership wrapped around an important set of processes for conducting the business of leadership (e.g., supporting, advocating) merits the high ground in the fight to create schools in which all youngsters reach ambitious targets of performance.

Bringing this understanding of leadership to life in schools and school districts is difficult work. Much can be accomplished through the education of the women and men who occupy (or will occupy) leadership positions in schools. In a similar vein, changing governance structures and systems to permit leadership to flourish can be helpful. Still another critical weapon—one that historically has been underutilized, and generally poorly engaged when employed—is the assessment of learning-centered leadership.

## Note

1. The framework presented herein was developed to inform the crafting of a new evaluation system for school leaders and school leadership teams, the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (VAL-Ed). The development of this article was generously supported by a grant from the Wallace Foundation.

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