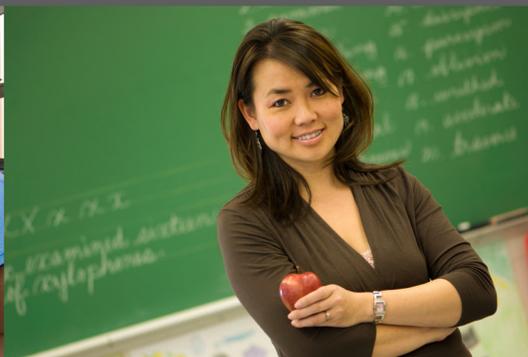


ON TARGET

A QUARTERLY REPORT BY TARGETED LEADERSHIP CONSULTING

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Introduction

Dear Colleagues,

The Winter edition of our On Target Report takes a look at a network of Chicago High Schools who are committed to building a true culture of collaboration. The Network for College Success, sponsored by the School of Social Service Administration at the University of Chicago, has been working with a group of Chicago high schools for the past three years to implement this model. The network of schools has also partnered with Targeted Leadership to help maintain their focus on teaching and learning.

Following the Report is a tool your school or district may find useful in assessing your own collaboration readiness. We put together some questions to ask your teams about the nature of your collaboration, but feel free to add your own since each school and system culture system is unique.

Jeff Nelsen and Amalia Cudeiro

Building a Culture of Collaboration: The Chicago High School Network for College Success

by: Mary Ann Pitcher, and Jeff Nelsen, Ph.D.

The Context

High schools are extremely complex institutions and the outcomes they are trying to achieve are multi-dimensional. High schools are expected to ensure a high rate of graduation, raise student achievement, prepare students to be college ready, while simultaneously ensuring that they are developmentally, emotionally, socially and academically prepared to become adults.

Thus, the challenge facing high school leadership is not only to create core instructional foci in multiple content areas, but to also engage teachers, students and families in ways that all are motivated to achieve results and prepare students successfully for their future. Shared leadership is not only a nice idea – it is a vital necessity. The Network for College Success, sponsored by the School of Social Service Administration at the University of Chicago, has been working with a group of Chicago high schools for the past three years to help implement just such a model. Following are some of the lessons we have learned while pursuing this goal.

The Role of the Network

Public high schools are amazingly complex organizations. There is so much going on all the time that it is easy to fall into a pattern of being ruled by the “tyranny of the urgent,” and responding to what’s most important right now. The schools we work with frequently express the value of our network, especially our partnership with Targeted Leadership Consulting (TLC), an independent consulting organization which provides external training and coaching to help schools maintain their focus on teaching and learning. Empowering teachers as real instructional leaders is not a simple add-on; it is a shift in culture and requires significant support.

We spent the first year of our high school principals’ network visiting one another’s schools, trying to create a common vision for what good teaching and learning looked like. The principals also requested assistance in supporting the adults in their buildings to lead this important work. The question posed by the principals was: How do I provide vision and support for the shared instructional work of the school?

Building on the work of our partner, the Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR), we view instructional leadership as a central catalyst for school improvement. In the CCSR formulation, instructional leadership is defined broadly to include: the active role of the principal around instructional issues, the extent to which teachers are involved in school decision making and have a trusting relationship with the principal, and the degree to which instructional programs at the school are coordinated and implemented well.

As we embarked on year two of our pro-

fessional community, we chose to partner with Targeted Leadership Consulting. Targeted Leadership has created a framework for successful integration of all school-based systems drawn from a wide range of research and experience.

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The findings of the research have been blended with more than ten years of experience in school and district improvement to create a model that has been shown to produce dramatic results in numerous schools. The leadership training is comprised of a full curriculum of tools, strategies, protocols and practices linked to a research-based framework for achieving powerful results.

For those of us who had been through the trial and error model of developing shared leadership structures in our schools, we immediately embraced the TLC framework as a viable organizing structure for supporting school leaders to distribute leadership and align all their efforts to provide instructional leadership to the faculty and school.

The TLC framework has provided a road map for the work. The art (and the challenges) lie in the implementation of building a culture of shared leadership. As each school is unique, network staff supports each school to navigate the

road map according to the local context and idiosyncrasies that exist at each site. We have found in practice that a highly articulated model helps principals to implement this complex endeavor more effectively and more systematically anticipate and deal with the various stages and challenges of teaming and developing adult leadership for the purpose of increased student learning.

As a partner in the network, TLC provides professional learning in the form of institutes for leadership teams from participating schools. Institute work is followed up by on-site coaching and support by the network staff to ensure that schools are moving forward with their action plans. In addition, Targeted Leadership taught us the value of Targeted Learning Walks, and how to collect evidence of progress in the classrooms and give school teams opportunities to discuss ideas and challenges in implementing their shared leadership model.

The Role of Teacher Leaders

The first step toward building a more collaborative culture was in supporting principals to establish instructional leadership teams (ILT’s). With guidance from both TLC and network staff, principals began to grapple with team composition and purpose.

Many of our schools already had some form of leadership team in existence; however, most of these teams were dealing with more administrative issues. A key step in working toward common goals and work centered on teaching and learning was identifying a targeted instructional area (TIA). Through guided implementation of the Targeted Leader-

ship framework, the ILT's were charged with engaging the entire staff in looking at data and having conversations grounded in their professional judgment about their students' needs in order to determine an instructional area that is important for all students, reflects their needs and relates to all teachers, grade levels and content areas.

The critical aspect of this work is about involvement and engagement of the entire school community. ILT members, who are representative of the teacher collaboration teams in the building, lead their colleagues in conversation, learning and work around the TIA and how it translates into their practice and supports the skills and knowledge they are trying to teach. Another way in which the ILT is empowered to lead is through the development and implementation of a school-wide professional learning plan. In many of our schools, teachers had not previously been responsible for designing and facilitating professional development for and with their colleagues. Suddenly a shift occurs from top-down professional development and priorities to a teacher-driven agenda and a sense of ownership that is necessary for impact at the classroom level. This common focus and sense of purpose helps to unify the work of high schools, lessening fragmentation across content areas and opening up dialogue and collaboration toward a common set of goals.

The Role of the Principal

While most principals will claim that teacher ownership is what they desire, actual ownership presents challenges of its own for the principal. This requires

creating and living a delicate balance between authority and democracy. The challenge of this balance is well articulated below (Mohr & Dichter, 2002):

They (principals) do not abandon traditional authority; they use it judiciously, building involvement as they can in a variety of informal as well as formal ways, but asserting themselves as they must. They provide a binary leadership that is both top-down and bottom-up. In this way they avoid the pitfalls that can turn empowerment and collaboration into quagmires and they help school communities deepen the commitment on which improvement depends. Leadership can vary and move around, but when it comes down to it, no matter how much decision making is shared, there does have to be someone who is in charge – and we have to know who that is. Otherwise, we all can spend an inordinate amount of time either duplicating each other's efforts or waiting for someone to be decisive.

This calls for moving from a more authoritative role to a more facilitative one. While our principals are progressive educators, the traditional role of the principal and the ensuing responsibilities that the district structure imposes, are extremely challenging to sharing leadership. The principal must learn to balance the management and operational responsibilities that take up much of a principal's time with the need for the principal to be involved in and at the table as instructional leader providing the vision, guidance and support for the work of the ILT.

At the core of our professional commu-

nity is our principals' network. We seek to provide an honest and open forum for principals to problem solve and address the issues that are unique to their role. A key strand of the principals' network is examining and exploring the principal's role as instructional leader vis-à-vis a shared leadership framework. Through professional readings, case studies and dialogue, principals engage in reflection and discussion. The work of instructional leadership is hard and the propensity to revert to the more traditional principal role is strong.

The Role of Trust

Empowering teachers to make decisions and lead the work requires a great deal of trust. Trust by the principal that, while building the capacity of his/her teachers, the work will be productive and result in improved learning for students; and trust by the teachers that the principal will both lead and support the work. Trust has been a recurring theme in our principals' network. The Consortium on Chicago School Research produces reports which provide school level survey data on trust as a measure for school improvement. Our principals have examined this data and reflected on their practice specifically related to issues of trust. At a recent network meeting, we read *How the Best Leaders Build Trust* (Covey, S. 2009). If we are talking about empowering teachers to take on new and evolving leadership roles, it must begin with the principal.

The job of a leader is to go first, to extend trust first. Not a blind trust without expectations and accountability, but

rather a "smart trust" with clear expectations and strong accountability built into the process. The best leaders always lead out with a decided propensity to trust, as opposed to a propensity not to trust. S. Covey

Conclusion

In an endeavor that is as complex and multi-faceted as preparing our youth for productive futures, principals are uniquely situated to organize the work of a school so that our students have the greatest likelihood for success. Principals must lead instruction around rigorous school-wide standards and create school cultures and structures where teachers have opportunities to learn together to improve their practice. The principal cannot do this work alone. Activating and empowering teacher leaders, and all teachers for that matter, is essential to improving the outcomes for every student.

District Partnership- Latest Development

This past year the district has undergone a change in administration and with this transition a reorganization of district areas. NCS, with the support of its principals and district leadership, facilitated the grouping of our schools into their own area. Previously grouped geographically, our schools now form an area whose organizing principle is its sense of professional community and its commitment to the work of shared leadership and collaboration to improve teaching and learning and postsecondary outcomes for our students. The new

“ Shared leadership is not only a nice idea – it is a vital necessity. ”

area, led by a former principal of one of our network schools who is now the Chief Area Officer, is partnered with the Network for College Success to provide professional development and support to its principals and schools. The network has expanded from ten to sixteen schools, ten of which are in the district area and six of which are autonomous under various structures. The diversity of all participating schools, including comprehensive neighborhood schools, small and large, new and long-standing schools, is greatly valued by all participants. What unites our schools is a commitment to collaboration and shared learning to transform teaching and learning to support all students for college and postsecondary success. ■

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A TOOL FOR LEADERS

Introduction:

The high schools included in the Chicago Network for College Success have spent considerable time building cultures of collaboration within individual school sites and across the entire network. These high schools have partnered not only with one another, but with outside organizations to assist them as they work towards shared leadership and healthy and collaborative cultures.

Objectives:

1. Participants will have an opportunity to read Building a Culture of Collaboration: The Chicago High School Network for College Success.
2. Participants will review the graph showing key attributes of a collaborative culture and have an opportunity to add additional attributes.
3. Participants will discuss questions and determine what level of engagement exists in six key areas of collaboration.



A TOOL FOR LEADERS

Targeted Learning	Not at All	To Some Degree	Significantly	Extensively
Are teachers involved in sharing and identifying best practices?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is there an Instructional Leadership Team at our school?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vision/Mission				
Are staff aware of vision/mission?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does it guide the work of the school?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Organizational Climate				
Are there trusting relationships among the staff?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is there a feeling of collective responsibility?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Time to Collaborate				
Is there time set aside regularly for staff to meet in teams and as a whole group?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is time to collaborate a high priority for the staff?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
School Leadership				
Are key decisions (curriculum, policies) developed and made in partnership with staff?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do the staff as a whole hold themselves accountable?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
School Norms				
Are there clear and overt agreed upon norms within the school (i.e., how to respond to underachievers, high fliers, dealing with staff issues...)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (add your own)				
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>