

Leadership Implications for the Common Core

Presented by Douglas B. Reeves*
The Leadership and Learning Center

1. Research Update 2012

Culture vs. Policy for Leaders (What happens when principals are given exceptional powers?)

Culture vs. Policy for Students (How do beliefs influence learning?)

Can we cut our way to greatness? The multi-million dollar impact of effective teaching

2. Common Core State Standards: Myths and Realities

Myth	Reality
<i>Common Core State Standards start in 2014.</i>	Common Core State Standards start NOW. Today's early primary students, including kindergartners, need a different writing curriculum to meet CCSS in 2014.
<i>We need to wait until the assessments come out to make any classroom decisions.</i>	There is no mystery about some fundamental changes: more information writing and increased middle school math rigor require immediate attention.
<i>The assessments and USDOE guidance will drive our instruction.</i>	Challenge the intellectual consistency of these statements: "We hate government telling us what to do." "We can't make any decisions until government tells us what to do."
<i>The Common Core provides "fewer and focused" standards so there is no need to identify "priority" or "power" standards.</i>	If all of your students need to gain only one year of learning, that's a sound assumption. But if some (or many) of your students need to gain more than one year of learning, you must either expand the school day or narrow the focus of the standards.
<i>We've distributed the Common Core to our teachers, and they can take it from there.</i>	If we learned anything from "Standards 1.0" in the 1990's, it is that the "delivery" method DID NOT WORK. Teachers need the tools and time to transform standards into curriculum, engaging activities, and a variety of assessments. Teachers must also add value to standards by creating opportunities for students to achieve "beyond the Common Core" at a much higher level.

What are other myths about the Common Core State Standards that you have encountered?

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3. The Accelerating Pace of Change

Consider prominent claims of change leadership theorists in the 20th Century.
What is the same? What is different?

Claim About Change Leadership	What is Similar in 2012?	What is Different in 2012?	Application to Your System
1. Systemic change takes 5-7 years.			
2. Implementation Dips are inevitable.			
3. System alignment requires a detailed strategic plan.			
4. The leader's most important role is the creation of a vision.			
5. Buy-in from all stakeholders is essential.			
6. Do what is important, not just urgent. Other claims about systemic change:			

4. The New Rules of Systemic Change

Rule #1: Long-term change depends upon short-term wins

Rule #2: Leaders deliver execution, not excuses

Rule #3: Alignment is a function of focus, not just strategy

Rule #4: Vision is important, but it's Christopher Wren, not Picasso

Rule #5: Buy-in is nice, but behavior "as if" the buy-in has occurred is essential

Rule #6: Importance and Urgency Coexist

Choose just one or two of the New Rules for Systemic Change and consider how that might apply to a real-world leadership challenge you are facing:

My Challenge	The New Rule	Potential Breakthrough	Potential Challenge

How do the "New Rules for Systemic Change" apply to your implementation of the Common Core State Standards or to another key leadership focus you have for this year?

5. The Culture of Evidence-Based Decision-Making

Didn't we already win this battle?

Drowning in data and thirsty for evidence of impact

After more than a decade of "data-based decision-making," what are the greatest challenges educational systems face in the practical implementation of better teaching and leadership based upon evidence?

1.
2.
3.

Cultural Imperatives for Evidence- Based Leaders:

- Acknowledge variation in teaching and leadership EFFECTS and ACTIONS
- Acknowledge a combination of internal and external influences on results
- Open discussion of teaching and leadership mistakes and mid-course corrections
- Consistent environment of transparent self-assessment and improvement

Example: Apply Appendix A, Senior Leadership Meeting Assessment, to your most recent board meeting, cabinet meeting, or other appropriate meeting.

6. Creating a Leadership Environment of Respect for Evidence

Estimate the impact of the following factors in terms of “a year of progress” for students:

- Student socioeconomic status _____
- Student expectations _____
- Formative assessment _____
- Class size _____
- Ethnic diversity of students _____
- Retention of students _____

I used to think . . .	But now I think . . .
Students have distinctive learning styles – visual, auditory, and kinesthetic.	Daniel Willingham’s research is compelling – there is no evidence that shows students really learn in these three different ways.
Direct instruction was an ancient and horrible “drill and kill” practice.	2012 evidence shows that Direct Instruction remains one of the most powerful instructional practices, particularly when associated with deliberate practice and immediate feedback.
Multiple Intelligences was the most highly regarded and well tested instructional theory of the 20 th Century	Multiple Intelligences is an interesting theory, but there is no evidence that curriculum based on the theory leads to improved achievement.

What are other mind shifts you have encountered?

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Doug also facilitates the Learning Leaders group on LinkedIn and sends weekly articles and research updates to his Twitter followers @LeadandLearn and @DouglasReeves.

Senior Leadership Effectiveness Matrix

The purpose of this matrix is to encourage self-assessment and leadership team assessment in order to improve our individual and organizational performance.

Strategic Goals	Exemplary	Proficient	Progressing	Not Meeting Standards	Remarks
Achievement	All of Proficient, plus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific and consistent in helping other divisions and individuals achieve goals and objectives. • Identifies “lessons learned” from successes and failures, and shares those lessons with colleagues, internal professional development, leadership meetings, and informal teaching and learning opportunities • Public posting of goals is frequent and clearly explained, used as learning tool 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Translates achievement growth goals into individual and team objectives • Individual and team objectives fit seamlessly into objectives of other teams, our budget and plans • Personal and public accountability for achievement of objectives • Reacts decisively and immediately if intermediate objectives are not met so that overall goals are met and exceeded • Goals publicly posted, performance updated at least monthly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintains clear, specific, and measureable personal and team goals. These are generally related to the Center’s overall objectives and goals. • Participates in helping other divisions and individuals when asked 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not know the achievement goals • Does not know the growth goals of other parts of the organization • Does not intentionally contribute to the growth and support of other parts of the organization • Goals are unclear, not measureable or not time-bound. • There is no clear reaction to conditions when objectives and goals are not met • Focused on self and not on team or organization 	

Strategic Goals	Exemplary	Proficient	Progressing	Not Meeting Standards	Remarks
<p>Service</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All of “Proficient” plus: • Takes specific steps to identify the elements of extraordinary service and systematize them, as evidence by contributions to Center web site, formal training and development programs, leadership meetings, and informal training opportunities • Subordinates personal interests to provide extraordinary service to others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personally responsible for delivery of “10” service recognized by clients and colleagues • Regularly recognizes colleagues who provide extraordinary service • Personally responds to instances in which internal or external service is inadequate anywhere in the Center, focusing on solutions rather than blame • Holds subordinates responsible for superior internal and external service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides client and internal service that is regularly identified in the 8-10 range by clients and colleagues • Occasionally recognizes excellent service from colleagues • Helps other colleagues and clients when asked 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides service to clients or colleagues that is reflected in “7” or lower ratings • Elevates personal needs over the needs of clients and colleagues who need service • When helping colleagues or clients, complains about it • Does not recognize colleagues who deliver extraordinary service 	

Strategic Goals	Exemplary	Proficient	Progressing	Not Meeting Standards	Remarks
<p>Innovation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All of proficient, plus: • Identifies specific opportunities for enhancements in existing products, services, and processes for innovation • Leads teams to identify and execute new innovations in markets, benefits, relationships with employees and contractors • Identifies, develops, executes, and maintains strategic innovative partnerships for the Center • Codifies innovative processes and “lessons learned” in formal and informal ways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sets clear objectives for innovation appropriate to responsibilities – innovation in products, services, and/or processes to improve internal service and efficiency • Actively embraces innovation and change and encourages clients and colleagues to do so • Personal responsibility for analyzing, evaluating, and improving specific processes within personal area of responsibility • Clear contributions to cross-functional team that leads to innovative services, products, and/or processes • All necessary steps to protect I.P. for Center innovations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serves on cross-functional teams to contribute to innovations • Will identify and suggest potential innovations, though the follow-up and implementation is typically done by someone else • Will accept innovation when it is provided • Aware of innovation and change, but is not enthusiastic about embracing or promoting change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resists change and innovation • Fails to identify opportunities for improvement • Does not recognize and appreciate colleagues who provide innovation and change 	

Choosing Choice

Parents are demanding more educational choices and more say in their children's schooling. How can you offer choice in your district so you don't lose parents to charters and vouchers?

Parents love choices. Proliferating brands, color palettes, communication media, and electronic options are only a few of the manifestations of our collective desire to be in charge of our choices. Not surprisingly, board members now face a significant increase in demands for school choice. Some of this increase in demand is fueled by federal funding incentives for charter schools; the recent \$4 billion Race to the Top program gave preference to states with the least restrictive charter school legislation. A growing number

of states permit parents to choose schools outside traditional attendance boundaries, and a few are permitting vouchers.

However, charters and vouchers are not the only ways for school systems to provide choices to stakeholders. This is important, because the demand for choice is propelled not just by political trends but by human nature. Parents often like expressing their choices of teachers, curriculum, assessment methods, homework, textbooks, and extracurricular activities,

to name a few areas with increasing parental involvement.

While not every school system permits these choices, a growing number of schools are using choice to better engage parents and students. Board members and other education leaders should consider making the point that it is possible for parents to have meaningful choices without losing students to charter schools or private schools supported by publicly funded vouchers.

Funding moves, costs remain

The challenge that many choice programs present to public school systems is that funding moves with the students to their new school, but many of the costs remain at the public school. It costs the same to deliver heat, electricity, and a teacher to 28 students as it does to 30.

Public high schools are creating theme-oriented academics, with students choosing focus areas such as law, medicine, communication, and engineering. Two students who exercised their choice through a charter or voucher decision could cost the district about \$20,000, assuming per-pupil funding of \$10,000. Magnify this pattern across many classrooms, and the costs to the losing districts can be staggering. Rather than oppose choice, however, districts should embrace it in a way that is fair to parents, students, and the districts. Here are some examples of choice strategies boards should consider:

■ **The portfolio approach.** One recent study suggested that school systems should create a portfolio of different educational options, includ-



ing charter schools. Rather than wait for organizers to start independently governed charter schools, school systems can create charter schools with specific curriculum focus areas, such as fine arts, technology, and world languages. While public charters have a degree of autonomy in staff and curriculum decisions, their financial and academic accountability remains within the purview of the public school system.

■ Academies within schools. While students pursue core academic subjects, the context of science, math, and literature classes are oriented to the theme of the academy.

■ Cooperative campuses. On some campuses, students have the ability to take college or technical school classes that earn both high school and college credit. In other cases, high school campuses are located adjacent to community colleges and universities so that students can enjoy a much broader array of curriculum options. One interesting case study of this approach was documented in an earlier column, “The

P-20 Connection” (June 2011).

Curriculum choices

Although most curriculum choices are governed by state academic content standards—and soon, for some states, the Common Core State Standards—there remain choices in the curriculum emphasis that schools and districts can offer. For example, the Core Curriculum championed by author and professor E.D. Hirsch provides strong content knowledge and skills for students and offers a strong record of academic achievement for students.

A growing number of districts are creating their own curricula, including Web-based textbooks, in an effort to improve the relevance of their content and the intellectual engagement of students and teachers. While the content of the curriculum is certainly important, research suggests that the rigor, expectations, reading comprehension, and writing requirements of the curriculum may be more important than whether the curriculum is focused on a particular cultural perspective.

School systems can embrace academic standards without becoming standardized commodities. By engaging the intellectual energy of teachers, administrators, students, and parents, schools can develop alternative academic themes within and among schools, providing a vibrant academic environment and meaningful choices for parents.

Reframing the debate

Educational debates can sometimes be framed in terms of extremes—you are either for choice or against choice. Board members can, however, offer a more nuanced approach that provides fair choice—alternatives in structure, governance, and curriculum—without inflicting unnecessary financial damage on the public school system. ■

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The Face of Data

School leaders and educators often are exhorted to use data to improve student achievement. However, test scores only provide partial information on what's going on in your district

Over the past decade, the public's image of education has largely been shaped by the publication of test scores. Academic achievement certainly is an important element of the public's perceptions of any school system; however, test scores—particularly as they have been reported in the past decade—tell only a fraction of the district's story.

Now, with nearly every school system in the nation strapped for resources, and with public confidence in many governmental institutions sagging, it is essential that the public and the media hear the real story of public education in your schools. As board members, you can play a critical role by being ambassadors for your districts and for public education.

Think of it this way: When a district maintains an excellent reputation, it attracts families to the area, stabilizing property values. Moreover, school districts where board members are strong public supporters of education can attract the best staff and senior leaders who are more likely to work with a harmonious board than with a contentious one.

Here are five practical ways to serve as effective ambassadors for your schools.

Put a face on the data

Charts, graphs, data, and statistics are part of any effective presentation describing the quantitative elements of an educational system's performance.

However, we must remember—as one group of teachers told me—that “data has a face.”

In other words, the numbers on charts are not sterile statistics, but real children. Charts that include pictures of children demonstrate that increased reading scores are not merely lines on paper, but the result of joyous interactions between students and teachers as they discover the joy of reading and the challenges of learning.

Beyond the data

A sports team's performance can be reduced to box scores, but there is always a story behind the numbers—the qualitative lens through which we better understand quantitative information. Board members who are ambassadors for education can provide context for data presentations by talking about real stories in which students, staff members, and school communities have overcome adversity, taken on challenges, and learned things far beyond the skills reflected in test scores.

This is particularly true for areas such as student service, leadership, fine arts, and health, none of which are displayed in traditional reports of “adequate yearly progress.” Test data also fail to reflect the exceptional work of teachers who challenge students to perform at high levels beyond the prevailing academic stan-

dards. They also don't tell the story of those teachers assisting students who are far below a standard to make significant progress. This information is best conveyed with rich descriptions and compelling stories rather than a PowerPoint slide.

Explain the impact

Most people think of education as an expense—and a very significant one for the budgets of most states and cities. However, a closer look reveals that education is also an important source of revenue.

The Alliance for Excellent Education (all4ed.org) provides details for each state about the dollars saved when districts reduce the dropout rate. Students who stay in school rather than drop out generate significantly more tax revenue, spend less money on state-provided medical services, and consume fewer resources from the local and state criminal justice system. Other recent studies show the long-term economic and social benefit of kindergarten. Even extracurricular activities have demonstrable positive impacts on student behavior, attendance, and academic achievement.

Challenge common assertions

When public officials allow critical assertions about public education to stand, the public too easily can infer that the assertions are true. As Netscape founder James Barksdale famously said, “Everybody's entitled to their opinions; they're just not entitled to their own facts.”

Board members don't need to provide a knee-jerk defense of everything in public education. We have some bad teachers, administrators, and yes, perhaps even a few bad board members. The

Convey a clear vision

same could be said of bankers, lawyers, doctors, farmers, or just about any other group we could name.

But despite the prevailing villainy associated with the word “banker,” we all know of many honest, decent, hard-working bankers who are far more representative of their profession than a few rapacious thugs who capture the lion’s share of the media’s attention. It is similarly inappropriate to generalize about any level of education based upon isolated incidents of violence, poor teaching, or inadequate leadership.

The pages of *ASBJ*, as well as many academic journals such as the *Journal of Education of Students Placed At Risk* and the newly published *Getting It Done* (2011, Harvard Education Press) by Karin Chenoweth, make it clear that there are abundant stories of school success that challenge common stereotypes.

Board members, superintendents, staff members, and students must share a clear vision of the future. For example, in Tulsa Public Schools, there is a bone-deep belief that every student deserves the right to be prepared for college.

It’s a simple one-sentence commitment, with carefully chosen words (“right” is more powerful than “goal” or “objective”). In any public setting, leaders can say, “Our students have the right to be prepared for ...” and everyone else in the room will fill in “college” with an enthusiastic affirmation of their vision. This is not merely a slogan, but has clear implications for how these teachers and leaders address literacy, assessment, schedules, and interventions for student success.

Board members are busy people, balancing the demands of professional

lives, families, and school board meetings. Adding to that list, “ambassador for education” may seem like one burden too many. But if each board member took on one ambassadorial assignment each month—from a private meeting with a legislator to a public presentation to a community group—to send consistent and accurate messages about public schools, we could change the national debate that is dominated by critics who too often are unburdened by evidence and unchallenged by educational leaders. ■

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Burning Questions

Question for Doug to answer publically:

Question for Doug to answer to me privately:

Phone _____ or E-Mail _____

My greatest leadership challenge is: