

Dimensions of Education



Succession

2011

Succession Planning in support of Educational Leadership

The support required for the delivery of global and digital competencies that will meet or exceed the needs of our society help define the daunting tasks facing our educational leaders. School districts also face significant challenges to support the recruitment, development and retention of appropriate leadership personnel. These challenges must be recognized in the intense complexity of the framework currently defining the roles and responsibilities of our educational leaders.

Challenges / Current Context:

Leadership and management are inextricably intertwined yet the volume and complexity of the tasks facing principals and vice-principals will often come at the expense of ‘leadership’. The effectiveness and efficiency with which they can demonstrate the required depth of leadership is being significantly compromised. This, more than ever



before, necessitates careful thought around the particular skill sets that must be developed to demonstrate leadership proficiencies. The capacity of the

current leadership infrastructure needs improvement to avoid further “alienation” of the leadership domain.

- A 2007 national study by the American Association of School Administrators found that 85% of superintendents believe there is an inadequate supply of educational leaders needed to fill anticipated superintendent openings.
- In many areas a larger number of impending retirements from key leadership positions represents a significant loss of institutional knowledge and access to quality coaching support.
- A lack of systemic experience (including years teaching), negative perceptions of the administrative career path by teachers with leadership potential and higher turnover rates ensure that demands on proactive succession planning have never been greater.
- The educational leadership provided by principals and vice-principals is one of the most important factors contributing to student achievement levels.

Key Reflective Questions



- *What are the benefits and liabilities of succession planning?*
- *What is the nature of current leadership succession within the district?*
- *What role do the primary stakeholders play in the leadership succession process within the district?*
- *What is being done to define the leadership attributes that will be essential for leadership in the future (21st Century Skills, Personalized Learning, etc.)? What leadership attributes does the district value?*



- *What does the development of leadership capabilities and capacity look like in the district?*

- *What are the steps that should be taken to plan and prepare for leadership succession?*
- *Is succession planning part of the five or ten year strategic planning process in your district?*



Succession Planning

What does the research tell us:

- “*Succession planning must, furthermore, be based on agreed principles to ensure that the selection is based on future organizational needs. When this process is left to incumbents, they tend to groom successors who resemble themselves in appearance, background and values.* (Loughlin 2000, quoted in Lacey 2003, *Succession Planning in Education.*) This obviously discriminates against certain groups, and may cause the organization to stagnate.” (Curriculum Leadership Journal, Australia, 2003)
- Liebman (1996) and others have identified the following elements of a good succession framework:
 - Identifies future needs of the organization
 - Identifies potential future leaders and inspires leadership aspirations
 - Promotes a selection process and program designs based on future leadership capabilities
 - Identifies and creates a pool of talent
 - Recognized multiple paths to leadership
 - Provides for the development of future leaders and the retention of current leaders
- There is a strong correlation between effective leaders and student achievement. (Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis 2010. The Three Essentials: Improving Schools Requires District Vision, District and State Support and Principal Leadership.)
- “School leadership has a greater influence on schools and students when it is widely distributed.” (NCSL 2006. Seven strong claims about successful school leadership. p3&12)
- “...there is not a single documented case of a school successfully turning around its pupil achievement trajectory in the absence of talented leadership.” (NCSL 2006. Seven strong claims about successful school leadership. p5)
- (Hall 2008) Schools/districts that do not adopt formal succession planning processes expose themselves to external change agents that could dismantle current practice. Succession planning focuses on who will fill the vacancy as opposed to how you will fill the vacancy.
- (Miskel and Cosgrove 1985) Superintendent successions have greater systemic educational impacts than do principal successions.
- Successful transition from one leader to another is a critical but neglected dimension of sustainable improvement. (Barker 2006)
- Succession plans should not depend solely on internally prepared candidates. Communication between board members and superintendent is not conducive to formalized succession planning. (Dedrick, Sherman & Wells, 2010)

Succession Planning

The best succession planning practices are proactive.... talented individuals are identified early and nurtured throughout their careers through professional development that is integrated into human resource management.

The Learning Partnership, 2010

Recommendations:

- *Current longer term school district strategic plans often acknowledge some human resource challenges but could benefit from the development of an enhanced vision around succession planning.*
- *Investment in instructional leadership development at the school and district level is necessary. Pro-active long-term efforts to build 'leadership capacity' within the current realities of the volume and complexity will yield positive outcomes.*
- *A collaborative effort to develop a meaningful succession plan within a district should become a priority for action. Stakeholders should seek to develop a definition of 'succession planning' for their district.*
- *Succession planning should be valued and promoted within a school district.*

