Core Function	District Context and Support for School Improvement

Effective Practice	Improving the school within the framework of district support

Indicator: The district includes municipal and civic leaders in district and school improvement planning and maintains regular communication with them. (5847)

Explanation: The local school board is, of course, a link between the district office and the community. But the school board is not fully representative of all groups in the district, and municipal and civic leaders are people of particular influence. Keeping these leaders informed about district and school improvement and gaining their input to the process, builds support for the district leadership's vision and understanding of necessary change.

Questions: How does your district intentionally engage and communicate with municipal and civic leaders regarding the district and school improvement planning and process? Does communication include opportunities for input from these leaders?

School success is closely linked to a district's ability to build and maintain a broad social and political community coalition. Termed "civic capacity" by political scientist Clarence Stone (2003), this coalition building and the ability to establish trust in reform efforts is key to district improvement.

When the district and/or its schools are engaged in significant reform or turnaround efforts, communication with community leaders is especially critical. District leaders can enhance civic capacity with the development of a turnaround "campaign", a committed and concerted effort directed toward promoting an environment that is receptive to change (Garvin and Roberto, 2005; Hirschhorn, 2002; Kim and Mauborgne, 2003; Kotter, 1995; Roberto and Levesque, 2005). In an effective district system for school improvement, districts value transparent and forthright communication about the need for change (data about poor student performance can be used) and the ramifications of failure. (Beer, Eisenstat, and Spector, 1990; Kim and Mauborgne, 2003; Kotter, 1995; Roberto and Levesque, 2005). This type of civic engagement facilitates community response, positive and negative, which in turn fosters a sense of ownership in the reform process.

In difficult turnaround situations, districts which have conscientiously cultivated community ownership throughout the improvement process find greater support and understanding within civic institutions. When a district vigorously pursues healthy civic capacity as defined by Stone (2003) municipal offices are motivated to take part in the turnaround process. In a 1998 survey the National School Boards Foundation found that "there is a consistent, significant difference in perception between urban school board members and the urban public on a number of key issues" (National School Boards Foundation, 1999, p. 12). While 67 percent of urban board members surveyed gave their schools As and Bs for their level of quality, only 49 percent of the urban public surveyed did. Moreover, whereas three out of four board members rated their teachers as excellent or good, only 54 percent of the public agreed. In recent years, mayoral involvement in urban education can be seen as an institutional effort to fill this public confidence gap. Mayors who are granted the power to appoint school boards can be particularly effective in garnering support for school reform thus closing a confidence gap between school and community (Wong, 2006).

School boards are a way to involve municipal and civic leaders, both as serving members and as ambassadors to municipal and civic leaders. Rhim (2013) states that "research on school boards indicates that communities have ownership and faith in public schools in part because they are governed by—and presumably responsive to—local constituents" (p. 10). Including community leaders on a school board gives the community a sense of knowing what is taking place in the school and also gives them a say in the process:

> Having locally elected officials govern public schools presumably ensured that the individuals hired to run and teach in schools, as well as the content that was taught, reflected the norms and values of that community. (Rhim, 2013, p. 10)

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