



Indicator: The superintendent and other central office staff are accountable for school improvement and student learning outcomes. (5622)

Explanation: The buck has to stop somewhere. We typically hold principals accountable for their schools' performance. But school progress depends a great deal on district policy, guidance, and support. Everyone respects leadership that assumes responsibility for progress.

Questions: Does your school board consider the progress of the schools and the student learning outcomes when discussing contracts with the superintendent? Does the superintendent do the same with district personnel? How do district personnel communicate to school personnel, parents, community leaders, and taxpayers that they stand accountable for school progress and student learning outcomes?

“Accountability for results begins at the top in effective districts, with superintendents explicitly signaling their willingness to be held accountable. This more rigorous approach to accountability typically should begin with the development of specific goals, deadlines, and consequences, with both district- and school-level staff held responsible for producing results” (Cawelti & Protheroe, 2007, p. 41). To take responsibility means that central office staff must be able to communicate direction for the district and goals. The goals must always be centered around student learning with high expectations and no excuses. Achievement targets should be set at the district level and progress toward these targets monitored. Financial decisions should be based on the goals of the district. Professional development and other programmatic decisions should support the goals. The superintendent is the key to making sure these goals are brought to life in the daily lives of the schools (Cawelti & Protheroe, 2007).

The role the superintendent is not an easy one. As Cuban (1998) writes of the role, “superintendents must fashion a solution out of three sometimes-conflicting roles: instructional, managerial, and political. As instructional leaders, they bear the ultimate responsibility for improving student achievement. As managerial leaders, they have to keep their districts operating efficiently, with a minimum of friction, yet taking risks to make necessary changes. As political leaders, they have to negotiate with multiple stakeholders to get approval for programs and resources.” Anthes (2002) states that the law (ESEA) has heightened the superintendent’s instructional role; “District administrators have typically been expected to set the tone that honors and supports classroom instruction, but they have often done so in ways that are symbolic or abstract. The new expectations will require an in-depth understanding of instructional strategies, coaching techniques, and use of data to guide decision-making.”

In a study done by Togneri and Anderson (2003), they found that in high-poverty districts that were improving student outcomes, these strategies were in place:

- Courage to acknowledge poor performance and will to seek solutions
- Vision focused on student learning, guided instructional improvement, systemwide approach to improving

instruction

- Data-based decision making
- New approaches to professional development
- Redefined leadership roles
- Commitment to sustaining reform over the long haul.

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Togneri, W., & Anderson, S. E. (2003). *Beyond islands of excellence: What districts can do to improve instruction and achievement in all schools*. Washington, DC: Learning First Alliance.

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For English Language Learners

District leaders must create a united vision for ELLs that signals a commitment to system-wide change that will foster higher achievement levels for ELLs. It is essential that districts demonstrate that the responsibility for the academic success of ELLs is shared by all educators in the school system. According to research conducted by The Council of the Great City Schools, the districts in their study that showed improved ELL achievement had a greater emphasis on having a shared, unified vision for district reform that was inclusive of all students. “In St. Paul, for instance, the district abandoned its approach of segregating ELLs from the general student population and moved toward a system of integration and support” (Horwitz, Uro, Price-Baugh, Simon, Uzzell, Lewis, Casserly., 2009, p. 18). This renewed attention to the needs of ELLs enabled the district to carry out a reformed vision for improving instruction through the alignment of services and the integration of academic programs.

References and Resources

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