



# Share the lead: Strengthen Leadership to Improve Student Achievement

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As Warren G. Bennis, the Founding Chairman of The Leadership Institute at the University of Southern California, has said: “**Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality and sustain it.**” The 106 Educators Delegation sponsored by the Education Bureau of New Taipei City really opens a window for me to learn from distinguished schools in New Jersey exploring educational collaboration and personalized learning. The school leaders help to establish the conditions that enable others to be effective. From what I have observed, leadership is a function more than a role. It encompasses a set of functions that may be performed by many different persons in different roles throughout a school.

Therefore, in this report, I would focus on micro-politics, the agendas as well as the motivations of individuals within organizations and on their actions. My intention is to use **LEADERSHIP** as an acronym to describe how leadership influence students achievement in the district, and how the leaders inspire my teaching belief and methodology.



## Leadership in the School

**Listening:** Create an environment that fosters dialogue at all levels. The term “Collective Leadership” is best used in referring to the extent of influence that organizational members and shareholders make decisions in their schools. As the Superintendent of the Freehold Borough Public Schools Roco Tomazic shared, this fundamental perspective on leadership focuses attention on the combined effects of all sources of leadership, along with possible differences in the contributions made by each of these sources, including administrators, teachers, students, and parents. They all together create an excellent educational environment that encourages people to share their opinions with the leaders, instead of complaining to others.



**Empowerment:** Empower high-performing teachers to make their own decisions. At Sherwood Middle School, teachers know what the vision and the goals of the organization are. They're encouraged and supported in using iPads as a teaching tool. All the teachers are willing to integrate a well-designed resource that combines audio, images, interactivity and learning activities that cater to all type of learners. Setting a tone and developing a vision of instructional climate for student achievement and teacher growth is presented in such a high-performing (high student achievement) school of all grade levels. Teachers share a vision and believe that all students can achieve at high levels. In order to turn their visions of high student achievement into reality, principals





are actively engaged in providing direct instructional support to teachers. And then instructional actions have to do with how the teachers carry out the task. The actions taken by the principal guide and support according to the goal of enhancing every student's success. Together, they form instructional leadership that is learning-focused for both students and teachers.

**Autonomy:** School Autonomy includes decisions relating to different aspects of school management, such as funding and allocation of resources, designing curriculum and assessments, and school improvement. The skills and knowledge of the school will never be fully realized unless the school has a success-oriented accountability. The distinguished schools we visited have one thing in common. They are authorized to IB World School. The schools encourage both personal and academic achievement, challenging students to excel in their studies and in their personal development. Students in the IB School are encouraged to drive their own learning, and consider both local as well as global contexts. Schools in any countries should autonomously help students become more culturally aware through the development of a second language, and be able to engage with people in an increasingly globalized and rapidly changing world.

### ***Leadership in the Classroom***

As a facilitator of learning in the classroom, demonstrating leadership, providing motivation for learners and operating effective groups will increase the chances of success. Our behaviors can contribute positively to the learning process of students. Modeling such attributes will also assist our students to become better leaders.

**Diversity:** Language diversity and cultural intelligence lend themselves well to effective leadership. Although the United States has a rich language history, the pursuit of nationhood has folded language resources under the umbrella of English. In viewing language as a resource, students in Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School (PVCICS) also study Chinese Language Arts and culture. Their goals are to graduate students with excellent scholarship, high proficiency in Mandarin Chinese and English, plus sensitivity to multiple cultures. PVCICS uses a "one-way"

immersion model, meaning most students enter the program with no acquaintance with Chinese. Chinese language acquisition occurs naturally by using Chinese as the language of instruction during a portion of the day. It's not hard to understand why the younger students in my mini-cultural lesson are eager to use their limited Chinese. It is due to the popular approach that helps bilingual students embrace language diversity and produce high academic outcomes.



**Engagement:** Leaders always engage every member and stimulate their motivations to contribute their best. Here is an example. In Mrs. Ganelos' science classroom, we were able to observe an online student discussion about scientific modeling of evolution in Schoology, the district's online learning platform. Eighth grade students shared a research about the evolutionary link between chickens and dinosaurs they have been working on. The students evaluated each other's research and validity of sources then used shared Google documents to find examples of evidence to support their claims about evolution. When teachers put each student at the center of the learning experience, they must train students to be active participants and take ownership and pride in their learning. It is definitely a powerful way to personalize learning.

**Readership:** A readership crisis is really a leadership crisis. And for leaders who know how to respond, crisis is just another way of saying opportunity. As we observed reading classes from elementary school to high school of the three states (New York, Massachusetts, and New Jersey). In each case, we spent



some instructional time and often more, observing and interviewing in each room. Teachers are found to be particularly effective in developing reading and writing proficiency. As the

literacy teacher of Ramtown School shared with me, “An effective reading teacher encourages, models, and supports student talk across the reading program. This talk was purposeful talk though, not simply chatter. This talk was problem-posing, problem-solving talk related to curricular topics.” In the classroom I observed, the talk between the teacher and students was more of a conversation style than an interrogation style. In other words, teachers and students discussed ideas, strategies, and responses together. I believe that teachers should pose more “open” questions, where students can give multiple responses appropriately.

**Self-regulation:** In developmental psychology, there's new interest in non-cognitive skills as important influences on academic achievement. Self-regulation, the ability to exercise control over our feelings, thoughts, and behaviors, turns out to be a stronger predictor of success in the classroom than intelligence, or standardized test scores.



Josiah Quincy Elementary School, the biggest public elementary school in Boston, is an open-plan school, meaning that on each floor there were no walls between the classrooms. Classrooms are separated by only low furniture. This is intended to help pupils learn better by being able to communicate more with others, and have more space in the hallways. All the teachers and students are accustomed to this environment by following the values: FIRE (Focus, Integrity, Respect and Empathy). This kind of strong self-discipline is the main contributor to important traits, and a link to higher school achievement as well as success in the world of work.

### ***Applying Leadership in My Class***

The leaders we met in the states are willing to contribute themselves to the community. They are great models of leaders for Asia, where students and parents seem to concern more about how to have higher test scores; therefore, I try to apply what I have learned to help students gain more achievement both in academic skills and non-cognitive skills.

**Hope and expectation:** Ample evidence shows that almost all students can achieve at high levels if they are taught at high levels. One of the most frequent questions we are asked by stressed-out school teachers is "How am I supposed to get my students ready to pass the grade test when they enter with low English language ability and I have only my 80-120 minute teaching period each week?" "Peer-Teaching" can be a solution implemented in the classroom in multiple ways. This method builds not only content knowledge, but also student confidence. From my experience, students in small groups can teach short lessons to other small groups, and then switch roles.



Alternatively, individual students can prepare unscramble sentences or clozes and exchange them. Keep in mind that their statements need to be carefully chosen so that their peers can complete them. The well-known "jigsaw" concept which students become experts and teach each other in small groups is one of my favorite practical methods. When a lesson involves a cooperative learning activity, it demonstrates increased feelings of autonomy and intrinsic motivation.

**Interest:** Student interests and strengths are important components in student success and academic achievement. When a child believes he can succeed, that motivation translates over into the classroom. At Howell Township Public School, students are able to choose the stations they are interested in the most at the Media Center. Teachers help students succeed by personalizing instruction to meet the needs of the learner. This may seem like a daunting task because it takes front-loading at the beginning of the year and ongoing progress-monitoring. As a student-oriented teacher, I can design activities and assessments that focus on personal interests, strengths, and academic standards. What I have seen in my school, disadvantaged students often depend on the school for this exposure, since their access to content outside of school may be limited. It's our responsibility to personalize instruction through various materials and to expose students to content-rich classrooms that incorporate rigorous standards. It will result in students being better prepared for higher education.

**Professional development and Passion:** Nothing determines the level of output more than the passion exhibited by the team, and this starts with the leader who is the teacher in the classroom. Without demonstrated passion from the teacher, there is no hope of the students ever achieving greatness. Today's schools face enormous challenges. Schools are being asked to educate the most diverse students to higher academic standards. From what I have learned, we need to be able to analyze and reflect on our practice, to assess the effects of our teaching, and to refine and improve our instruction. We must continuously evaluate what students are thinking and reshape our plans to take account of what we've discovered. The most powerful way for teachers to learn best is by looking closely at students' performance and our teaching; by studying, doing, and reflecting; by cooperating with other professional teachers; and by sharing what we've observed. As teachers, we cannot do this alone. Start from myself to build a culture for learning, tapping colleagues and encouraging students to join the leadership, and well, being a learning leader for all.

## Conclusion

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the superintendents, principals, district administrators and consultant, teachers, school board and community members in education who welcomed us into their busy work lives, provided time to talk with us and gave us the chance to observe their classes, all of which gave us the most complete district data set ever assembled to better understand issues in educational leadership. Their anonymous contributions will be forever giving feedbacks, as educators and leaders use this information to initiate and guide changes in our schools.

Helping students succeed is a collaborative effort. Families, communities, and all branches of government must work together at all levels. Everyone in the education system should build partnerships for student success and to provide quality education programs for students. All in all, connected leadership is the foundation of



student learning achievement. As the latest of the influential series of OECD reports on Innovative Learning Environments, “Learning leadership is fundamental because it is about setting direction, taking responsibility for putting learning at the centre and keeping it there.” With technology rapidly advancing in an information-based economy, it is difficult to predict what the future of our world will be. However, with the right skill-set, today’s students will become tomorrow’s leaders. And that’s exactly what I’m trying to do in my classroom: Cultivate Tomorrow’s Leaders.

## **Reference**

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