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Current Realities for Public Schools

Administrators in today's schools work in a constant state of flux; change is the norm. Congress' recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act, through the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), provides a signal example. Just as many were beginning to fully understand and adjust to the implications of the now defunct No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, there's a new set of rules to play by.

Still, though much changes, much remains the same. The current reality defining public schools remains unchanged. Schools must strive to meet the current educational needs of each and every individual student, regardless of circumstances, and to prepare those students for the steps they will take after school. And schools do this work in an environment characterized by accountability intended to expand educational opportunity and improve educational outcomes.

This issue of the *School Leadership Review* offers several insightful manuscripts on issues that directly impact our public schools and highlight the current realities of them. Administrators and teachers in public schools are working harder than ever to ensure that all students master higher levels of concepts as well as mastery for ALL individual students, including those at-risk of not graduating. Additionally, administrators are supporting their teachers with a renewed focus on teaching and learning in a strong, collaborative, and innovative work environment.

Such collaboration and innovativeness can lead to tensions between required teaching content and methods of teaching. We do not want to lose sight of teachers' desire and need for some autonomy in the "how" of teaching. Teaching is an art, not a script, requiring high levels of skills and knowledge from practitioners. Any focus on teaching needs to address teachers' morale as well as their commitment to engaging students, as higher teacher morale impacts the retention of quality teachers. Though not a new concern for public schools, retention remains an area demanding a continual search for ways to keep our most capable teachers within the ranks as well as retain new teachers as they strive to hone their craft.

Another area that is not new to the current realities is the engagement of families and community members. School administrators and teachers must constantly search for ways to have strong and effective communication with partnering families and communities. This communication needs to be constant, two-way, and open in order to build relationships and trust between schools and the public they serve.

Further, today's school principals serve as critical advocates for guiding their campuses, students, and by extension, communities, to higher levels of performance in many different areas. There may be disagreement on standardized tests, but principals must advocate for strong teaching and learning, perhaps because of--or perhaps in spite of--these tests. Many states have new teacher and principal evaluation instruments and processes. While the instruments may not have all new items, the process for using the instruments requires a more collaborative process between teachers and principals. This collaborative process does take more time, but produces a higher level of professionalism in the education field.

The superintendents leading our schools today must also be strong advocates for their schools, students, teachers, staff, and community. Critically, superintendents are leading the charge on the vision while managing needed changes amidst limited resources. Superintendents must look at the entire system and realize a change in one component affects the change in many other parts of the system as well. Many superintendents may transition to other districts for many reasons. This leadership change for a district often might change the district's focus and vision. Sometimes that change is good; but other times there may be a loss in consistency and forward movement for a school district.

Each of the of the selections in this issue of School Leadership Review addresses the current realities of today's schools in a meaningful way.

Community and Student Engagement: A Committee's Weakness and Strengths by Stacy Hendricks and Malinda Lindsey describes one school district's commitment to Texas' House Bill 5 component of local committee involvement in a school's performance evaluation. The study examines the 15-member committee led by the district's Director of Curriculum and Instruction process. This committee was tasked with establishing the evaluation criteria. The authors tell about their strengths and weaknesses in process to embark on continuous improvement as well as celebrating successes.

Examining How Campus Contextual Factors Correlate to Teacher Morale in a Secondary School Setting by Scott Bailey and Allison Marz looks at a teacher survey on morale. Their findings show that factors of teacher interaction, classroom size, and the perceptions of administrative support impact morale. This action research study was conducted at a mid-sized school in Texas with a survey involving 25 teachers.

Changes in Principal Evaluation Standards: A Case Study of North Dakota Principals by Tsoonae Molapo, Laura Parson, Cheryl Hunter, and Jonathan Butz examines the perceptions of 31 principals regarding a new North Dakota state requirement of the principal evaluation process. The results revealed that principals saw the new process as fair and positive. Similarly, the state of Texas has also recently changed its principal evaluation process to a more formative system with collaboration in goal setting.

Superintendent Transitioning: When is the Right Time to Make a Move by Karon Radford, Kerry Roberts, Pauline M. Sampson, Wesley Vinson, and Ralph Marshall looks at the reasons superintendents move to different districts or retire as well as their increased tenure in one district. This qualitative study was conducted with 38 superintendents in Texas with a follow-up more in-depth interview with 10 superintendents. The results indicated that superintendents made a move based on new challenges, board policies, salary, family, community politics, health, media, and an inner sense that it was time to move. Interestingly, 47% of the 38 superintendents said they left at the right time, while 31% said they should have left sooner and 22% said they left too early.

The Effectiveness of an Online Credit Recovery Program on Improving the Graduation Rates of Students at Risk of School Failure by Carrie Eddy and Julia Ballenger is a quantitative study on the effectiveness of online credit recovery program for high school students. The program is Edgenuity. This study found that the credit recovery program increased the students' chances for graduation.

Overall, schools—and the administrators and teachers who staff them—have a moral obligation to not only educate students, but also to do so equitably and at high levels, while demonstrating fiscal responsibility. Hopefully, this issue of *School Leadership Review* casts some light on how to do that.

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