

“Growing Our Own Leaders: One District’s Experience”

When the Saint Paul School Board selected Dr. Pat Harvey 1999 as its new Superintendent, they gained access to her 30 years of experience. “They were looking for a leader to do the work I was ready to lead,” she recalls. Part of that experience had come in Chicago, where she had seen first-hand the potential of moving power and authority away from the central administration and to the individual schools. She also understood that to fully capitalize on that shift of power and authority, a District needed to have strong leaders in place in the school buildings. As Richard Elmore has written, “Holding schools accountable for their performance depends on having people in schools with the knowledge, skill, and judgment to make the improvements that will increase student performance.”¹ Giving greater authority to school Principals and encouraging them to operate in partnership with Site Councils (consisting of teachers, parents, and even students) would require strong leadership at the building level.

That raised two significant questions. First, just what did the District mean when it said it needed effective leadership – what does *leadership* mean in the context of giving greater autonomy to the

¹ Quoted in the McREL Working Paper on “Balanced Leadership (Waters, Marzano, and McNulty 2003)

schools? There are many varying definitions of leadership² – what definition should the District use? Second, what did the District propose to do to create and support that stronger leadership?

Saint Paul Public Schools operates nearly seventy schools and nearly ninety other educational programs. About ten percent of the Principal positions come open each year. Supt. Harvey believes that the urban Principal comes with special demands³: “You’re not able to understand the pressures in this role, and it’s even unique in Saint Paul.” Michael Fullan notes that nonetheless success in the principalship “cannot require superwomen and supermen or moral martyrs because , if it does, we will never get the number necessary to make a system difference” (Fullan 2003). Supt. Harvey recalls the experience of many first-time Principals: “We have not adequately prepared people for that role – just about every As Principal, despite having felt prepared, will say, ‘I had no idea ...’ after that first week as Principal.” Hale and Moorman cite research supporting this comment: 69% of educational leaders surveyed gave administrator training programs an ‘F’, pointing out that the programs were “out of touch with the realities of what it takes to run today’s schools” (Hale and Moorman 2003). What could Saint Paul Public Schools do to ensure that the incoming Principals – those who will likely

² See for example Keller in “Principal Matters” (Keller 1998); *Trying to Stay Ahead of the Game* from Public Agenda (Farkas et al. 2001); *Better Leaders for America’s Schools* from the Broad Foundation (Better Leaders for America's Schools: A Manifesto 2003).

³ See Cusick in “The Principalship? No Thanks.” (Cusick 2003); Fullan in *The Moral Imperative of School Leadership* (Fullan 2003); Hess in “A License to Lead?” (Hess 2003).

serve for the next fifteen or twenty years – were fully prepared to demonstrate strong leadership?

{Figure 1 – Saint Paul Public Schools Leadership Model goes about here}

The first step Supt. Harvey took involved pulling together a team of people to outline the meaning of *leadership* in the context of Principals serving in an urban school district. “The skillset that you need outside a metro area or even in a suburban school is different from the skillset you need to lead here,” she points out. She chose to work with Bob Eichinger, an outside consultant with years of experience in the area of leadership development, along with a select group of top level people from the District’s own staff. This group established the Principal’s *Leadership Model*. They constructed the model by identifying 28 critical *competencies* from the Leadership Architect® competency library developed by Eichinger’s firm⁴. Then they aggregated those into seven *competency clusters*. Ralph Barton Perry writing about education some fifty years ago observed, that “Without a definition of the End there is no test by which Means can be selected, and no standard by which Practice can be criticized and improved” (Steinberg 1970). Now they had a common basis to work from – in essence, they had crafted a local

⁴ The competencies included in the model are from the Leadership Architect® Copyright © 1992, 1996, 2001-2003 Lominger Limited, Inc., and used by permission.

definition of *leadership* as it applied to the target environment – the urban school building and the role of the Principal.

Now they could turn their attention to formulating a plan to develop greater levels of skill in those seven clusters. Supt. Harvey created a design team of experienced principals led by Dr. Nancy Katzmarek as Director of Special Projects. Their work included the formation of the District’s Leadership Institute. At the same time, the District received a generous grant from the Robins, Kaplan, Miller, and Ciresi Foundation (RKMC) to support its work. RKMC wanted its grant to serve as a catalyst for change.

The design team spent several months creating the Leadership Institute and launched it in the summer of 2000. While the District naturally seeks candidates with the state-required certification, it now supplements that by playing a major role in shaping their development as school leaders⁵. They accepted 24 applicants for the first-ever offering, all of them ‘Aspiring Principals.’ The Institute consisted of an intensive three-week exploration of practical techniques mixed with guiding theory concerning serving as an urban Principal. The content ranged broadly, beginning with a focus on the participants themselves via an exploration of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. The content then shifted to improving interpersonal communications, building strong relationships, and fostering greater teamwork, taking into account the differing

preferences and styles. Bryk and Schneider provide data that correlate a school's trust levels with its students' academic improvement (Gewertz 2002), so the Institute includes an examination of practices leading to building trust as a fundamental component.

{Sidebar for Theresa Battle about here – see below}

Next the Institute offered the participants a new way to look at organizational effectiveness by bringing the concept of the *Four Frames* work of Bolman and Deal (Bolman and Deal 1997). To ensure that the Institute had credibility – after all, these participants already had significant academic credentials and work experience – the design team used the RKMC grant money to secure the participation of instructors / facilitators with solid expertise. These include Barbara Tuckner (for the MBTI and team-building segment) and (Kent Peterson) for the Four Frames component. In addition, the Institute concentrated on avoiding replication of typical university-based courses. It included a mix of relatively generic content with content very specific to Saint Paul, including a chance to spend two days meeting the key administrative players in the District and learning about how their departments or projects contributed to the operation and success of the schools.

To further underscore the priority she placed on this development experience, Supt. Harvey took the strong step of making participation in

⁵ The concept of *district ownership* is one of the recommendations from the report *Better Leaders*

the Institute a prerequisite for consideration as a Principal in a Saint Paul school. That is, unless an applicant for a Principal position had significant experience elsewhere as an urban Principal, completion of the Institute served as an entrance requirement. Hess notes that bringing experienced leaders from other organizations, including business and the military as will not ‘address the long-term challenge of deepening the talent pipeline, enhancing accountability, and supporting practitioners’ (Hess 2003). Supt. Harvey intended to create just that kind of systemic change via the ‘talent pipeline’, driving it broadly and deeply into the District’s culture. She notes that in the plans used in elsewhere, “It was not the only way to become Principal, therefore you don’t get that *systemic* change.”

{Deb Henton sidebar about here – see below}

The District has offered the Leadership Institute each year since 2000. The fourth cohort completed its year-long activity in June 2004, while the fifth cohort completed the three-week summer segment the next month in July. Of the 113 participants in the first five cohorts, some sixty are now serving as Principals or Assistant Principals. And the District has filled virtually 100% of its openings for Principals with Institute Fellows.

for America’s Schools from the Broad Foundation.

Meanwhile, at the beginning of 2003, Supt. Harvey moved Dennis St. Sauver into the newly-formalized position of Executive Director of the Office of Leadership Development and Site-Based Improvement. “What I wanted to do was to pair leadership with site-based decision-making. The expansion beyond the Leadership Institute was a deliberate plan. First to take the idea across the District then to take it deep as opposed to starting out with small pilots that never get the chance to be systemic.” She also added another position – partially funded by the RKMC grant – for Associate Director Kate Wilcox-Harris.

Both of these people have extensive experience within the District as classroom teachers and as building Principals. Both also show a commitment to strengthening the Leadership Institute itself and to providing opportunities to a broader audience to achieve that systemic change.

As a consequence, they have modified the nature of the year-long Capstone Projects undertaken by the Institute participants to focus more explicitly on aspects of the District’s 2002-2005 Action Plan⁶. Indeed, one of that plan’s performance benchmarks specifies that

By 2005, a unified and expanded systemic leadership development process will prepare future principals, teacher leaders, administrators, and site council members to serve in leadership positions in the Saint Paul Public Schools.

Thus they have also expanded the breadth and depth of the Office's reach by adding three new complementary offerings - 360°-Feedback, a Core Curriculum, and Competency Coaching - all intended to create a stronger web of continuous support⁷.

The 360°-feedback program - open to all people within the District with positional leadership responsibilities or aspirations - offers those who participate as 'learners' the chance to get concrete and candid feedback about how others see their performance as leaders. It uses the competencies and clusters from District's Leadership Model as the 'gold standard.' The Core Curriculum consists of seven courses (8-to-12 hours each) specifically constructed to support the seven competency clusters. Finally, the Competency Coaching offers a more targeted approach matching someone who wants to work on a specific competency with someone with proven proficiency at that competency.

In addition, the Office continues to monitor the success of the its offerings. As a consequence, the 2004-5 version of the Institute employed a modified process to screen applicants and the Institute itself will see some content revisions bringing more focus to the organizational dynamics of leadership. The basic framework will remain the same, and the same anchoring instructors / facilitators will return to provide continuity. Further, the Office will this year launch a new evaluation

⁶ See http://www.spps.org/2002-05_Action_Plan.html for a copy of the Saint Paul Public Schools 2002-2005 Action Plan.

process to determine whether the Institute actually achieves its refocused intended outcomes.

Andy Xiong sidebar about here – see below

In 1999, Saint Paul Public Schools set out on a journey to increase the level of achievement of its students. One key element involved moving more decision making authority to the schools in order to increase their responsiveness and accountability. With the creation of the Leadership Institute and the subsequent addition of supporting offerings, the District has put in place a vehicle to better prepare Principals to step up to the challenges entailed in greater responsiveness and accountability. For the 2004-2005 school year, the District has promoted eight first-time Principals into buildings. All of them have been Fellows of its own Leadership Institute. Supt. Harvey understands the need to create a deep, systemic change. “All of us are connected to the Principals’ growth. The beauty of what we’ve created in St Paul is that everyone is invested in the success of everyone else.”

⁷ See <http://www.leadership.spps.org/> for information of the Office of Leadership Development within the Saint Paul Public Schools..

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Figure 1 – The Saint Paul Public Schools Leadership Model⁸

Character / Role Model

- Ethics and Values (22)
- Integrity and Trust (29)
- Composure (11)

Working Constructively with Others

- Informing (27)
- Presentation Skills (49)
- Interpersonal Savvy (31)
- Conflict Management (12)

Managing Staff

- Directing Others (20)
- Delegation (18)
- Building Effective Teams (60)
- Motivating Others (36)

Resourcefulness / Getting Things Done with Less

- Organizing (39)
- Planning (47)
- Priority Setting (50)
- Time Management (62)

⁸ The competencies included in the model are from the Leadership Architect[®] Copyright © 1992,

Getting Results

- Action Oriented (1)
- Timely Decision Making (16)
- Problem Solving (51)
- Drive for Results (53)

Creating and Leading the Vision

- Managing Vision and Purpose (65)
- Strategic Agility (58)
- Dealing with Ambiguity (2)
- Learning on the Fly (32)

Managing Constituencies Effectively

- Customer Focus (15)
- Political Savvy (48)
- Negotiating (37)
- Managing Diversity (21)
- Organizational Agility (38)

Sidebar for Deb Henton, Principal of Harding High School:

On looking forward to the Leadership Institute:

“I can remember initially thinking ‘I have to do this to become a principal?’ I had gotten my Bachelor’s degree, two Master’s degrees, and my Doctorate and I thought, ‘I need to go through this Institute?’ I have to say with all honesty even with all that training, all that formal education, I learned so much in the Leadership Institute about what was necessary to become a Principal that maybe I hadn’t learned in some of my other coursework. I learned in a different way, in a more specific way about what was needed to be a leader in Saint Paul.”

“I can remember thinking after the first couple days with my cohort that this was a really good thing and that even though there was a vast difference in levels of experience and education within the group that it was going to be very beneficial to me. I was having lots of fun while I was learning. I remember coming out of there like it was a life-changing experience and that this would definitely help establish me in my career and I think it has. I don’t think I could have done what I’ve done without those building blocks being there.”

On the impact it has had on her performance

“We were taught about the Four Frames [based on the work of Bolman and Deal] and that when you look at situations, you think about

those four frames and try to incorporate them into our daily work for our buildings. And I rely on that thinking so much. I think it really gave me a great focus for my first year as Principal. I can identify it, label it, understand what's happening and figure a way to make things work. Somehow that was conveyed in a meaningful enough way and connected to enough of our knowledge base that it has been long-lasting. When you're a new leader and you have so many things coming at you, and you can at least classify some of it, it helps ..."

"In my mind there is no doubt that the goals of the Institute as I see them have been accomplished for many people that have gone through the Institute. I think the goal is to give people a solid foundation in organizational philosophy, in understanding how an effective organization runs, in how to work with people, understanding symbolic interaction, and in giving administrators those necessary foundation skills so that they can then move achievement levels up in their buildings. And I believe if you look at the buildings where the achievement levels are going up, those people have been through the Institute ..."

"I think that the Institute is one of the reasons that I have that confidence [to take risks]. It gives you the confidence for believing what you say is valid and you can go on and take some risks. You have to be a secure leader, but you also have to be a leader that involves other people."

On the impact on the District as a whole

“Supt. Pat Harvey really articulated her vision when she came here and she has continued to do that. She has continued to shape it ... in the general big global terms, but then she’s also brought it down to the practical level. But she’s also given us lots of latitude ...”

“I think another thing that has been a side effect: there has developed I think a healthy competition between us as participants. That is, that we remain current, that we remain highly visible within the District, that our schools are achieving and functioning well, and that we are known as *leaders* within the District. I think it’s brought the bar up for everybody.”

“I think it institutionalized practices within our District. In other words, we learned about what is important to us, what it means to be Saint Paul Public Schools. It’s not just about your leadership skills, it’s about things you need to implement right when you get on the job.”

“I have another Assistant Principal who wants to get into the Institute and has interviewed three times and failed all three times. She’s new to me this year – she did not ask for any advice or support before she went into the interviews, and it was difficult because I was one of the interviewers. Knowing that she hadn’t asked for any help, and seeing her fail was pretty tough, but it led to a really candid conversation between the two of us. I’m trying right now to see that she gets every opportunity for professional development she possibly can.”

Sidebar for Theresa Battle, Principal of Highland Park Junior High School

On looking forward to the Leadership Institute:

“I was looking forward to the Leadership Institute because I’m a lifelong learner. Of course, there was a little moaning and groaning about ‘three weeks in the summer, in Minnesota, do I really want to be indoors ...’”

On the impact it has had on her performance

“I have a closer connection with about three members of my cohort, mostly secondary Principals because we’re facing some of the same issues. It becomes a sort of support network, and if you just want to bounce ideas off someone, they’re always ready to listen. And for the day-to-day nuts-and-bolts issues, it’s good to get a different perspective.”

“As a new Principal in that first year, it’s really about observing and listening. It may be difficult for some people who have been in the organization for a long time to see areas for some improvement, so my second year has been how to tap into their strengths and to build what they need to improve. They saw they were a fragmented school and wanted cohesiveness. About 90% of my job is having the right people, so I take very seriously new hires.”

“The Human Resource frame is my strength. For me it’s pretty automatic to see the best in a person – I don’t know that I’ve ever met

anybody I can't say something good about. So it's really natural for me to make connections with people. What's more difficult is the political landscape, trying to find out all the agendas and asking 'What is it that this person wants?' ... and then how to create a win-win situation."

"I rely on a lot of people. I believe that the people who have to do the work should be consulted on any decision – those that implement it should have a voice. But as a leader, I will make decisions after having all the information. I am the executive, and there are some executive decisions I will make."

On the impact on the District as a whole

"Another thing was the collaboration with people with the same goals (e.g., principalship) but coming at it from different perspectives. All of us took a different path to get to that Leadership Institute, and so it was interesting to see the different leadership styles. We have some administrators who were not teachers but had a passion for working with children. We have some that have come from industry and other from Districts outside of St Paul. We have one that had a military background who had extensive leadership training, and he brought a different perspective."

"I think it's a very unique opportunity and initiative in St Paul, I think because it focuses on leadership throughout the organization. We have professional development for teachers and principals, and now

they've extended that to central office personnel. It's about raising the level of leadership at every level throughout the district."

Sidebar for From Andy Xiong, Assistant Principal of Battle Creek
Environmental Magnet Primary School

On looking forward to the Leadership Institute:

“I wanted to move into an administrative position, but I kept thinking ‘you’re not ready.’ Now after completing the Leadership Institute, I feel ready.”

On the impact it has had on his performance

“For anyone to grow and develop professionally, you need to be more reflective and I think that’s where the District is moving. We need to not be complacent.”

“If people believe in you, then they’ll follow you. I really want to be collaborative, seeking input from others. And that’s reinforced by the District’s Site-Based efforts.”

“It’s not about attracting Hmong parents to become more active, but rather parents with time to be involved. The parents we have come here knowing it’s a school with high expectations and making progress, and everything else is secondary.”

“I think when people come in to see me, they are able to look beyond racial elements and we can work together. I’ve worked with all kinds of people, all kinds of parents and I’ve been blessed with the ability to work with them.”

On the impact on the District as a whole

“Saint Paul Public Schools is pretty unique in growing its own administrators – shaping them and molding them into leadership positions, and doing a good job of making sure that they look at people’s skills. They see potential and provide support and affirmation.”