

ESSENTIAL PRACTICES FOR SUPERINTENDENTS



The role of the superintendent in today's increasingly complex, competitive, and global economy must be to set the stage for student learning on a system-wide basis, not only to close achievement gaps between groups of students, but also to raise performance expectations for all students through a focus on twenty-first century skills.

Setting the stage includes focusing the core work of the district on the improvement of instructional practice and student learning, setting the direction and expectations for facilitating and monitoring adult implementation of agreed-on strategies and actions, as well as monitoring student progress and learning, providing time and structure for frequent collaborative conversations about the effectiveness of the instruction provided on student learning, engaging staff and the community in improving the teaching and learning process, implementing Board policies, and creating the processes, structures, and culture to support continuous improvement in adult and student learning across multiple dimensions.

Professor Mark H. Moore of the JFK School of Government at Harvard uses a strategic triangle to talk about the need for leaders to integrate three components when managing change associated with the implementation of complex improvement strategies: making strategic decisions based on the public value the organization is trying to create (i.e., moral purpose); managing the political environment so the organization obtains the resources and authority it needs to make improvement; and managing the operational capacity so that the organization can fulfill its organizational purpose and mission.



In effective districts and schools, this kind of improvement is not random. Rather, it is highly focused, beginning with an honest assessment of student data and the identification of academic weaknesses that must be addressed. It involves the development of leadership teams, targeted professional development, the alignment or realignment of resources to address identified weaknesses, and an internal accountability system for continuously monitoring whether instructional practices are having the desired effect on student performance.

These practices are reflected in findings released in September 2006 by the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) following a comprehensive analysis of 27 studies conducted since 1970 on the effect of district leadership on student achievement.