

## TRANSFORMING SCHOOL CULTURE

- The **Believers** are those who are committed to the learning of each student and who operate under the assumption that their efforts can make an enormous difference in that learning.
- The **Fundamentalists** are preservers of the status quo.
- The **Tweeners** are members of a staff who are typically new to a school and are attempting to learn its prevailing culture.
- The **Survivors** are those who have been so overwhelmed by the stress and demands of the profession that their primary goal becomes making it through the day, the week, and the year.

### Impact of Formal Meetings

Structured meetings give believers a platform to articulate their belief system. This helps combat what fundamentalists do during informal conversations. It also allows for sharing information and rational that satisfies the level one fundamentalists. The process can invigorate tweeners and reinforce their rational for choosing their career.

### Celebrating Success

Mohammad cites an example of a school where awards for leadership, curriculum, child advocacy, and creativity were given out every two weeks. The person receiving an award had two weeks to identify someone who deserved it next. Such celebrations need to be for real accomplishments. Students can be recognized for things like being on time or improving. Celebrations that are authentic and all-inclusive help build trust as teachers see a leader who is willing to honor others.

### Support for Tweeners

Grooming new teachers can be a catalyst for turning a toxic school into a healthy one. It should be the leader's top goal. A team of school members (believers) should be involved in the mentoring process. Leaders need to make it acceptable to struggle and to seek help. Professional development needs to be focused on areas in which new teachers struggle the most. They are: lesson planning, preparation and instruction, the creation of student portfolios, classroom management and discipline, and communication with parents.

### Collaboration to Avoid Isolation

A system of regular collaborative meetings helps avoid isolation and can serve to assist new teachers. They can compliment regular professional development sessions. Schools should use their own staff to teach others when possible. This gives believers an opportunity to push their beliefs and blunts the efforts of the fundamentalists who can only battle in the informal culture.

To build a practice of shared leadership, a school needs to form teams and give them significant responsibility, schedule regular meeting times, improve methods of communication, and find ways to implement shared decisions. When schools adopt shared leadership and decision making as an organizational practice, the role of the principal often changes dramatically

Districts can help set the stage for school change by helping schools use data effectively. Measuring progress and setting standards -- and analyzing the information to identify patterns of failure and their causes -- enables districts and schools to diagnose low performance and attack specific problems with concrete solutions. Important sources of data include: student test scores and portfolios of work; comparisons of school-wide achievement against district, state, and national standards; and surveys of students, teachers, and parents.

## **Working in Teams**

Effective teams are one of the key instruments of the Turning Points design. As schools are being asked to do more and more, the demands on schools and teachers are greater. Research has shown that successful schools create structures that allow teachers to collaborate on the challenges they face. Instead of working in isolated classrooms without interaction with their colleagues, teachers in successful schools come together to discuss ideas, share practices, and plan curriculum.



## **The Changed Role of the Principal**

In the new role, the principal recognizes that no one person in the building is the most knowledgeable or experienced practitioner. Rather, the principal is aware of the strengths of the staff and taps into each member's expertise to improve teaching and learning in the school. The principal works with the staff to develop a strong professional culture in which teachers continuously collaborate to ensure fulfillment of the school's vision.

### **FOCUS ON INTERCONNECTED AREAS**

The principal's new role focuses on five interconnected areas:

#### **1). Sharing decision-making power with staff and faculty**

The principal shares authority by providing meaningful opportunities for teachers to participate in significant decision making in academic teams, discipline-based teams, study groups, and the leadership team.

#### **2). Providing support for effective functioning of teams**

The principal ensures that teachers have the skills and understanding to participate effectively in teams. These skills include defining a purpose, setting measurable goals, creating norms for operating, setting agendas, and assigning tasks. The principal also gives ongoing feedback to teams, supporting and encouraging their work. Giving compliments and recognition to teams for their progress goes a long way towards supporting their work.

#### **3). Being an instructional leader who prompts others to continuously learn and improve their practice**

As the instructional leader, the principal often visits classrooms to work with teachers and students or attends academic team meetings to assist the development of effective teaching and learning strategies. In this role, the principal also obtains instructional resources and professional development opportunities that improve learning, teaching, and assessment practices.

## **There are a number of ways districts can help schools build strong and capable school teams:**

- ***Recruit qualified teachers enthusiastic for change.*** Some teachers have seen too many reform efforts come and go to support new initiatives wholeheartedly. To bring new life to its ranks, Chicago recruits and trains teachers in part through Teachers for Chicago, a two-year program sponsored by the Chicago Board of Education, the Chicago teachers' union, and the Golden Apple Foundation in collaboration with Loyola University. Participants desire to enter teaching but often do not have education certification. They work towards a Masters in Education while teaching in a Chicago public school. Carter Elementary School, a high-poverty school on Chicago's south side, is benefitting from the enthusiasm of four Teachers for Chicago: a lawyer, a social worker, a graphic artist, and a designer of museum exhibits. The program has recruited more than 500 teachers in Chicago.

States and districts can do much to work collaboratively with high schools and higher education agencies to help build a qualified teaching force. In 1984, to support a statewide reform agenda, South Carolina's then-Governor Richard Riley established the Teacher Cadet Program to recruit highly qualified young people into teaching. High school juniors and seniors from almost 150 schools in the state have the opportunity to teach younger students. In Cincinnati, the district is working to transform teacher education in partnership with the University of Cincinnati. Prospective teachers obtain degrees in education and from the College of Arts and Sciences and intern at schools where teachers are committed to continuing professional development.

- ***Promote buy-in.*** School reform cannot work unless the whole school staff is on board. In order to obtain the kind of consensus necessary to support school improvement, teacher contracts in Pittsburgh and Rochester require 60 percent of school faculty to approve school restructuring plans. Organizations such as New American Schools, which help schools to implement comprehensive school reform designs, require a majority of teachers to vote in favor of a model before working with schools.

Agreements with teachers' unions have increased some districts' capacity to create school environments supportive of change. Some districts allow teachers who are not willing to support reforms to transfer to other schools. In New York City, for example, the district can arrange priority transfers for teachers seeking positions in other schools. The teacher contract in Providence, Rhode Island, grants waivers so that teachers can opt out of newly redesigned schools. In Los Angeles, the teacher contract allows voluntary transfers from schools that are being restructured into charter schools.