Leading Schools of Character

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Head Heart & Hands

“Good character consists of understanding, caring about, and acting upon core ethical values”
Character Education Partnership
(www.character.org)

Challenges to Leading 21st Century Schools

- Mission confusion
- Counterproductive policy
- Authoritarian hierarchical structure
- Poor technology transfer
- Inadequate and off-target professional leadership development
- Ill-prepared or underprepared staff
- Morale

Outline:
The other head, heart and hand

- What do you need to know? “Getting it”
- Why care? “Prioritizing”
- How can you do it effectively?
  - The skills of leading schools of character

The Head: What do you need to know? “Getting it”

1. What is character?
2. What impacts character?
3. What is effective character education?
4. Understanding the central character role of schools.
5. How to lead organizational development.
Understanding organizational development

- It is the principal's job to shepherd organizational culture
- This includes the adult culture
- Need to think organizationally and long-term and developmentally
- It is a sign of adult intellectual development to think this way

An Example of a “Canny Outlaw” from Practical Wisdom by Schwartz and Sharpe

“If I were to highlight what I am most proud of, it would be the transformation from a PBIS school with ‘Meramec 5’ core virtues to a ‘Meramec 5’ character culture. Through studying and discussing, we slowly changed/refined practices to align with a culture that exemplifies our virtues. For the first two years, I did not drop from PBIS, but, as a school, we did not adhere to behavior mod and reward systems. It was slower than I would have liked, but they had to buy in.” Annette Isselhard, Principal of Meramec Elementary School

Amy Johnston (Francis Howell Middle School; NSOC) charted all the failing grades by teacher and course and distributed it to all the staff and asked them to see what they saw. This led to a study hall program that supported a zero tolerance policy for giving “zeros” for non-submitted homework.

Prioritization strategies

- Lead the charge; be the prophet
- Advocate for the vision
- Authentic delegation
- Navigating the 4Ws
  - Waiting you out
  - Work with the willing
  - Win ’em over
  - Winnow ’em out
- Set and monitor expectations

The Heart: Why should you care?

Prioritizing character education

1. Character is a fundamental purpose of education
2. Character education is good education: it promotes academic achievement

“My expectation became using class meetings to set norms and conducting them weekly to resolve climate issues. Teachers were expected to have class meetings in every classroom that year. I also had ‘conversational struggles’ with those teachers who were not buying into this approach of using student voice to positively affect climate. In a couple of cases, these conversations resulted in teachers leaving Chesterfield.” Jill Ramsey, Chesterfield Elementary School (NSOC)
"The daily meeting started everyday with the Jefferson family together, set the tone for the day's activities. It focused all on the single vision of building and environment through developing a single vision. Of everything I had to do as a principal, I rarely missed my daily meeting with the students. I made it a top priority." Mark Eichenlaub, former principal, Jefferson Elementary (Belleville, IL)

“This is obvious for all of us, as building leaders: we were responsible for keeping the ship headed in the right direction. Never backing off what was best for kids set the tone for all activities." Mark Eichenlaub, Jefferson Elementary School (NSOC)

Guard against “mission drift”
(Charles Elbot: Building an Intentional School Culture)

• You don’t have to be a road map, knowing all the destinations. You can’t.
• Just be a compass – always pointing in the right direction. Each destination that is reached will allow you to see a little farther down the road”

The Hand: What can you do?

Leadership is the most important ingredient in successful school reform. It requires skill.

The skills of leading schools of character

• Walk the talk
• Human relations expert
• Pedagogy of empowerment

Walking the Talk

• You are the lead role model in the school; so be the character you want to see in others
• Be a servant leader
• Put your resources where your mouth is: invest in professional development
• Be the expert: be an instructional leader for character education
The Analogy

teacher is to student
principal is to teacher

Modeling Character

- Be the character you want to see in your students and staff
- You must be caring, respectful, responsible, fair, honest, etc.

Patrick McEvoy, principal of Bayless High School, routinely told students and staff that if they had an idea for character education, he would find the resources, even if he had to cut in other areas.

He says he is like a Hollywood producer.

Servant Leadership (Greenleaf)

- "The servant leader is servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. That person is sharply different from one who is leader first... The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served... The best test... is: Do those served grow as persons?"

Servant Leadership (Keith, 2001)

- "A servant-leader is simply a leader who is focused on serving others. A servant-leader loves people, and wants to help them. The mission of a servant-leader is therefore to identify and meet the needs of others. Loving and helping others give a servant-leader meaning and satisfaction in life" (p. 9)

Key Practices of Servant Leadership (Keith, 2001)

- Self-awareness
- Listening to others
- Change the pyramid of power: Be "first among equals"
- Develop your colleagues
- Coach, don't control
- Unleash the energy and intelligence of others
- Foresight
Be a Trust Builder

• Bryk & Schneider: What builds trust?
  - Respect (Listen and act on what you hear)
  - Go beyond job for others
  - Be competent in your core responsibilities
  - Personal integrity (Be trustworthy, act from ethical principles, put children first)

Be a Trust Builder

• Tschannen-Moran: What builds trust?
  - Benevolence
  - Honesty
  - Openness
  - Reliability
  - Competence

Be a Trust Builder

• Tschannen-Moran: What builds trust?
  - Use a "professional orientation"
    - Give teachers discretion
    - Trust teachers
    - Be flexible
    - Share power
    - Support teacher learning and autonomy
  - NOT a "bureaucratic orientation"
    - Constrained communication
    - Micromanagement
    - Too many rules
    - Distrust of teachers

Human Relations Expert

• This may be the single most important role of the leader…and the most neglected
  - Model and teach courageous conversations
  - Strategically and intentionally foster relational trust; focus on relationships
  - Selection and evaluation

What you MUST know: and they never taught you….

• Your own communication strengths and weaknesses.
• How to show empathy to other people.
• How to listen and respond appropriately
• How to give and receive feedback
• How to resolve conflicts and problem-solve
• How to facilitate a group
• How to demonstrate cultural sensitivity
• How to handle the media
• How to communicate formally when necessary

• "I hired staff who cared about students and who believed that character development was the core of all instruction."  Rima Vesilind, West Potomac High School
Pedagogy of Empowerment

- Make your school a laboratory for democracy
- Empower ALL voices: be invitational
- Institute collaborative decision-making
- Transform faculty meetings

For Kristen Pelster (Ridgewood Middle School, NSOC) the biggest influence on her school was "creating and implementing character/leadership classes for students that empower ALL students to lead and created autonomy and a sense of belonging in the school."

"I led a school community retreat - 4 half days during which every staff member, many parents and several interested community members participated - to determine our core values, our concerns, and suggestions for change." Rima Vesilind, Woodley Hills Elementary School (NSOC)

Karen Smith (Principal, Mark Twain Elementary School) implemented the Navigator Buddy program, where each staff person was a buddy for an at risk student. It was a great resource when the father of her buddy killed his wife and then himself when her buddy and his brother were in the home. "The advantage was the close relationship I had with XXX that helped me meet his needs and help family members (who I had never met) transition both boys into the new life they would be beginning."

The Transformation:

National and Local Impact
Since 2008:

- LOCAL: 72% of all NSOCs in the St. Louis region are led by a LACE graduate (41/57)
- NATIONAL: 23% of all US NSOCs are in the St. Louis region and led by a LACE graduate (41/178)
Leadership Academy in Character Education (LACE)
(1) U. of MO- St. Louis/(2) Alverno College (WI)
- Twelve month training for school leaders (n=30)
- Monthly full day meetings
- National experts/workshop leaders
- Peer support and sharing
- Development of site-specific implementation/assessment plan
- “Starter” character education resource set
- Monthly site team collaborative reflection assignments
- Expert critical feedback/mentoring
- Attendance at character education conference

National Schools of Character (NSOC)
Bold indicates school was led by a LACE Grad.
Italics indicates member of CHARACTERplus but not led by LACE Grad.

1998-2004
Pattonville High School, Pattonville School District (1998)*

2005
One winner
Jefferson Elementary, Belleville School District #118

2006
Two winners
Ridgewood Middle School, Fox School District
Rockwood School District

2007
No winners

2008
Four Winners (out of 11 nationally)
Chesterfield Elementary School, Rockwood
Francis Howell Middle School
Lindbergh School District
Sappington Elementary School, Lindbergh
Valley Park Middle School*
2009
Three Winners (out of 10 nationally)
Bayless Junior High School
Fox School District
Long Elementary School, Lindbergh

2010
2 Winners (out of 3) (out of 15 nationally)
Kehrs Mill Elementary School, Rockwood
Seckman High School, Fox
Sullivan Primary School, Sullivan*

2011
13 NSOCs (out of 14) (out of 44 nationally)
Babler Elementary (Rockwood)
Bowles Elementary (Rockwood)
Crestwood Elementary (Lindbergh)
Fox Middle School (Fox)
Guffey Elementary (Fox)
Kellison Elementary (Rockwood)
Lincoln Elementary (Troy)
Lindbergh High (Lindbergh)
Mark Twain Elementary (Brentwood)
Renfro Elementary (Collinsville, IL)*
St. Louis Charter School
Woithe Elementary (Rockwood)

2012
5 MO NSOCs (out of 6) (out of 25 nationally)
Brentwood Middle School (Brentwood)
Ellisville Elementary School (Rockwood)
Northview High School (SSD)
Plattin Primary School (Jefferson R-7)
Ross Elementary School (Parkway)
Truxwein Elementary (Mehlville)*
1 IL NSOC
Henry Raab Elementary School (Belleville 118)

2013
(5 out of 9 in MO; 5 out of 29 nationally)
Independence Elementary, Francis Howell School District
Beasley Elementary School, Mehlville School District
Bierbaum Elementary School, Mehlville School District
Hagemann Elementary School, Mehlville School District
Mehlville High School, Mehlville School District
Chesterfield Elementary School, Rockwood School District
LaSalle Springs Middle School, Rockwood School District
Discovery Ridge Elementary, Wentzville School District
Jefferson City Academic Center, Jefferson City School District

2014
(9 out of 17 in MO; 9 out of 44 nationally)
Bernard Middle School, Mehlville
Blades Elementary School, Mehlville
Blevins Elementary School, Rockwood
Ladue Middle School, Ladue
Lindbergh Schools
McKeeley Elementary, Parkway
Mehlville School District
Oakville Elementary School
Oakville Middle School
Neosho High School, SSD
Lindbergh School District
Margaret Buerkle Middle School, Mehlville
Mehlville School District
Oak Brook Elementary, Parkway
Oakville Middle, Mehlville
Sperreng Middle School, Lindbergh
Sherwood Elementary School