



Balanced Leadership Crucial for Success

With change coming, school leaders need to exhibit adaptive and technical leadership

At the WASB August Workshops, the Governance and Leadership Development (GoLD) team provided a broad overview of the whole system change that is taking place in Wisconsin. This change includes new standards for students, teachers, and administrators; new assessments; and new accountability.

The GoLD team also discussed how these reforms fit the Key Work of School Boards framework that we use to talk about the board's and superintendent's role in improving student achievement. In particular, these reforms fit into the right side of the framework, which focuses on the technical aspect of leadership — the stuff that needs to get done.

What we focused on only in passing, is the importance of the left side of the diagram in successful implementation of these new reforms. The left side focuses on adaptive leadership — the concepts and conditions you create so teachers, administrators and students can do the work. This work is going to be different than what was done in the past — that means careful attention needs to be paid to adaptive leadership if you expect to be successful.

In other words, you need to keep the framework in balance. And thus far — in more than 30 years of educational reform that has brought us standards, assessments and accountability — we have paid scant attention to adaptive leadership,

instead focusing on the technical side of things. But, focusing on the technical side alone will not bring out the changes we are seeking.

Research from the education and business worlds bears this out.

Michael Fullan, a leading scholar on educational reform makes the case that countries that use accountability as a major driver of change are not successful.

Accountability is important, just not the main thing. Better to focus on the climate you create for staff and students to do the work: creating the conditions for capacity building, engagement and trust.

In *The Harvard Business Review*, Boris Groysberg and Michael Slind talk about leadership as a conversation. They maintain that globalization, new technologies and the need for organizations to create value have changed the focus of leadership. Top-down, directive leadership no longer works. Instead, leaders

who can engage with their stakeholders, both internal and external, are more likely to achieve success.

Some school districts in Wisconsin are taking this approach and seeing results. The WASB has created a web page just for their stories. Visit our web page “Creating Conditions for Success” (*see QR code*) to see how school boards across Wisconsin are intentionally creating a climate that supports teaching and learning; one that will better ensure successful implementation of whole system reform.

So, bring the adaptive side of the framework into your work. Create a climate of continuous improvement. Provide staff time to collaborate and work in professional learning communities (and do the same as a board). Continuously ask the question, “How is this decision going to improve student performance?”

Remember, whether you are intentional or not, you are creating a climate. Create one that serves our students and our communities, and provides the best opportunities for whole system reform to succeed. ■

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Add your story ...

If you would like to add your story to the *Creating Conditions for Success* webpage, email your story to Deb Gurke, Director of Governance and Leadership Development, dgurke@wasb.org.

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Creating Conditions for Success



Whole System Reform Resources