Moving Toward a New View of Leadership

“The force of leadership distributed across many team members has a powerful impact on student achievement.”

One day in June 2012, as I hurried toward the TSA screening area on my way to Washington, D.C., I saw that the line was long, and I started worrying about missing my flight. I could see the usual assortment of business passengers on their cell phones, a couple of families headed toward vacation, and a few other people I could not classify as easily. Most passengers seemed a little impatient or apprehensive, as they usually do, but I looked to the front of the line and noticed that the atmosphere up front was unusually jovial. I was intrigued.

As I got closer to the checkpoint, I started to understand what was going on. I heard the TSA attendant ask with a huge grin, “Mr. Nelson, how are you doing today?” “I’m doing okay,” the passenger smiled back. “Well, I hope you have a great day,” she responded pleasantly. When the next passenger arrived at her checkpoint, she said, “Don’t you look nice today, Ms. Weiss.” “Well, you just made my day,” the lady responded. “Travel safe,” the attendant offered with another smile.

This continued with every person in line. Everyone was affected by the attendant’s cheerfulness, kindness, and personal acknowledgement. When I handed her my driver’s license, I was already smiling after observing the exchanges for five minutes. “Mr. Edwards, I hope you have a great trip,” she said as she looked me in the eye. “Thank you,” I replied. “You need to lead training sessions for all the TSA staff.”
As I walked toward my gate, I thought about the impact of this one person on an environment that is often tense and aggravating. Because she was conducting mundane business with a personal touch and a smile, she was easily the best TSA person I had ever encountered. She was positively influencing passengers and modeling how to do the job for colleagues, all on her own initiative.

Although I doubt that she would match the generally accepted definition of a leader because she did not rank highly in the organization, to me she was clearly demonstrating leadership in action.

**Learning about Leadership**

My parents, both excellent career educators, immersed my siblings and me in a mixture of love, work ethic, and humor that has been part of my leadership makeup ever since. Based on a deep sense of honor for older, younger, and newer family members that shaped our daily lives, a connected family dynamic and cultural condition helped define us. From childhood on, educators and family members helped me learn to lead, so I have long viewed leadership opportunities as a natural part of my culture and a core personal value.

My formal leadership training began in 1988, when I was a graduate student at Vanderbilt University. I read Max De Pree’s *Leadership Is an Art* and was impressed by his concepts of participatory leadership and culture as the driving force in organizations. I studied Roland Barth’s work on learning, sharing, and collaborating as the foundations of school improvement. The work of Michael Fullan and Margaret Wheatley on organizational design made me an enthusiastic believer in the power of shared leadership and the science of organizational flow. Jonathan Kozol’s emphasis on the moral imperative to serve our nation’s most needy children and Malcom Gladwell’s books on the psychology of societal evolution stirred my soul and further influenced my view of the responsibilities of leadership.

One of my first administrative assignments was as principal of Bay Haven Basics Plus Elementary School in Sarasota County, Florida, where I was fortunate to work with a superintendent, Chuck Fowler, who believed strongly in shared decision making and leading with courtesy and kindness, and who became—and still is—my mentor.

Later, when I was principal of Northfield Elementary in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, I worked with a great teacher, Jennifer Knox, who modeled the power
Moving Toward a New View of Leadership

of leadership at the teacher level. She was a constant “can do” force for the whole school, taking on more than her share of tough-to-teach kids because she was always able to reach them. One day, a social worker brought us a foster child who had been abused and passed around and who had serious behavior problems. Although Mrs. Knox already had a larger class than the other teachers, I knew she was the best person in the school to help the new little girl, Amy.

I talked it over with her and took Amy along to her classroom. When we arrived, Mrs. Knox said for all the students to hear, “Mr. Edwards, thank you so much! The girls were just saying that we have too many boys in this class, and we will love having you, Amy. Come on in here, and let’s get you ready to go. Great news, class, this is Amy! Let’s give her a big cheer!” I walked back down the hall knowing that Amy would thrive—and she did.

When I served as the superintendent in Henrico County, Virginia, our leadership team read Linda Lambert’s Building Leadership Capacity in Schools and Margaret Wheatley’s Leadership and the New Science, both of which profoundly impacted us personally and collectively. The ideas in those books drove us to accelerate our leadership capacity-building effort by designing ongoing leadership “pathways” for teachers.

Since 2007, I have been the superintendent of the Mooresville Graded School District (MGSD) in Mooresville, North Carolina, outside of Charlotte. As a principal, dean, and superintendent, I have observed leadership in schools, school systems, grade levels, departments, classrooms, communities, and organizations and consistently noted the impact of leaders on the culture of each group. My view of leadership has evolved and broadened beyond the general definition of school leadership, which focuses on strong individual leadership by principals and superintendents. Today, the evolving education ecosystem requires that school leaders grow their skills in the context of the needs of students and teachers and immerse themselves in the study and practice of distributed leadership as an art and science.

My many experiences with leaders at all levels have influenced me greatly, and I have used them to help build leaders during my career. I have learned over the years to encourage the unique talents of teachers and staff and move them toward leadership roles, to bring the maximum force to bear on improving student achievement.

Dr. Vicki Wilson, a colleague from the time I worked in Henrico County, said to me recently, “Mark, you’ve been implementing a different view of leadership for years, in all your different positions.” It took me some time to consciously formulate my view of leadership, but I gradually began to realize that leadership
like that shown by the TSA attendant—distributed throughout the organization and delivered at the point of service—is the most powerful and effective.

Today I consciously apply new leadership principles in my own work and try to foster them in others. I work with many teachers, principals, students, custodians, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, school board members, community members, and office staff who demonstrate leadership at their points of service, create positive experiences for others, and model the best way to do their jobs.

**LEADERSHIP VOICE**

**Learning about Gratitude**

_by Rebecca T. Miller_

*Editor-in-Chief, School Library Journal*

After the panel, . . . Edwards . . . greeted me by saying, “Thank you for your leadership.” No one has ever said those particular words to me, and I would be surprised if many school librarians hear them often, if ever. The phrase articulated gratitude for past actions, and perhaps more importantly, expectation.

I thought about the gap between the many school librarians who are already leaders, and the administrators who may not know the potential role of these players in making better schools. This is the largest challenge facing this profession.

**Effective Leadership Is Shared**

At MGSD, hundreds of visitors come to study our digital conversion initiative every year, and their most frequent observation is not about our one-to-one technology or our digital tools but about our shared leadership, because we believe that leadership extends way beyond a few individuals. Today, leaders throughout MGSD influence our instructional practice and our school and district culture, to the benefit of every student.

Individuals and teams demonstrate frontline leadership by striving for greatness—taking the initiative to solve problems or improve processes. We encourage everyone to lead, and we recognize our leaders, subscribing to the belief that if we all lift, we will all be lifted.
VISITOR FEEDBACK  “You seem to have leaders all over the place—teachers, principals, assistant principals, and other staff. So many leaders are creating a flow of energy—I can feel it.”

—Pat Greco
Superintendent, Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin

Our nation’s schools are called on to address more complicated challenges than ever before and in circumstances where accountability is a must. One or two people at the top of an organization cannot successfully lead such an enormous effort. We must develop broad and deep leadership that is available to all in order to build the energy to drive us forward.

I believe that other schools and districts can replicate our collective leadership model with outstanding leaders who reach into classrooms, hallways, school buses, cafeterias, and every other corner of school life, no matter whether the task is to manage budgets, clean schools, feed students, build community, or improve student performance. With the enormous challenges of change...
management and digital conversion, multiple leaders are essential to this new way of life in our schools.

**VISITOR FEEDBACK**  “Ask most district administrators today what their core mission is, and they likely will cite improving teaching and learning in schools. Teachers expect their superintendents to make decisions that support their work with students. Families expect their district leaders, along with principals and teachers, to provide their children with the highest quality education possible.

“These expectations, combined with increasing accountability demands at the federal and state levels, have resulted in districts having to transition from being bureaucratic and compliance-focused to being mission-driven and results-focused.

“Adding to the challenge and complexity of this shift is the ever-changing impact that technology is having on how our students learn and, consequently, how we must teach and lead in response. Gone are the days of teachers being the sole source of knowledge for students to rely on. Now they are brokers of multiple sources of information, coaching and facilitating students as they learn how to be responsible, critical consumers of the information they find.

“Gone, too, are the days of leaders focusing merely on leading. Today’s district leaders must focus on re-culturing their systems. Re-culturing goes far beyond altering structures and policies—or even reallocating resources. It demands that leaders clearly communicate a vision for what can be, along with tangible strategies that engage staff and, more importantly, help them experience that change is possible. It is only through changing people’s experiences that we ultimately change their beliefs. Re-culturing, then, can occur only when the adults within a school district have a shared vision, strategy, and belief system for helping all students learn.

“Districts like Mooresville serve as models for what re-culturing can do—for both students and staff. Learning, teaching, and leading become more dynamic, collaborative, and personalized, with the emphasis being on asking the right questions rather than only knowing the right answers. This happens over time, however, and requires courage, self-reflection, tenacity, and an unrelenting belief in ourselves and our students.”

—Dr. Susan Enfield
Superintendent, Highline School District, Burien, Washington
As I hurried down the hall at Park View Elementary, I turned the corner and saw a little boy in tears and a little girl comforting him. “What’s the matter?” I asked them. “Jerry got lost on his way to the office,” said the little girl. “But I told him I can show him the way, and it’s going to be okay. I told him I got lost when I was in kindergarten, but now that I’m in first grade I know my way around, and I know where the office is. You don’t have to keep walking with us.” As I walked on to the meeting, I knew I had just seen the impact of leadership on both of these young learners.

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Chapter 1

Distributed Leadership and High-Performance Teaching and Learning

“High-performance teaching and learning are not possible with just one or two leaders at the top of an organization.”

In the fall of 2012, Robin Melton, principal of East Mooresville Intermediate School, was walking out of the media center at her usual fast pace two days before school started, when she hit a slick spot on a newly waxed floor, fell, and fractured her vertebrae. Robin had done a tremendous job as principal, leading change, focusing on every student, and developing capacity and leadership in the faculty. The assistant principal, Jason Gardner, had been in his new role for only a few weeks.

The faculty and staff rose to the occasion, supporting Jason and the student body with collective leadership to fill in for Robin. The grade-level chairs stepped up their efforts to support their colleagues and each other. Jason immediately took a leadership role, and the staff was right there with him.

East Mooresville Intermediate School did not miss a beat in a situation that might have caused serious problems in many other schools. Everyone responded to the unexpected, nimbly and collectively. High-performance teaching and learning carried on without interruption, and the students recognized it.
In the Mooresville Graded School District (MGSD), we have many leaders—principals, teachers, custodians, central office staff, clerical workers, bus drivers, technology staff, child nutritionists, cafeteria workers, parents, students, and community members. This shared leadership brings a clarity and momentum to our work—what I call “high-performance teaching and learning.”

We have leaders in every aspect of our daily work who influence everyone around them with their powerful enthusiasm and support. High-performance teaching and learning are not possible with just one or two leaders at the top of an organization. At MGSD, distributed leadership directly impacts student achievement every day.

What Is Distributed Leadership?

Distributed leadership in schools means that every employee, every community member, and every student has the opportunity to lead and is expected to lead—and that leadership is not solely reserved for those at the top.

In many organizations, leadership roles are set in stone, and others have little opportunity to lead. But we have found that if we reverse the mind-set and proactively encourage leadership—with both opportunities and expectations—many individuals and teams step up to the challenge. Distributed leadership moves beyond the traditional definition to a new way of thinking about how we lead in our schools.
Leaders at Every Level

Distributed leadership—also known as shared, collective, ubiquitous, or inclusive leadership—is found throughout our district because we have consciously built our culture on a distributed leadership model.

Teachers lead students with enthusiasm and love. Principals and other administrators lead in classrooms, hallways, and cafeterias, modeling attention to the work of the day. Student leaders help to establish a collective work ethic and a caring environment that sets the tone.

Custodians go the extra mile to influence the environment in which we work. Bus drivers know all the students and encourage them on a daily basis. Community members are active on many advisory boards. Community foundations support a variety of needs, and numerous community and civic organizations provide a collective lift that we feel and count on every day.

VISITOR FEEDBACK  “Great leaders understand the only way to embed change is by including others in the journey. Bringing change across a district is hard work. Internal momentum is obvious in MGSD, but so is momentum from working and sharing with districts from around the nation. The deep sense of team is making learning happen for students and staff.”

—Dr. Pat Greco
Superintendent of Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin, and Member of the League of Innovative Schools

Roving Leaders

As described in *Every Child, Every Day*, teachers in MGSD operate as “roving conductors,” moving around the classroom to orchestrate student work. Similarly, “roving leaders”—principals, assistant principals, central office leaders, teacher leaders, and others—orchestrate students and adults throughout our schools.

Roving leaders are there to step in whenever needed, help new staff members, and encourage students. They provide situational coaching and developmental direction for students and staff, who need encouragement from principals, assistant principals, and other leaders all the time.

Daily life in schools can be rife with distractions and conflict that make it difficult to sustain the rhythm of striving for excellence. To counteract these
CHAPTER 1

forces, MGSD roving leaders stay visible, reinforce the culture of collective problem solving, and support the high-performance teaching and learning environment. If principals, superintendents, and other school leaders are highly visible and students see them in their classrooms and hallways every day, the messages are clear:

Roving Leader Messages

- This is where the action is.
- You—students and teachers—are my top priority.
- Stay focused.
- This is what matters.

The Impact of Distributed Leadership

In our schools today, we need to go beyond the traditional view of leadership, which assumes that large groups of people will follow the instructions of one or two people at the top and success will automatically follow. In fact, the opposite is generally
true. At MGSD, we have adopted a culture of collective leadership because it leads to high-performance teaching and learning and greater student success.

Most schools and school systems try to build teamwork and collegiality. But I believe that MGSD’s mission of sharing leadership responsibility has gone one step further and directly impacted student performance.

**Peak-Performance Teaching and Learning**

Good tennis players see the ball unusually clearly and hit almost every shot exactly where they want it to go. In team sports such as basketball, high-caliber athletes can reach amazing new levels of teamwork, functioning as one rather than as a group. Athletes achieve this “peak-performance zone” only after much practice and application. The same is true with teaching and learning.

When our constant efforts result in peak-performance teaching and learning, we have the feeling that everything is going right. At MGSD, many leaders work together to create high-performance zone conditions for individuals, groups, and teams, where the shared synergy enhances learning and workflow.

The efforts of employees “click” in a new way when people are influenced by the synergy of shared support and leadership. A new atmosphere develops, where everyone is called on to give his or her best because everyone is a leader. The feeling is contagious, and we are all able to take our game to new heights.

**MGSD Four-Year Cohort Graduation Rate by Subgroup, 2005–2013**

![Graduation Rate Chart](chart.png)
Because leaders are everywhere, the distributed leadership model influences every corner of school life. Everyone is inspired to join in and weave high-performance elements, such as the following, into every aspect of daily culture:

**Elements of High-Performance Teaching and Learning**

- Digital resources for research, projects, personal work, and collaboration
- An interactive, fluid, and highly focused student and staff culture
- A personal quest for excellence that incorporates data and offers nurturance to others
- An evolving systemic team
- A shared emphasis on learning
- A constant focus on student achievement

**Increased Visibility**

One or two leaders with limited visibility cannot create a high-performance teaching and learning zone. Traditional and hierarchical leaders are not only less visible to others, they are often unaware of what is going on in their schools because they are removed from much of the daily activity.

At MGSD, leaders are visible everywhere and engaged everywhere. They influence others while looking at school activity from different angles and bringing a variety of leadership perspectives to our collective work. They strive to be present as well as visible, in order to bring their leadership skills to bear on every situation they encounter.

**Positive Social Context**

Although distributed leadership is not widely practiced in schools, it is far from a new concept, and its benefits have been noted across many types of organizations. In *Leadership Is an Art*, businessman and author Max De Pree writes that in an inclusive work environment, employees feel needed, involved, and cared about as individuals. They are also treated fairly, able to take risks, believe that others try to understand their concerns, and feel that they are part of any success. When these attitudes and feelings are present, organizations flourish.
We have consciously nurtured these feelings at MGSD in order to create a positive social context in our classrooms and hallways that benefits employees and ultimately students.

**Resilience and Perseverance**

In MGSD's digital conversion initiative, distributed leadership has helped us build resilience and perseverance in spite of obstacles. Our journey toward personalized learning and digital tools has been full of challenges, but an abundance of leaders from throughout the community has allowed us to navigate the difficulties.

In our first years, many staff members had doubts, and some predicted failure, but more and more gradually caught the fever, supported by their colleagues. As a result, the resistance faded over time.

We prepared our staff for the turbulence that comes with change by telling people to hold together to ride it out. Maintaining focus throughout the change process was hard, and when turbulence hit, it was even harder. But when employees hit a bump in the road, they did not have to go up the chain of command to find a solution. They could be confident that a leader was nearby to help, and, as a result, they became more and more resilient when new problems came up.

Collectively, we were able to deal with the challenges promptly and move forward together, with renewed confidence in the effectiveness of our teamwork approach. Our distributed leadership model pushed leaders out into halls and classrooms to provide support and solve problems as needed.

**VISITOR FEEDBACK**  "In MGSD, what you see are daily actions from all members of the community exhibiting critical leadership, which have resulted in increased student achievement through active student engagement. A positive school culture is the most powerful indicator of just how far school can go when everyone is considered, valued, and viewed as a leader!"

—Dr. S. Dallas Dance
Superintendent, Baltimore County Schools, Maryland

**Shared Joy and Happiness**

When schools work with students in a peak-performance zone driven by shared leadership, the result is shared joy and happiness. As described by Max De Pree,
most successful organizations enjoy a common bond of interdependence, mutual interest, interlocking contributions, and simple joy. Part of the art of leadership is to ensure that this bond is maintained and strengthened. This is our goal at MGSD.

At MGSD, teachers take great pleasure and pride in students’ success. They have told me hundreds of times that they love our students and think they are great, building a powerful sense of family and shared happiness. And the students are motivated to live up to their teachers’ words of praise.

When students have teachers who smile and laugh with them, they feel connected to their teachers and want to learn from them and with them. When I was the principal of Northfield Elementary School in Tennessee, a second-grade boy told me, “We like to hear you laugh in our class, and Mrs. Duggin does too.” Students love to laugh, and laughter helps to build bonds and overcome struggles.

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LEADERSHIP VOICE

A Family of Colleagues

By Felicia Bustle

Principal, Mooresville Intermediate School

I have been very fortunate at MGSD to be surrounded by leaders who lead by example and from the heart. We are a family and share a mutual respect for one another.

Our executive director of elementary schools, Crystal Hill, has walked by my side from the day I began. She has mentored and encouraged me and modeled the type of leader I wanted to be. Scott Smith, our chief technology officer, has been gracious and supportive, setting expectations for our use of technology and modeling how the digital conversion should look. I learned a lot from Scott, not through directives and instructions, but on walkthroughs that we took together and from discussions of our observations.

I have taken the same approach with my own staff at Mooresville Intermediate School. We are a family here, too. I lead by example, and staff members know that I would never ask something of them that I would not be willing to do myself. We care for one another and treat each other with respect and dignity. We recognize that serious conversations may be needed at times, but always with the best interests of the students in mind.
Meeting Today’s Challenges

Today’s schools are facing multiple challenges that call for a new view of leadership. If we can rethink the traditional view that schools need only a few leaders at the top, we will be better positioned to meet those challenges and help our students succeed. I believe that high-performance teaching and learning driven by second-order, distributed leadership may be the only way to survive and thrive in many school districts today.

In order to address digital evolution, complex accountability standards, and shrinking budgets, we must develop strong leadership cultures to lift, pull, prod, cheer, and run with our teachers and staffs as they embrace their work and move toward high-performance teaching and learning.

Managing Change

School districts all over the United States are providing students and teachers with tablets or laptops and digital content, as we have done at MGSD, in the hope of enhancing teaching and learning. But many observers are urging caution because success rests on a multitude of factors beyond technology alone that interact and influence each other. (The interplay of MGSD success factors is outlined in my book *Every Child, Every Day.*)

Research suggests that one factor influencing success in this new environment is a deep understanding of change management and that change management requires leaders at all levels.

VISITOR FEEDBACK  "Less than one percent of the schools in the initial Project RED study met our standard success criteria. Highly complex new digital environments in schools must address the challenges of change management, and it takes leaders in lots of places to make that happen—in finance, technology, infrastructure, content, curriculum, classrooms, professional development, local community, and more."

—Tom Greaves, Jeanne Hayes, Leslie Wilson, Michael Gielniak, & Rick Peterson

*The Technology Factor: Nine Keys to Student Achievement and Cost-Effectiveness*

At MGSD, we had to make some tough decisions and ultimately let some staff go. It is important to remember that carrying out the work of change...
management and leading transformation requires individual leadership and organizational backbone.

**Serving the Community**

At MGSD we believe in the importance of leadership development—for students as well as teachers. One example is the REACH Club, which gives young people the opportunity to work together in a world fellowship dedicated to service and international understanding. The objective is to develop initiative and leadership, to provide experience in living and working within a community, and to serve the school and community.

The club also helps students build GPAs, determine which courses to take for college, and fill out college applications. Students complete several service projects in the community each year to help improve their leadership skills.

**LEADERSHIP VOICE**

**Going the Extra Mile**

*By Samone Graham*

*Mooresville High School Biology Teacher Leader, REACH Club Advisor, and Mooresville NAACP President*

I grew up in Mooresville, and I remember when a lot of students who needed extra help did not get it. Today, everyone in the biology department has made a commitment to do whatever it takes to help every student, and we take turns to stay after school and offer tutoring sessions. We want every student to know that we care and we are just not going to let them fail.

When I got involved with the Mooresville NAACP, I told the officers that we have to reach out to students who might not have the support or role models at home. And that is exactly what we are doing. I am so proud of our students. They know that when we push them, we do it because we care.

Back when our graduation rate for minority students was in the 50 percent range, we all knew that was not acceptable, and when we hit 98 percent for African-American students, I could see the difference in the students’ eyes. Every day we have to stay on it, and we will.
Doing More with Less

In our schools today, we are asking teachers, principals, superintendents, and school boards to do much more with less. In the new world of education, with its evolving accountability and funding challenges, schools need both broad and focused leadership to encourage staff to rise to the challenges and to provide training where needed.

At MGSD, the expectation is that every student in every class will be a successful learner, despite smaller budgets, larger class sizes, a more transient and changing community, and a constantly evolving digital conversion. Our staff has risen to the occasion, shown tremendous initiative, come up with new solutions to problems, and moved into new leadership roles.

Weathering the Storms

Our culture of distributed leadership helps us to weather ongoing storms. Leaders help everyone navigate a high-demand, high-expectation culture and face the challenges of complacency. This is hugely valuable in a time of ever tighter budgets.

Initiative in Action

When our staff development funds were almost completely cut out of the budget, two teachers stepped up to the plate. Tracey Waid and Meghan McGrath became tech facilitators at Mooresville High School and Mooresville Middle School, respectively, providing much-needed support for staff learning in a time of funding challenges.

They became powerful leaders of both teachers and students. Working with individual teachers and teams, they now demonstrate how to use new digital content and model project- and inquiry-based learning methodologies. They also team teach with colleagues, helping them to learn on the job, and they offer a powerful collaborative learning model for students.

Tracey and Meghan are huge influencers who emerged as leaders when roles changed. Two other technology facilitators struggled with the changing demands of the job, but Tracey and Meghan embraced their roles as leaders, promoting innovation to the faculty and modeling collaboration. This change took time, but the result has been improved productivity, cost-effectiveness, and skills all around.
We have faced some tough times in terms of public education funding in North Carolina. Our teachers have not had a raise in five years, although we expect this situation will soon be remedied, and teacher morale in the state has dropped. At MGSD, teachers and staff lift each other up and cheer each other on, and this helps us face the challenges every day. Teachers, staff, and administrators step into their work with energy, enthusiasm, and passion.

A few years ago, we lost the funding to pay our teachers to stay after school and offer extra help sessions to students. Yet today we have more teachers offering more extra help sessions than ever before. Our teacher leaders are not only modeling leadership by their personal work but also encouraging others and organizing the work.

I am frequently asked how we “get” our teachers to tutor before and after school. I always reply that I don’t “get” them to do what they do. They do it because they care, because they’re committed, and because they are part of an “all in” culture that permeates every school.

And their dedication led to a new level of achievement for our district in 2014, when we reached more AMO (annual measurable objects) targets than any other district in the state, despite ranking only 100th in funding.


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<tr>
<th>AMO Targets Met Top 10 North Carolina Districts</th>
<th>% of Targets Met</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Mooresville Graded School District</td>
<td>96.1</td>
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<td>2. Union County</td>
<td>94.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Polk County</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Henderson County</td>
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<td>5. Camden County</td>
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<td>6. Mount Airy City</td>
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<td>7. Watauga County</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Yancey County</td>
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AMO is based on students making a level 4 or 5 on EOG/EOC, EOG/EOC participation rate, math course rigor, graduation rate, ACT performance and participation rate, WorkKeys performance and participation rate, and attendance rate.

AMO = annual measurable objects, EOG = end-of-grade, EOC = end-of-course
Distributed Leadership and High-Performance Teaching and Learning

LEADERSHIP VOICE

Lasting Impact through Distributed Leadership

By Dr. Aaron Spence

Superintendent, Virginia Beach, Virginia, and Former Superintendent, Moore County Schools, North Carolina

One of the key challenges when implementing our digital learning initiative in Moore County was the need for buy-in and understanding. As a leader experienced with digital learning after working with Dr. Edwards in Henrico County, I was anxious to begin. However, I was also looking for long-term impact, and I knew that teachers had experienced a great deal of change, leading to widespread “initiative fatigue.”

Most teachers in my district were willing to embrace the idea that digital learning could transform our schools, but few were eager to take on the practical work. So we recognized that an “all at once” approach was likely to fail, and we needed time to get comfortable with the new devices, instructional model, and procedures. We mapped out a plan that included multiple pilot sites.

I also knew that the initiative would fail if I was the only one who believed in it. So we identified principals who believed in the power of digital learning, and they volunteered to lead the pilot sites. They in turn identified teacher leaders who took on the initiative and ran with it in their classrooms. These pioneering leaders helped make the initiative work.

Because I had other projects that required my attention, I had to have a team of leaders at the district level that would give the pilot sites the support they needed. Several key leaders who believed in the vision took hold of it and operationalized every detail. Without them—especially the deputy superintendent, chief of technology, and lead technology coach—our digital learning initiative would never have found wings.

We distributed leadership amongst everyone who had a stake in the outcome, including teachers, principals, parents, students, and district administrators. I worked hard to establish a clear vision, but I also learned that lasting impact only comes with a flexible approach that lets those who have captured the vision step up and take a leading role to help realize it.
Custodian George Gardner receiving the 2013 Custodian of the Year award from Chris Gammon, assistant principal at Mooresville Intermediate School, watched by Todd Black, director of operations.

When my son and I went over to Mooresville Intermediate School to play some basketball one rainy day last summer, we saw several custodians working in the cafeteria and stopped by to say hello. They were painstakingly working on the floor of the cafeteria to make sure it was spotless. “These corners are not easy to get clean, but we hit ‘em a couple extra times, and we got ‘em looking good,” George Gardner said.

“I really appreciate the leadership each of you is showing as we prepare for our guests,” I said. “Last year everyone said this school looked brand new, and your hard work is the reason why.” I shook their hands and headed over to the gym.

**REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS**

1. What practical steps can you take toward distributed leadership?
2. How do you nurture the attitude that everyone’s contribution is valuable?
3. What collective strategies can you implement to address problems?
4. How can you encourage the concept of roving leaders?
5. How do you support change management thinking?
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Leaders with a Shared Vision

“The presence of leaders is felt everywhere in our district, providing support and direction at every turn.”

On a visit to the Mooresville & Mebane Summer Literacy Lift, I explained to our guests that they would be seeing several different kinds of MGSD leaders in action. The institute provided a summer literacy program for first- through third-grade students with reading deficiencies, partially funded by the Mebane Foundation. We began the visit by meeting Dr. Crystal Hill, MGSD Executive Director of Elementary Education, who had led the development of the program.

She introduced us to the program director, Cheryl Dortch, MGSD 2011 Teacher of the Year, and together we visited the second-grade class. Here we met a young teacher, Lauren Wally, the Beginning Teacher of the Year at Rocky River Elementary School, who was on the floor helping three boys write stories on their iPads.

In the next room, a group of students was working on a reading assignment led by A’Lishia Bowman, a rising sophomore at Mooresville High School and a student mentor/tutor. A’Lishia was an excellent leader for these students since she lived in their neighborhood, and they obviously wanted to please her and meet her expectations.

The next classroom was filled with students doing research on animals, led by Troy Eckles, a recent Mooresville High School graduate who was working as a student tutor for the summer before heading off to Howard University. Cheryl told us what a great role model Troy was for these students and how they looked up to him.

The smiles and enthusiasm all around were remarkable and clearly influencing student progress, as each leader proudly led his or her area of responsibility.
I believe that a high level of encouragement by a wide range of leaders—each addressing a different area of leadership, supporting each other, and getting to know students as individuals—is an essential factor in continually building student and teacher success.

Our digital conversion initiative is like a river that constantly changes course as it flows along, so we are always adapting to new dynamic content and accountability policies. As we navigate the bends in the river, many leaders are needed to support our staff and maintain the focus on moving forward—for students, departments, schools, and the district as a whole. So we have integrated distributed leadership into every facet of our work, and we have supported leadership development by focusing on coaching and collaboration, believing that success for our students is directly tied to our relentless support and coaching of staff.

At MGSD, leaders work together to create a synergy that is a real force in our day-to-day activity. We have pushed the work of leadership out beyond the administrator level so that we have leaders all around us—working, giving, caring, learning, sharing, and leading. The presence of leaders is felt everywhere in our district, providing support and direction at every turn.

Last year CoSN brought leadership teams from 23 school districts to see the digital conversion that has happened in Mooresville and then spark a conversation in other districts about how to scale similar transformation.

**VISITOR FEEDBACK**  “Perhaps the most powerful part of the entire experience was hearing from the Mooresville leadership team—from Dr. Edwards to the heads of curriculum, technology, and finance. They literally could finish each other's sentences. It was much more than having one strong leader, and clearly Dr. Edwards is a strong leader. Rather, we saw that the Mooresville team had formed with a common vision. That was distributed leadership in action.”

—Keith Krueger

Chief Executive Officer, CoSN (Consortium for School Networking)

**Principals and Assistant Principals**

Research has shown that principals have a huge impact on the quality of schools, and many observers have suggested that every great school has a great principal. As a superintendent for over 20 years, I have worked with principals in three
different school systems, and I believe that the research is accurate. I can say with certainty that the many great principals I have worked with have had a huge impact not only on schools but also on lives and communities.

Principals and assistant principals do complex and challenging work and play a huge role in the daily lives of schools. At MGSD, our principals and assistant principals have grown enormously. They are constantly learning new skills and leadership strategies in their daily quest for excellence.

Developing Other Leaders

In a digital conversion initiative with a distributed leadership model, formal leaders must lead with new skills. One of their most important new skills is nurturing leadership in others as they actively develop teacher and staff leaders.

Our principals understand that the result of this effort, when teacher leaders influence and lead their colleagues, is an uplift effect across all areas of school life that directly impacts student achievement. Because best practices are always emerging and evolving as we implement new digital content, we need a lot of leaders in a lot of places. As teacher leaders share best practices and “coach up” other teachers, they help to build an instructional synergy that improves student learning and teacher effectiveness.

Dee Gibbs, the principal of N. E. Woods Advanced Technology and Arts Center, always calls on his department chairs to lead at quarterly information meetings. Under his inspirational leadership, his staff has embraced the important mission of relentlessly championing the students who need our help the most. He leads our Mi-Waye alternative school program, serving about 60 students who are finding a path to graduation that includes credit recovery and small classes, with tremendous support from the staff. Many Mi-Waye students have struggled with academics, discipline, and other issues.

Mr. Gibbs also works with local business leaders in our Career Bridge Advisory, to help students find opportunities with local businesses and raise money to support students who make it to national competitions. In 2014, 17 students were involved in national competitions, and we had plenty of resources to fund the travel for students and staff.

Leadership development is not limited to the teaching staff. When I visit our schools with the principals, I always hear them acknowledge the work of others. On a visit to the Park View Elementary cafeteria staff, the principal, Mark Cottone, told me, “These ladies have got to be the best staff we have here at MGSD. Every day they come in with enthusiasm and kindness for our students and make a difference.”
Leaders with a Shared Vision

Leadership in Action

Leadership Development in Action

A few years ago, we hired a new dietician, Kim McCall, for our school food service program. With the support of our CFO, Terry Haas, who is responsible for the child nutrition program, Kim soon provided leadership regarding nutritional standards and menu development.

Then she went one step further and started sending out fun emails every day with tips for healthy living. As a result, several faculty and teacher leaders initiated and participated in healthy living activities, including exercise classes, Weight Watchers groups, and walking clubs. Kim is respected and constantly learning along with her staff, who like her style.

Every good principal invests heavily in the development of teacher and staff leaders. Many of our cafeteria staff, bus drivers, custodians, and office staff have evolved as leaders with the help, encouragement, and direction of others and now model daily excellence in their work and attitudes. Interwoven in the leadership culture of all MGSD administrators is the daily work of affirming leaders and the great work of students, teachers, staff, parents, and everyone else who is part of the MGSD family.

Modeling the Importance of Learning

Our principals function as role models for everyone else by working on their own learning. Most have completed or are completing their doctoral degrees, and they support others who are working on degrees or additional certifications. They also help plan and lead professional development on our early release days.

As part of our professional development program, we use a book study format every year to further our understanding of leadership work. In 2013, the study group discussion of Leadership Is an Art by Max De Pree was led by three principals—Mark Cottone of Park View Elementary, Jason Gardner of East Mooresville Intermediate, and Dee Gibbs of N. F. Woods—along with one assistant principal, Angelo DelliSanti of Mooresville Middle School.

They developed an interactive small-group activity that kept everyone highly engaged as we discussed the different ways we could weave De Pree’s concepts into our own work. I love to see this kind of professional development session because it shows leaders influencing others and growing in their own skills.
Interestingly, in 2013 Mark had just completed his doctoral work in one of our cohorts with Wingate University, and Jason and Angelo were doctoral candidates in a new cohort. It was clear that their formal adult learning programs were greatly enhancing their work as school leaders.

How Leaders Model Learning

- Stay engaged.
- Talk to students and staff about their work.
- Encourage, acknowledge, and smile.
- Ask questions and want to know.
- Work hard to help others.
- Coach with conviction.
- Lead with purpose, energy, enthusiasm, and focus.
- Share with others what they are learning.
- Continue their personal learning journey.

Maintaining Visibility

I strongly believe that students and staff need to see their principals all the time and that the leadership presence of principals influences collaboration and learning. At MGSD, principals do not stay in their offices for a good part of the day, as they do in some schools. They roam around the building, in and out of classrooms, in the cafeteria, in the hallways, and on the grounds. They work on the go, and they make things go.

They lead by their presence and their effort, as they observe and influence the daily flow of student and teacher work. Some of their most important work kicks in when they encourage a student, acknowledge a teacher, or share their observations about leadership with someone else.

Assistant principals are also a significant part of our leadership fabric. Like principals, they are highly visible to students and staff at all times, providing leadership in all aspects of our work and adding value for students, staff, and parents.

When I walk through a school with a principal, students almost always approach him or her to ask for advice, confess about homework, or share a success. The personal presence of principals is very important to them.
Leaders with a Shared Vision

Jason Gardner, the principal at East Mooresville Intermediate School, focuses much of his energy and effort on knowing and interacting with students. When I walk through his school with him, in class after class students call out to him to come and look at their work or their results. It is powerful to see the personal connection he has forged with students.

A few years ago, while visiting a school, I noticed that few if any students interacted with the principal on our classroom visits. I shared with her that she needed to become more engaged with students, and on a recent visit I saw that she had taken the feedback to heart. Dozens of kids had comments for her, hugged her, and talked to her as we walked through the school.

Using the Data

To meet our performance goals, we rely on principals to lead in the use of formative data, working with teacher leaders to constantly adjust the instructional focus and maximize the use of digital resources. We expect our principals to develop teacher leaders to support this work by continually reviewing data with teachers and aligning instruction to meet the needs of students. The continual

MGSD principals and assistant principals are literally “out front” in our leadership effort, meeting students and parents on the sidewalk every morning. Parents love to see a smiling professional greet their children by name, and we use this opportunity to communicate that each day is a new day to learn. Our goal is to transform what many schools view as a routine task into a way to lead and set the tone.

“I know it’s a little thing, but when our principal Mr. Gardner is standing out front, opening car doors, and saying good morning, I just love it. It gives us all a sense of security,” commented Lisa Gill, PTO leader and mother of three MGSD students.

Similarly, teachers, custodians, bus drivers, and others need to hear a supportive “good morning, and we’re counting on you” message every day from their principals and assistant principals, acknowledging that they are valued team players in the work of educating students.

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Visibility in Action

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Leadership in Action
work of calibrating instruction—by teacher, department, and student—is vital to school success and takes full advantage of the data resources available through digital conversion.

Dr. Carrie Tulbert, principal of Mooresville Middle School, always focuses intensely on analyzing data with the department leaders in her school. Through her leadership, her faculty culture has shifted from “we’re doing what we have to do” to “we are a cadre of teacher leaders who view formative data as a vital component of student achievement and are willing to lead others in the effort.” The difference in attitude has had a huge impact on instruction.

### Setting a Caring Tone

To create the right context for teaching and learning, our principals encourage, acknowledge, and direct as they go about their day. When I visit schools with them, they generally share a few comments about each teacher as we move from class to class. In most cases, they acknowledge some special effort the teacher or the class has made.

In the spring of 2013, when I visited South Elementary School with the principal, Debbie Marsh, she said to me as we entered Hayley Johnson’s
Leaders with a Shared Vision

second-grade class, “I want you to know I’m so proud of Hayley. She’s our grade-level chair. Although she’s a young teacher, she has really stepped up her game and is providing strong leadership.”

As I shook Hayley’s hand, I repeated Dr. Marsh’s words to her and congratulated her on jumping into the role of grade-level chair. She beamed back at me but immediately turned to help a student pulling at her sleeve. Dr. Marsh’s acknowledgment of her leadership and the leadership of others impacts the success of students at South Elementary every day.

Dee Gibbs, the veteran principal at the N. F. Woods Advanced Technology and Arts Center, a sister school to Mooresville High School that hosts our CTE (Career and Technical Education) and alternative Mi-Waye programs, sets the tone by supporting the students who struggle the most and always letting them know that someone cares.

Teacher Leaders

Almost every visitor to MGSD comments on our teacher leaders—our department chairs and our elementary and middle school grade-level chairs—who do great work with students and peers in every school. They set an example for their colleagues and are “in the trenches” every day, encouraging and offering advice and direction.
They are also important members of our interview committees when we are looking to hire new teachers, principals, and assistant principals. This model aligns with Daniel Pink’s work on motivation in *Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us*, which indicates that teachers need to have a major voice in how they achieve goals, design instruction, and conduct their professional work. And I believe we make better hiring decisions as a result of their participation.

Teacher leaders who have a voice embrace accountability and work with challenges because they know it’s up to them. As Roland Barth stresses in *Learning by Heart*, empowerment and collaborative learning are essential for the betterment of the teaching profession.

Teacher leaders must be willing to embrace a leadership role in order to help their colleagues learn and grow, as well as to learn and grow themselves. As Sharon Markofski, the Mooresville High School math department chair, told me a few years ago, “We don’t need any lone rangers. We all have to pitch in, work together, and learn from each other to make this work.”

In April 2014, on a visit to Mooresville Middle School, I walked in and out of classrooms with the principal, Carrie Tulbert, sharing a running dialogue about the work of teachers and teams and how it was going. She told me that she had asked social studies teacher Jeff Wright to lead one of the grade-level teams, and he had really stepped up, despite his initial doubts about his ability to lead.

Mr. Wright’s growth in the digital conversion had not always come easy, but he plugged away to build his skills and effectiveness. Dr. Tulbert’s expectation that each

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**LEADERSHIP IN ACTION**

**Change Leadership in Action**

Mike Micklow, the boys’ basketball coach at Mooresville High School, was an early adopter and leader in our digital conversion. Coach Micklow loves developing basketball players, but he also loves developing students’ math skills, particularly their algebra skills.

Teaching math in a digital environment was challenging for some teachers at first, but Mike led them in successfully adapting to the change. He showed them how to enhance math problems with visual elements from the software program *Comic Life*, giving students more engaging examples and a new way to look at math problems.
Leaders with a Shared Vision

faculty member will evolve and her nurturing of those who need a little more time have paid off. It is important to note that the changes required by MGSD’s digital conversion and every child, every day culture were extremely challenging for many staff, and it has taken several years to build the cultural acumen that we now enjoy.

Our belief in teacher leaders and our high expectations for them helps to increase their contribution to improving outcomes for our students and is a major part of our school and district culture. Bolman and Deal describe this phenomenon in Leading with Soul:

“Trusting people to solve problems generates higher levels of motivation and better solutions. The leader’s responsibility is to create conditions that promote authorship. Individuals need to see their work as meaningful and worthwhile, to feel personally accountable for the consequences of their efforts, and to get feedback that lets them know the results.”

Leading Staff Development

Our department and grade-level chairs as well as other teacher leaders plan and lead staff development programs, providing support and encouragement for new staff. They implement much of the training and reflective analysis on the 10 early release days a year that we dedicate to professional development.

Our instructional technology facilitators at each school now train others on how to navigate alignment with new state accountability standards and assessments and implement the features and functionality of new digital content. Their contribution has evolved way beyond running computer labs. They play a major role in supporting the growth of their colleagues in our digital conversion.

Digital conversion requires that pedagogy continuously evolve along with online content, and our teacher leaders play a key role in making this happen. We arrange for new teachers to observe them so that they can see how the teacher leaders organize instruction to maximize collaboration and digital resources.

Over time, we have developed a cadre of professional development mentors who are great teachers not only of students but also of colleagues. It only makes sense in our schools, at MGSD and nationwide, to tap into the phenomenal resource of teaching expertise to develop the skills of other staff.

Learning from each other has led to a shared sense of exhilaration and an evolving esprit de corps at MGSD. Unlike the traditional leadership model,
distributed leadership builds connections among staff members that inspire them in their daily work with students.

**Leading Data Analysis**

At each MGSD school, teacher leaders have become skilled at using information to align instructional support to student needs, and their local leadership boosts the engine that drives student achievement. They help to analyze student formative data, implement instructional adjustments, and coach other staff.

In our quarterly information meetings, we review a profile of each course, break it down by student and subgroup, and look at the content areas for specific strengths and needs. Our teacher leaders proactively follow up on the results of these reviews.

**Championing Change**

MGSD’s digital conversion initiative requires that we constantly learn new software and adapt to a changing instructional model. We have looked to our

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**Data Analysis in Action**

At a recent information meeting, Ashley Ericson, the business department chair at N. F. Woods Advanced Technology and Arts Center, outlined the following plan: “We’ve looked at the data and identified every student who needs help, and we’re asking the parents to encourage their children to come to tutoring sessions before or after school. We know if we can get them here, we can get them up to speed. We have to bear down at times, but we’re on the right track.”

I’m always impressed by the N. F. Woods teachers’ laser focus on data. Their data analysis skills, inspiring leadership, and caring attitude have translated into great success for students. In spring of 2013 and spring of 2014, a dozen students from this school won state championships and made it to the national finals in CTE skill competitions. N. F. Woods also achieved its highest-ever composite score on the North Carolina VoCATS Assessments, a 92 percent pass rate.
teacher leaders to be champions of change in this effort while focusing on skill development for every student. And we have observed that champions and leaders sometimes emerge in unexpected places. When schools embrace a culture of distributed leadership, they benefit from a wide range of skills and experience, so we look for leadership everywhere.

Mooresville Middle School English teacher Bethany Smith helped lead the curricular and methodology change with digital conversion, and today she leads sessions at our Summer Connection Institute, showing educators from all over the country that teachers can make English more appealing to students and do a highly effective job in a digital, project-based, and collaborative environment.

Roseann Burklow, another teacher at Mooresville Middle School, did not initially embrace the change. But later “the lights came on” for Roseann. It took her a couple of years to move from complying with the changes to embracing them, but she has been soaring ever since. She now leads professional development sessions for MGSD and other districts and was recently honored with the prestigious DENY Award from Discovery Education.
Chapter 2

Planning and Leading Conferences

MGSD’s teacher leaders, principals, and central office staff join together to plan and lead our Summer Connection Conference for other districts, on how to implement a digital conversion, and our Summer Institute for MGSD teachers, on how to implement new software, build collaborative teams, and grow along with students.

**LEADERSHIP VOICE**

*My Journey from Textbooks to Computers*

*By Roseann Burklow*

*Fifth-Grade Science Teacher, Mooresville Intermediate School*

When our digital conversion started in 2007, I was a 25-year teaching veteran. Needless to say, I was very comfortable with my science textbook, paper, and pencil, and I had no idea I was about to embark on the most challenging, yet rewarding journey of my career.

My first “aha” moment came back in 2007, when I created my first digital lesson, and I saw my students have fun learning again. I started to see that they were blossoming into young scientists, eager to research, collaborate, connect to the real world, and take ownership of their learning. Also, I realized that technology provided easy tools to plan lessons for differentiation and review. Thanks to the training, support, and encouragement I received from everyone, I was soon able to step out of my comfort zone and make the cultural shift to a technology-driven classroom.

Now, seven years later, I have created and shared many digital lessons and activities with my fellow teachers throughout the district and beyond. Every year, I continue to grow and learn about new websites and programs. I always find it exciting to implement them in the classroom and watch student engagement grow.

I am grateful for the opportunity I was given to shift into the 21st century right along with my students, to revel in their success, and to become a better teacher.
They have fully embraced this responsibility. Working together to design developmental constructs for peers and each other, they have raised the level of their own knowledge and commitment. (Please see Appendix C and Appendix D for sample conference agendas.)

Central Office Leaders

MGSD’s central office team leads by example as they constantly offer service to teachers, principals, staff, parents, and each other. Terry Haas, chief financial officer, focuses all her efforts on helping others find a way to get the job done in a very difficult budget climate—not an easy task.

She has also shown leadership in a personal context. She lost 50 pounds, transformed her health, and helped develop a new online personal wellness program for voluntary district implementation. Our digital conversion is everywhere!

Terry Haas and Tanae McLean, our public information officer, are our main event planners and leaders, whether it’s a visit from President Obama or the meals for the Summer Connection Conference. Tanae worked 14 hours a day for weeks before the president’s visit, modeling for others how to step up and lead as the situation required.

Scott Smith, our chief technical officer, constantly triangulates his work with our executive directors of instruction, Crystal Hill and Steve Mauney, to maximize efficiency, influence teaching and learning, and model caring for all employees. Crystal and Steve model focus, energy, compassion, and the need to keep student learning on the front burner at all times. Because we have a very small central office team, our key instructional leaders juggle many responsibilities every day as they provide targeted leadership to our principals.

The results are strong personal relationships and connections across the board. When Scott Smith’s mother passed away unexpectedly a few years ago, the entire central office administration team drove to Greensboro, a couple of hours away, to support him at the service.

Todd Black, our director of operations, who joined the team in 2012, said at a recent principals’ meeting, “I knew MGSD had a great team, but every day I’m amazed and motivated by the leadership synergy here. Now I want to mobilize every member of the operations team to build on the synergy and take the game up even higher.”

Leaders must be attentive to caring for others. According to Bolman and Deal in Leading with Soul, “The heart of leadership resides in the hearts of leaders.” My
CHAPTER 2

observation during 20 years as a superintendent is that every high-performance central office leader combines exacting leadership with an outstanding work ethic and deep compassion for others.

**VISITOR FEEDBACK**  “At MGSD, I have seen leaders moving together, shoulder to shoulder, each committed to a commonly shared mission and set of described outcomes. Mooresville has shown us that it is possible to do more with less while encouraging each leader to rediscover why he or she chose to become a professional educator. It is not about heaping the load on a few but gladly sharing the burden across many aligned, passionate leaders.”

—Randy Wilhelm
Chief Executive Officer, Knovation

**Student Leaders**

Many years ago, I thought of student leadership primarily in terms of the high school student council or other groups where students assume formal leadership roles. However, I have developed a new point of view over the years, after watching students exhibit leadership from kindergarten through high school and college. I’ve developed a new appreciation for the important role of student leadership in advancing learning and productivity.

Every year, MGSD students open the Summer Connection Conference with presentations and conversations about their personal experience in the digital conversion. These young leaders, from fifth graders to seniors, always dazzle the audience with their insights and work samples. As you might expect, they offer many examples of digital learning, including multimedia projects and collaborative mashups of student research.

**Emerging Collaborative Model**

In MGSD’s digital conversion initiative, project-based work is a vital part of our instructional framework, and we have fully integrated students to help lead the learning process. We encourage students at all grade levels to work together on projects where they are given leadership assignments and expected to navigate and thrive while leading others.
LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

Student Leadership in Action

When I was the superintendent in Henrico County, Virginia, I was standing in the foyer of Laburnum Elementary School with the principal, Mr. Gunn, when we saw a five or six-year-old boy hurrying up the sidewalk with just a t-shirt on, despite the December rain. He was holding something we couldn’t quite make out. He came inside, oblivious to the cold and rain, and proudly held out a can of food, saying, “Mr. Gunn, my momma said we could give this can of beans for the poor kids.”

Mr. Gunn thanked him, and the boy smiled brightly and went off to class. “William’s family is the very first on the list of needy families we’re collecting for,” said Mr. Gunn. We both stood for a few minutes knowing that William had just shown us a great example of student leadership.
We utilize instructional design models throughout the grades, where students teach each other new software features or science and math concepts. Even elementary students coach and encourage each other in paired reading activities. We tap into an emerging collaborative learning model that both requires and leverages student leadership as part of the design.

We as educators still have a long way to go to fully realize the potential of this powerful model and consistently utilize student leaders as part of the instructional design, but this is an important goal we need to focus on in the coming years.

LEADERSHIP VOICE

Students Training Students

By Mary Royal
Counselor, Mooresville Middle School

At one of our school improvement team meetings, we decided to set up training groups, led by “veteran” students, for middle school students who were new to the district. Since I was new to the middle school grade levels, I was a little hesitant to go with student-led rather than counselor-led groups, but we decided to solicit student names from the staff, and we gave about 20 veteran students a challenge-based learning opportunity.

We asked them to take responsibility for 60 new students and help them become familiar with Keynote, Pages, iMovie, Angel, and Mac shortcuts. With a little guidance, they split into “centers,” and each volunteered to take charge of a different application.

The following Friday, we ran three sessions where rookie students rotated in and out of the room to learn about the most frequently used MacBook applications at Mooresville Middle School. The veteran students did very well. They split into small groups, shared mini-presentations with the new students, fielded questions, and led discussions on how to best utilize the MacBooks in class. I was impressed.

However, I noticed that two girls had totally separated themselves from the groups and were sitting at a table alone and in silence, staring at their screens. I observed them from across the room for a few minutes and wondered if they were doing homework or perhaps even
playing games. The rest of the students were chatting, moving around, and switching laptops to show off their knowledge.

I quietly walked up behind the two girls and peeked over their shoulders, and what I saw gave me goose bumps. They were using Google Translate to communicate. One girl spoke only Spanish and was typing questions in Spanish into the program. The other girl spoke only English and was using the program to translate her answers into Spanish. The Spanish-speaking girl later returned to her ESL classroom and excitedly showed her teacher all the questions and answers and all the new things that she had learned.

This is a tribute to our students and how much they can accomplish with a little freedom and trust when they are encouraged to take on a leadership role. It was also a learning experience for me. Any doubts I had had about the student-led groups were gone.

Peer Instruction

We at MGSD see peer instruction and project collaboration as a means to fully embrace a basic fact about student learning—that students will always learn from each other. From second grade on, we encourage students to share with each other what they have just learned and how they learned it. This transfer of knowledge is very powerful.

Whether it’s AP chemistry or second-grade math, we deliberately include shared learning and collaboration as vital tools in our instructional design. Small groups and peer-to-peer instruction give students the opportunity to lead others and reinforce their own knowledge at the same time.

TEAM One

At Mooresville High School, math chair Sharon Markofski and a colleague took the initiative a couple years ago to introduce a concept they call TEAM One (Total Efficacy for Achieving More One) to administrative leaders. Their idea was to develop a group of student leaders to provide peer instruction in math to rising ninth graders who had been identified as possible dropouts based on their academics, attendance, behavior, or home life struggles, and then to ramp up a summer program to build their capacity to succeed and lead. TEAM One now meets throughout the year to foster collegial connections among students and staff.
TEAM One is designed to help students during their freshman year. Targeted students are incoming freshmen whose math EVAAS (Education Value-Added Assessment System) scores are less than 55 percent proficient, who were recommended by their eighth-grade teachers for extra help, and who want to achieve more through learning and hard work.

TEAM One students are invited to attend a June summer session for a positive first experience on the high school campus. A structured learning environment is provided through work in ELA (English Language Arts) and mathematics. Foundations of Algebra is incorporated into the curriculum to prepare students for the Math 1 course they will take the second semester. The primary goal is to close learning gaps.

**TEAM One Courses**

- Study skills
- Organization skills
- Leadership skills
- Collaborative skills
- 21st-century skills, including technology
- North Carolina higher standards Math 1 skills

**TEAM One Activities**

- Team building/collaboration
- Career-ready investigations with community/business partners
- College visits to two- and four-year schools
- Business and professional speakers
- Tutoring

**AP Student Leaders**

MGSD high school student leaders are committed to helping others advance their vertical progression and logical understanding of mathematics, with high-achieving students helping those who are trying to close learning gaps. The AP
calculus students begin working with Math 1 students as soon as the AP exams are over in early May, to help their peers achieve success on their end-of-course exam. AP students report to an assigned Math 1 teacher, who structures the peer tutoring of Math 1 students. The AP students learn appropriate questioning techniques, hints to prompt further thinking, and technology tools that support deeper understanding of core concepts. During help sessions, they offer one-to-one peer instruction to help Math 1 students learn the concepts and testing strategies.

Tutoring is held in a flexible and comfortable environment, sometimes in the Math 1 classroom, sometimes on the floor in the hallway, and sometimes in another teacher’s room. AP students debrief with the teacher after the sessions so that they can reflect on and improve their tutoring practice to meet individual needs.

The students build strong bonds, with caring and compassion in evidence as new friendships build character and work ethic. Both groups of math students benefit by learning many life lessons while coming together to complete the math cycle with continuous alignment and support. As we say at Mooresville High School, it’s “blue devil helping blue devil.”

Support Staff

In most school districts, about half of the employees are support staff—bus drivers, custodians, food service workers, maintenance workers, clerical staff, and technical support staff. This group is naturally very influential because it is so large, but unfortunately many districts fail to acknowledge this powerful force and do not fully benefit from the contributions of these individuals, although these staff can play a huge role in helping students, families, and teachers get the support they need.
Authors Max De Pree, Michael Fullan, and Roland Barth emphasize that all members of the school culture are essential for organizational success, and Margaret Wheatley points to the idea that each staff member is both symbiotic with the rest of the organization and part of the whole.

In MGSD, we have seen magnificent leadership emerge from the ranks of our support staff. Roger Lambert, one of our maintenance staff, is a true leader who works extremely hard. Among many other things, Roger and his colleagues keep our grounds looking great. Roger took the initiative to put rose bushes around each school sign, and when President Obama came to visit Mooresville Middle School, the sign was adorned with beautiful roses.

Some MGSD bus drivers not only greet each student with a personal hello each morning but also get to know the kids and parents. They support students with a caring attitude on the way to and from school every day. Our cafeteria staff greet students by name and often know their personal food choices.

Our entire central office staff, including my administrative assistant, Jean Millsaps, provide responsive service to all and know that their communication and leadership skills are important to each school’s success. When I visit schools, I make a point of thanking our support staff with a handshake and a smile. I used to thank them for their hard work, and now I thank many for their leadership.
Leaders with a Shared Vision

School Board, Parents, and Community

I have worked with some excellent school board members during my career, and we are fortunate in Mooresville to have school board members who truly believe in our mission of every child, every day. They take their leadership role very seriously, model teamwork, and are highly engaged.

MGSD school board members have demonstrated leadership by introducing early release days for professional development, which has been central to the success of our digital conversion. Board members have high expectations, and they are vocal cheerleaders for our students and the entire staff.

Our parent advisory committees are also an important component of our leadership work. Each school identifies and recruits 8 to 12 parent leaders, along with other leaders from band and athletic boosters and other organizations, to serve on the parent advisory board and attend quarterly and other occasional meetings. Feedback and advice about our digital conversion are on the agenda at every meeting. Parent leaders have advised on a wide range of topics, from parent training to backpack selection.

Our parent and community leaders also take a strong stand when it comes to support for educational funding and other issues related to our schools. The Mooresville Education Foundation and the Career Bridge Foundation, which...
supports our CTE programs, include many local business leaders who offer
tremendous support to our schools and programs.

Our mayor, police chief, and several other elected leaders are involved with
our district and offer formal leadership support. Our chamber of commerce
and economic development leaders work closely with us on the shared goal of
building opportunity in the community. I believe that all school districts can
reap dividends by cultivating collaboration and leadership among parents and
community members.

**LEADERSHIP VOICE**

**Broad Benefits to the Community**

*By Miles Atkins*

*Mayor, Mooresville, North Carolina*

The Mooresville community has benefitted immensely
from the changes in our school system. The district has
eveled the learning playing field by giving every child equal access to
educational resources and tools. And a partnership with our municipally
owned broadband system is providing basic Internet service at no
charge to families of children who receive free or reduced-price meals.
For Mooresville’s underserved population, this has been a huge plus.

In addition, families are relocating to Mooresville from all over the
country because of the reputation of our schools, and the increased
demand for housing has fueled a housing boom in our town. Our
business community recognizes that our schools play a key role in talent
recruitment, and the district has formed strong alliances with our top
employers, who have become great supporters. My office and the city
council are tremendous supporters of MGSD. The Chamber of Commerce
and the Economic Development Commission work in partnership with
MGSD to leverage the work of our students and schools and position our
town for economic development and positive growth.

The district is not only a community partner that contributes to
our sense of place, it is also an economic engine driving an emerging
edutourism industry, as hundreds of educators from around the country
attend the MGSD Summer Connection Conference, filling our hotels
for a week and spending their free time in our downtown. In addition,
Leaders with a Shared Vision

At one of our Summer Connection Conferences, a Mooresville Middle School student who had recently transferred from New York and was struggling with a number of issues, addressed the audience. “Hello, I’m Juan from Mooresville Middle School, and I’m going to show you my architectural design project,” he said. “When I did this project, I discovered a couple of things about myself and a couple of other important things. First, I discovered I love architectural design, and I’m good at it.” He shared his impressive 3D design on the screen projected from his school laptop.

“Last year I dropped out of school,” he continued. “I’m a year behind because my family moves around a lot, and we’ve had some problems. But the principal and my counselor came to see me and my mom, and they said I just couldn’t drop out. And that was that. So I’m going to Mooresville High School next year, and I can’t wait to start drafting class. I learned you have to believe in yourself, and it’s great to have a principal and counselor and teachers who care about you. Thank you.” The ovation lasted a long time as this young leader returned to his seat.

**REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS**

1. How do you develop a shared vision among all leaders?
2. How can you consciously work on setting the tone in your district?
3. Do you acknowledge the leadership contributions of support staff?
4. What are some nontraditional ways you can encourage students to become leaders?
5. What leadership opportunities are available to your teachers outside the classroom?
REFERENCES