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The Leadership Factor

A Key to Effective Inclusive High Schools

Tom Bartholomay
Teri Wallace
Christine Mason



Institute on Community Integration (UAP)



The College of Education
& Human Development

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

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This document does a great job identifying themes that are important for school leaders who are pursuing standards-based reform and inclusion.

It sheds light on issues that are basic to school leadership today. Particularly helpful is that it goes beyond lofty descriptions to offer many practical examples and tips on what leaders can do within their own contexts.

Ann Zweber Werner

*Coordinator of
Licensing and Leadership
Development
for Educational
Administrators,
University of Minnesota*

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This document would not have been written if it were not for the generous participation of the four schools that shared information with the Beacons of Excellence project: Fred J. Page High School (Franklin, Tennessee), Sinagua High School (Flagstaff, Arizona), High School of Telecommunication Arts and Technology (Brooklyn, New York), and William H. Turner Technical Arts High School (Miami, Florida). These schools went out of their way to provide us with access to their data, classrooms, and stakeholders. Administrators and teachers energetically supported research efforts by compiling school data, and arranging site visits, interviews and focus groups, observations, and the administration of surveys. These efforts were always couched in an appreciated concern for kids, in terms of both the value of the research *and* not letting the research interfere with the school's ability to deliver quality education.

Within these schools there are particular people who took the initiative to open their school doors to our research team and remained as key sources of insightful information and contact at each school. The Beacons project is indebted to their efforts and dedication to the project and to school improvement. These people include —

Page High School

- Joe Yeager, Principal
- Phyllis Williamson, Special Education Department Chair

Sinagua High School

- Kim Flack, Special Education Teacher/Coordinator
- Dave Flack, Special Education Teacher

- Keith Bacon, Special Education Teacher

High School of Telecommunication Arts and Technology

- Charles Amundsen, Principal
- Deirdre DeAngelis, Assistant Principal Special Education
- Ellen Victor, Assistant Principal
- Steve Resnick, Assistant Principal Special Education

William H. Turner Technical Arts High School

- Mary Jones, Special Education Facilitator
- Robert Carskadon, Vice Principal
- John Simpson, Special Education Department Chair Person

As the leadership themes described in this document are based on the views of each school's community, we extend a special thanks to all administrators, staff, students, parents, district, and other involved stakeholders. Their pursuit of educational excellence is what made this publication meaningful.

Special thanks also goes to three people who meticulously helped to analyze the leadership data —

Dr. Susan Hupp, Professor, Department of Educational Psychology, College of Education and Human Development, University of Minnesota
Gonzaga de Gama, Research Assistant, Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota

Robert W. Kambeitz, Research Assistant, Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota

Abstract

The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) funded several research projects in 1997, entitled Beacons of Excellence. The intent of the projects was to identify factors associated with schools whose students with disabilities were achieving exemplary learning results within the context of all students achieving such results.

The Institute on Community Integration at the University of Minnesota, in collaboration with the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), was awarded a research project to study the factors associated with exemplary inclusive high schools (Grant Number #H023D70102). Four schools across the country were identified as a result of a national search and were studied for 2 years using a variety of data collection methods. This document represents the results of hundreds of stakeholder opinions regarding a key factor they associated with the success of their school — Leadership!

The significance of leadership in each school and the seven leadership themes that were found to be essential to the success of these inclusive high schools is described. Recommendations for school leaders are included as well as a leadership self-assessment based on the research findings. This document describes what school and district leaders can do to build high schools that help all students learn to high standards while they help all students really feel like they belong.

Teri Wallace, Principal Investigator
Tom Bartholomay, Project Coordinator



I could see this document being used during principal workshops in our district. It is concise and quickly summarizes important points that would lead to good discussions. This document describes what we have been trying to do in our district for the past three years.

Barbara Pulliam

*District Superintendent,
St. Louis Park, Minnesota*

Using This Document: A Guide

This report is designed for school and district administrators. Efforts have been made to keep it short yet informative. It is a composite of the leadership themes identified in the case studies of four high schools studied through the Beacons of Excellence research. (These case studies can be found on the Beacons Web site, <http://ici.umn.edu/beacons>). This report is divided into seven segments. These segments function independently of each other, and the reader should feel free to go directly to the segment of interest. However, the segments are logically ordered to offer readers a sequential understanding that reinforces itself through the document.

The seven segments are as follow —

1. Introduction

A general overview of the Beacons of Excellence study — its context, purpose, information on the schools that participated in the study, and why leadership became an important focus.

2. Leadership Themes Defined

A brief description of the process by which the Beacons leadership themes were defined.

3. School and Leadership Summaries

A brief summary of each school, drawn from school-related documents. In addition, this section briefly describes what stakeholders have said about the significant role that school leadership and administrators have had in their school's success.

4. Leadership Themes

Each of the following leadership themes are described in three ways —

1. As the theme applies to the four schools.
2. As the theme applies to one school in particular, as an example.
3. As a set of administrative recommendations, informed by all schools relevant to the theme.

Themes —

- Challenge all students and their teachers to high standards
- Build an inclusive and collaborative community of learning
- Foster a school culture of innovation and creativity
- Engage stakeholders in school leadership
- Promote professional development
- Hire staff who reinforce school values and vision
- Use data for decision-making and school improvement planning

5. Relationships Among Themes

A brief overview of how the themes relate to, and build on, each other.

6. Changing To Integrated Settings

A Chronology of Administrative Decisions: A description of one school's experience as it moved to greater inclusion.

7. School Leadership Behavior Assessment Worksheet

A useful list of administrative behaviors that emerged from stakeholder interviews at the four schools included in the study. Whether pursuing improvement or greater inclusion, or both, this list offers school leaders an easy way to assess the degree to which their behavior is similar to the behavior of the leadership involved in the research.

More Information

As mentioned earlier, this document is designed to be short yet informative. All the information that was collected on leadership at the four schools is not included in this document. For more information on the four schools, including complete descriptions of each school's leadership themes, please visit the Beacons Web site at: <http://ici.umn.edu/beacons>.

Introduction

Overview

High schools today are facing increased pressure to demonstrate excellent outcomes for all students, including students with disabilities. The current emphasis on high-stakes assessment, improved student outcomes, and overall success provides a major impetus for principals and other educators to implement reforms that will result in immediate and substantial improvements in academic achievement of all students. At the same time, test results for students with disabilities are now being reported in aggregated reports for individual schools and districts. As a result, teachers and administrators are being held accountable for outcomes for these students, creating a new interest in their education and strategies to enhance their success.

School Reform and Inclusion

The current era of school reform has included many approaches for improving educational outcomes. Standards based reform, probably the dominant reform movement today, is based on the underlying belief that high expectations and standards should be maintained for all students. At the same time that schools are being asked to raise achievement of all students, technology, global competition in the adult labor force, and changing demographics are driving schools to reconsider curriculum content, pedagogy, and the relative merits of teacher autonomy versus standardized approaches to instruction. These forces sometimes result in a push-pull phenomena with a foray into virtual learning expeditions countermanded by rigid accountability that imposes a curriculum dictated by the content and the frequency of standardized testing, and a practical push for literacy to meet workplace needs. Teachers and administrators can be torn by opposing approaches, philosophies, and concerns.

Both educators and the general public realize that many schools need to be revitalized and restructured. However, while some would encourage more standardized content and a focus on acquisition of facts and skills, others are concerned about adequate time for exploration, flexibility, creativity, problem solving, and inquiry (Consortium for

Policy Research in Education, 1997). While some view charter schools or privatization of schools as the answer to quality (The Center for Education Reform 2000; Nathan, 1996), others want to improve practices, including the quality of instruction, within public schools (U.S. Office of Education, 1997). School leaders and administrators are faced with a multitude of advice, advice that is often provided without thought to its proven efficacy or to its probable long-term impact.

Despite the differences in approaches to school reform, a common element has been a focus on “reorganizing and revitalizing the entire school rather than isolated, piecemeal efforts.” (Educational Research Services, 1998). Most of these efforts have begun with developing a vision, nurturing staff collaboration and participation in decision making, relying on professional development, and bringing the community into the school (American Institutes for Research, 1999; Educational Research Services, 1998). While some of the reforms have been implemented on the basis of philosophy without a sound research basis to substantiate the approach, research has been undertaken to further our understanding of the relative merits of some of these reform efforts for the general student population (American Institutes for Research, 1999). However, relatively little is known about the impact of these reforms on diverse learners, including students with disabilities (McLaughlin, Nolet, Rhim, & Henderson, 1999).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 requires states to establish goals for the performance of students with disabilities and that these goals, to the maximum

extent appropriate, be consistent with other state goals and standards for all students (P.L. 105-17, 20 U.S.C. §1400 et seq.). While this was the most explicit reference to current school reform trends, several other changes addressed the same general issue – providing increased opportunity for students with disabilities to learn the things deemed important by society and making it possible for schools to be held more accountable for these students’ success. Such changes include —

- Increasing involvement of general educators in developing individualized education programs (IEPs),
- Ensuring students with disabilities access to the general curriculum,
- Increasing the use of appropriate assessment accommodations,
- Requiring that most students with disabilities participate in state and district-wide assessments, and
- Requiring alternate assessments be developed for those who cannot participate in these assessments even with accommodations and modifications.

A research void has been created due to the changing relationships among students with disabilities, educational outcomes, availability of data, and the processes that yield positive outcomes. Most educational research on processes and outcomes in the last fifteen years has used data from schools that were implementing at least some elements of standards-based reform. Unfortunately, this research base has very few studies including students both with and without disabilities, making it difficult to examine the impact of reforms across these populations.

Purpose of the Research

To learn about factors associated with inclusive high schools whose students are achieving exemplary results, the Beacons of Excellence project at the Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota, (in collaboration with the Council for Exceptional Children) implemented a three-year project, funded by the Office of Special Education Programs. The project was designed to study how curricula, instruction, leadership, and other factors contribute to exemplary results for all high school students. The conceptual model used to guide the research was built on the framework established by the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award for education, which was established in 1998 to recognize performance excellence in schools (National Institute of Standards and Technology [NIST], 1998). Additional input for the model was gathered from a broad group of constituents interested in youth and educational concerns, and school completion and post-school outcomes established by the National Center on Educational Outcomes at the University of Minnesota.

A variety of data collection strategies were used to collect and prepare data-based descriptions of each of the schools. In addition to developing individual case studies, common themes across the school sites were identified. Before describing the findings associated with leadership, the strategies used to collect information about the schools will be briefly described.

Data collection strategies used —

- Data on student achievement, documents such as school improvement plans, and staff development activities were reviewed.
- Classroom observations were conducted using a computerized data collection system. Data were collected on teacher and student behaviors as well as on the ecological context, such as instructional setting, classroom design, and so on.
- Teacher surveys were conducted to identify personal teaching styles, behavior expectations, assessment and reporting strategies, instruction, instructional support, role of special educators, collaboration between general and special education teachers, satisfaction, and curriculum coordination.
- Interviews and focus groups were held with district and state level administrators, school administrators, teachers, parents, students, and community representatives.

Because the purpose of this study was research, the definitions of the seven Baldrige categories — designed as criteria for recognizing schools deserving awards — were adapted to this study's research purposes. The resulting, adapted, category definitions are listed below. These definitions were used to code all of the data from the interviews and focus groups conducted at the schools.

1. Leadership — School-based leadership system and actions of the leaders.
2. Strategic Planning — How the school sets its directions, identifies priorities, allocates resources, takes actions to meet a goal, and plans to track progress.

3. Student and Stakeholder Focus — The manner in which the school addresses the needs and expectations of all stakeholders.
4. Information and Analysis — The way in which a school uses data and other information to monitor and improve its performance.
5. Faculty and Staff Focus — Characteristics of faculty and staff when tied to job (hard working, committed), process for hiring, faculty and staff development, expectations for job performance, physical/social/emotional design of the work environment to meet faculty needs, and faculty satisfaction.
6. Educational and Support Process Management — School efforts regarding supporting the needs of students (educational program, teaching methods, support practices).
7. School Performance Results — Specific data or other results used by the school to assess its performance.

The Baldrige criteria consider performance of the school as a whole, including all students, staff, faculty, and administrators. The Beacons project selected schools that were making efforts to include students with disabilities in general education environments. A goal of the project was to examine schools as a whole to see how they meet the needs of the student population as a whole. A highly separate system of special education would have been inconsistent with that goal, as well as with the tenets of standards-based reform.

Data were collected in four secondary schools chosen by a National Advisory Panel as part of the Beacons of Excellence

project. The schools were selected from a field of 114 schools that were nominated for the project due to their success. Fourteen of the nominated schools completed and submitted comprehensive applications. These schools were identified through a rigorous process that included school information disclosures and thorough analysis of each school's submitted information against selection criteria. Data reviewed for selection included: the extent to which students with disabilities were included in the general education curriculum, reviews of anecdotal descriptions of each school and its history, levels of school demands, school resources, descriptions of student populations, school completion outcomes (e.g., dropout rates), and post school outcomes (e.g., postsecondary education enrollment rates) of students with and without disabilities. In addition to the criteria listed previously, sites representing urban, suburban, and rural locations were purposely selected.

Information from the schools was organized and comparisons were made to national and state specific statistics, as well as project generated data. Members of the project's National Advisory Panel, consisting of researchers, practitioners, parents, school administrators, and professional organizations, reviewed the information from the 14 schools over the period of two days. Based on their recommendations, researchers validated applications by contacting references (parents, community members, and school staff), and four schools in four different states were selected.

Selected schools varied in terms of per pupil resource allocation, number of students enrolled, and the percentages

of students receiving services for Limited English Proficiency (LEP) and special education, as well as the percentage of students qualifying for Free and Reduced Lunch. However, all selected schools had high rates of inclusion of students with Individual Education Plans (IEP's) within

general education and high rates of graduation for all students, including students with disabilities. School information regarding resource allocation, student population, and rates of inclusion and graduation are provided in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Descriptive Information for Student Populations by School

	Miami, FL (Urban)	Brooklyn, NY (Urban)	Franklin, TN (Suburban)	Flagstaff, AZ (Small City/Rural)
Per Pupil Allocation	\$5,000	\$7,350	\$4,575	\$4,676
Number of Students	2,090	1,345	875	987
Students Receiving Special Education Services	11%	19%	14%	11%
Students Receiving Free/Reduced Lunch	55%	54%	3%	17%
Students with IEPs in General Education for 75% or More of Day	70%	66%	100%	90%
% of Students with LEP	6%	11%	0%	6%
% of Students Not Included in Accountability Testing	IEP*	0%	0%	IEP*
% of Students that Leave Building for Services	0	0	0	5%
Graduation Rate for All Students	96%	91%	95%	95%
Graduation Rate for Students with IEP's	96%	87%	95%	95%

Note: Data are from the 1997-1998 academic year

*Decisions made on an individual basis by each student's IEP team

The majority of students who receive special education services at the four sites do so under the category of learning disability (LD; 63%-88%). The percentage of students receiving services for emotional and behavioral disorders ranges from 3% to 18%. At one site, 31% of the students receive services for speech.

The percentage of students labeled mentally retarded was similar across sites (3%-4%). Other special education categories, such as orthopedic, visual, and hearing impairments, were less common. The percentages of students by special education category and school are provided in Table 3.

Table 2. Racial/Ethnic Composition of Student Population

School Location	African-American	Asian or Pacific Islander	Hispanic	Native American	White not Hispanic origin
Miami, FL (Urban)	53.0%	0%	42.0%	0%	5.0%
Brooklyn, NY (Urban)	18.5%	3.6%	59.6%	0%	18.3%
Franklin, TN (Suburban)	9.3%	.6%	1.6%	.2%	88.3%
Flagstaff, AZ (Small City/Rural)	.6%	1.0%	8.0%	15.0%	75.0%

Note: Data are from 1997-1998 academic year.

Table 3. The Percentage of Students in Special Education by Category

	Miami, FL (Urban)	Brooklyn, NY (Urban)	Franklin, TN (Suburban)	Flagstaff, AZ (Small City/Rural)
LD	81%	68%	88%	63%
EBD	4%	17%	3%	18%
Speech	3%	31%	—	2%
MR	4%	4%	3%	4%
Deaf/Hard of Hearing	6%	1%	—	8%
Other	1%	3%	4%	3%
Multi	—	4%	2%	4%
Ortho	1%	2%	1%	1%
Visual	1%	—	—	1%

Note: Data are from the 1997-1998 academic year

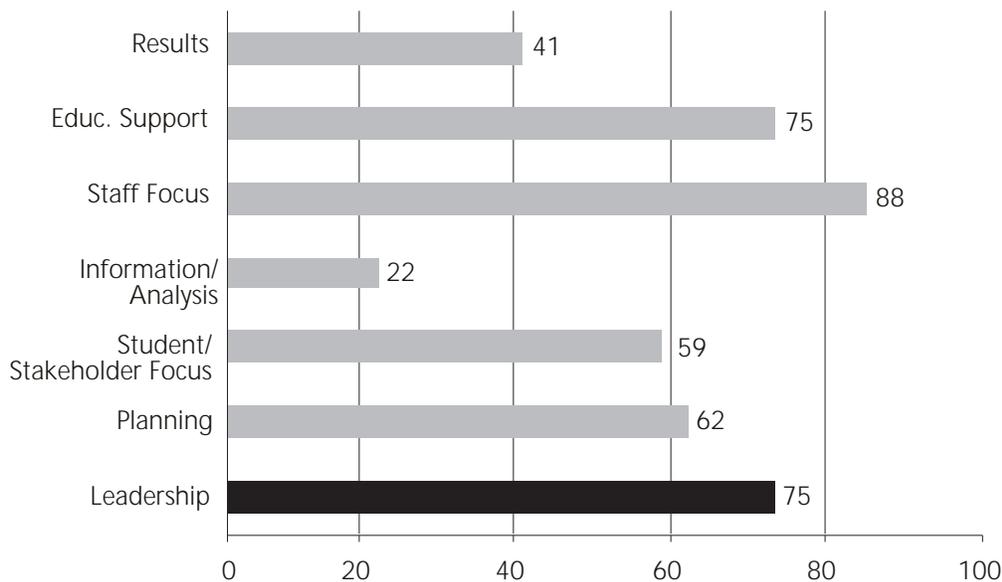
Leadership: Its Significance Within The Beacons Study

When stakeholders at all four schools (a total of 20 focus groups and 12 interviews) were asked what factors they associated with the successful outcomes of their school, 75% of the groups and individuals replied with statements associated with leadership. Because of this frequency, leadership became a particularly important focus for the Beacons research study.

To understand what stakeholders defined as important leadership factors associated with their schools, we first transcribed each interview. We then coded or identified each stakeholder statement that was directly or indirectly

linked to the school-based leadership system and/or the actions of the school leaders. This process was conducted by two people who established high reliability in their consistent classification of leadership statements. Once identified, these statements were analyzed, school by school. The themes that emerged from the statements were checked and validated by Beacons staff who were familiar with the interview text and schools. Lastly, the resulting case studies for each school were given to school administrators to be shared with relevant stakeholders for further validation. Although the individual case studies can be found on the Beacons Web site (<http://ici.umn.edu/beacons>), what follows in this document is a composite of the *leadership themes* as they apply to all four schools.

Figure 1. Percent of Focus Groups and Interviews Associating Factor Categories With School Success.



Leadership Themes Defined

How Were the Leadership Themes Defined?

The rest of this document describes the leadership themes that emerged through interviews with stakeholders at each of the schools. It should be noted that the information presented does not cover all that school administrators and school leadership systems are doing, but represents what stakeholders at each school identified as important leadership related events. In fact, many of these described events were said by stakeholders to be directly associated with their school's success.

Stakeholders also defined which school events were related to leadership. Leadership was defined as the "school-based leadership system and actions of the leaders." Only the stakeholder-described events that could be identified as explicitly related to this leadership description were included in the themes that are reported here. If a stakeholder statement was not explicitly related to leadership, however much the administrator or leadership system may have been involved in the event, it was not included.

This process, we believe, stayed true to stakeholder intent, and the emergent themes represent what stakeholders highlight as important leadership events within their school — events that support schools that produce exemplary outcomes for students with and without disabilities.

The Four Schools and The Factor Of Leadership

- Fred J. Page High School
- Sinagua High School
- High School of Telecommunication Arts and Technology
- William H. Turner Technical Arts High School

Fred J. Page High School

Summary

Fred J. Page High School (Page) is a comprehensive 9-12th grade high school located in Franklin, Tennessee, a suburb of Nashville.

The area surrounding the school is picturesque, with rolling hills, trees and open fields. Page serves about 875 students, most of them Caucasian

(85%) and black (9%). Fourteen percent of Page students have Individualized Education Plans.

Page first opened in the fall of 1976 as a 7-12th grade high school. In 1981, a middle school was built across the street to serve seventh and eighth grade students. Since 1976 the school has experienced four major renovation projects, including the addition of a new gym, nine science labs, four computer labs,



several new athletic facilities, and a state-of-the-art media center. The current principal started at Page in 1993. The context in which the principal arrived was one in which the school was having difficulty maintaining even an acceptable reputation. His foremost task was to

improve the school and reestablish its reputation.

Currently, Page's overriding aim is to prepare its students for college, although it offers a two-

path curriculum that includes a career education focus. Page prides itself on its wide selection of courses and programs. Academically, they have eliminated all of their basic classes and replaced them with differential courses that challenge students at every level — from remedial and study skills courses to college level courses. Support is built into the daily schedule through a 50-minute “Directed Study” period that allows all students to

If you have a strong principal, you have strong leadership... you're going to have a staff that's driven in delivering the goods and making things happen.

District Administrator



[The primary factor associated with this school's success is] the principal's involvement. That was six years ago now in January. We were a very sleepy community.... We were the runt of the litter. The principal came in and, in his first year here, was principal of the year for the State of Tennessee, which was kind of an eye opener for me.

Special Education Administration

study in the classroom of the teacher of their choosing. Alternate day block scheduling, allowing 90-minute instructional periods, offers instructional latitude and opportunities for teacher collaboration within departments and across departments. In addition, there is a school-wide emphasis on incorporating knowledge application, problem solving, and critical thinking in all courses. Graduating students are required to complete a culminating project that draws on a variety of skills to present to a panel of experts, including topic-related professionals from the community.

Extracurricular efforts emphasize activities that are relevant to students and staff. Although there are competitive activities, such as sports and debate, the less competitive activities stem from student and staff interests, with an underlying objective of connecting students with the school community.

When the current principal was assigned to Page, he initiated an effort to increase expectations for all students. A new resource program was developed to encourage the involvement of students with disabilities in the general core curriculum.

A staff monitor was connected to each student with a disability and this person would remain in this role throughout the students' high school experience. Currently, 95% of students with disabilities spend 100% of their day in the general core curriculum, and the remaining 5% participate for at least 75% of their day. Only one class is offered exclusively for students with disabilities.

A Partial List of School Programs/Initiatives

- Site-based decision-making along the framework of the Effective Schools program.
- Joining the High Schools That Work program of the Southern Regional Education Board.
- Extensive staff development program in effective instructional strategies, including Socratic Seminars, Cooperative Learning, Application of Learning, Writing Across the Curriculum, Interdisciplinary Instruction.
- Implementation of an Extra Help Network.
- Peer Mediation and Anger Management program.
- Freshmen Transition programs.
- Integration and Expansion of Technology program.
- Upgrading all vocational classes to include college preparatory curriculum.

For more complete information, check the Beacons Web site <http://ici.umn.edu/beacons>.

Fred J. Page High School: The Significant Factor of Leadership

One of the primary factors associated with the success of Page is the quality of its leadership. When stakeholders at Page think of leadership, they almost always think of one person, the principal. It was the arrival of the current principal that marked the change in Page's direction and performance. The principal carried with him absolute values that fused with the values of the staff and eventually transformed the school. These values included a belief that all children can learn, that performance is only as high as expectation, and that a school needs to be one-one group of staff and students, driven by one common vision.

The principal at Page focuses on developing and maintaining a single, high quality, learning community that strives to challenge students and staff while supporting their individual needs. He does this by regularly renewing, reinforcing and aligning school objectives around a common school vision; by setting and communicating high standards; by being consistent and systematic (fair); by expanding student access to challenging classes while expanding their responsibility for their choices; by being visibly present and involved at many school levels; by giving professional autonomy to staff while promoting an energetic climate of innovation and collaboration; and, finally, by expecting that all students are part of the general education curriculum while, at the same time, expecting the school will continue to give students the individualized support they need to succeed.

Page's staff and students have positively responded to these efforts. In six years Page transformed itself from a school that was characterized as the "runt of the community" to a school that now produces exemplary results for all of its students. In response to the school's success outcomes, students with and without disabilities have begun traveling beyond their own district borders to attend Page.

Sinagua High School

Summary

Sinagua High School (Sinagua) is a comprehensive 9-12th grade high school located in Flagstaff, Arizona. The school is nestled in a small valley just outside of town, with large scenically forested spaces around it. Its facilities are large, open, and uncrowded. It is the newest of three high schools in the city of about

50,000 people, and serves about 990 students. Fifteen percent of its students come from the Native American population (Navajo tribe), which has a large reservation outside of Flagstaff. Another 8% of its students come from the surrounding Hispanic community. Of all the students attending Sinagua, 11% have disabilities. These differences combined with the diverse mix of rural and small town backgrounds and high and low socioeconomic statuses makes for a unique school community.



Sinagua High School first opened in the fall of 1989. It is a community-based school whose objectives reflect changes in the community it serves. Sinagua offers a broad outcome-based curriculum for all students. Some of its programs include advanced placement courses in all disciplines, vocational trades blocks, as well as concurrent enrollment opportuni-

ties at nearby universities. In response to its large minority population, a strong Limited English Proficient Study Skills program

has been developed.

From the start, Sinagua was progressive in its perspective toward students with exceptionalities. Its original principal and staff placed a high value on all students participating in the core curriculum. In 1989, when mainstreaming was relatively rare, Sinagua placed an expectation on itself that all students with disabilities would spend at least 50% of their day in core curriculum classes. They have exceeded that expectation.

Even after a bus accident with 32 students resulted in a large increase in the student population with serious and profound disabilities, Sinagua today includes 90% of its students with disabilities in the general core curriculum for 75% or more of their day.

I think the original administration at this school was very open and positive with their staff. Their students became excited. The parents saw the excitement. They came here to see what was it that turned their kid on so strongly. They got the same excitement and passion... That's why we have the parents... [that] are willing to be there and help if they feel wanted, appreciated, needed, and they see that it is having a positive influence on their children.

*Community Advisory
Panel Member*

A Partial List of School Programs/Initiatives

- Emphasis on authentic assessment.
- An alternative program, called New Start, which allows potential dropouts (students with and without disabilities) to complete high school courses independently.
- A support program for expectant mothers and parents, called Teen Academic, Pregnancy, and Parenting (T.A.P.P), which provides daycare options and transportation for pregnant and parenting students.
- A special program for students with disabilities who are having difficulty working in the general education setting, called Turn It Around (T.I.A.), which aims to provide a safe, structured, and nurturing educational environment.
- Vocational courses specifically gear students for certification and employment opportunities after high school; for example, Certified Nursing Assistant, Certified Food Handlers.
- Incorporating school-to-work activities in all curriculums is strongly encouraged.
- Goal-setting, study habits and test preparation are stressed throughout the high school.
- Current news and community events are incorporated into the curriculum.

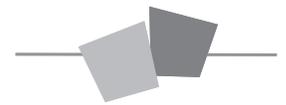
For more complete information, visit the Beacons Web site at <http://ici.umn.edu/beacons>.

Sinagua High School: The Significant Factor of Leadership

When stakeholders talk about leadership at Sinagua, they often refer to a school committee, called the Site Council. The Site Council is facilitated by the principal, and includes representatives from all of Sinagua's stakeholder groups — the administration, community, parents, staff, and students. This committee makes most of the school-wide decisions at Sinagua, and its participatory nature points to what is probably Sinagua's most fundamental characteristic: Sinagua is of and for its community.

This community-orientated leadership extends in all directions within the school, making leadership appear more structural than administrative. There are regular department head meetings and numerous other committees that consolidate information and present it to the Site Council or to the administration (who then presents it to the Site Council). Although it appears on the surface that the administration has a secondary role to the participatory, structural processes that lead Sinagua, the system would not work without the crucial efforts of the administration — efforts that have made the participatory system thrive.

Sinagua's first principal initiated and modeled a hardworking, dedicated, and nonhierarchical mode of operation within the school. These values spread throughout the school community and have endured throughout the course of Sinagua's development. When thinking about factors around Sinagua's success, many stakeholders point to what they call a "passion" that was cultivated by the



[The current administration is] very positive, very enthusiastic, and very supportive of teachers and students and the school programs.

School Advisory Panel Member

administration — a driving passion that was the result of the first administrator's ability to select a base of dedicated teachers, model excitement and momentum, and facilitate a structural and administrative invitation to the school's community to determine the school's direction

School "passion" is essential for Sinagua, as it is "passion" that motivates stakeholders to provide the needed leadership and direction. However, cultivating this motivation is a delicate, three-part process for administrators. For one, the administrators subtly abdicate their directive roles to staff, parents, community, and students. Secondly, while opening up leadership avenues, they compel stakeholders to accept and responsibly carry out the leadership functions. Finally, administrators manage the leadership system, as the whole process depends on the equitable coordination and guidance of the administrator. If one of these factors is compromised, the others suffer. If administrators take upon themselves too much of the control, or if there is not enough impetus for each stakeholder group to get involved, there is either a lack of invitation (pull) or a lack of interest (push) to bring stakeholders into leadership roles. If the system is not equitable and inclusive, some contingencies will be left out (or perceive themselves as being left out) and power-politics will distort the process. The administration has a subtle but complicated job of orchestrating the leadership system and facilitating its success.

Currently, Sinagua experiences an abundance of stakeholder passion and active participation from all constituencies. Furthermore, because the leadership system models an integrated, participatory process, the school community and instructional system reflect these values as well. Sinagua is perceived by stakeholders as one community. There is a focus on providing every student with the support he or she needs to succeed, and all department requests and student needs are approached through the same channels. Students with exceptionalities largely receive instruction in the general education curriculum and, conversely, students without disabilities can receive supplemental instruction in the resource room. As a direct result of the inclusive leadership process, academic support is built into the whole school, for all students.

High School of Telecommunication Arts and Technology

Summary

High School of Telecommunication Arts and Technology (Telecom) is a comprehensive 9-12th grade high school, located in

Brooklyn, New York. Telecom is housed in an old, brick, three story building that fills a small city block.

Serving about 1,350 students, it is a school that is physically pushed to — and some people would say beyond — its capacity.

A couple of small, temporary buildings have been erected across the street to absorb some of the overflow of students. Every square foot available is being maximally used in a city that puts a premium on space.

The student population at Telecom is largely Hispanic (60%), with the remainder split nearly equally between African American and Caucasian. Nineteen percent of Telecom's students have disabilities.

Half of the students are chosen by the city, using a lottery process. The other half apply to and are selected by the school. Telecom can boast of a 91% graduation rate in a city where a 49% graduation rate is the norm.



Telecom has a focus on integrating the classic liberal arts education with an awareness of technology while celebrating its diverse population in a sort of “global village.” There is special emphasis on learning tolerance, understanding, cooperation and mutual respect; the teaching of these values is supported through a conflict resolution program, the bilingual poetry journal, a leadership training class, and multicultural festivals,

among other diversity oriented programs. Telecom also offers students an independent study program, a cooperative education program (with paid work experiences), a teacher assistant

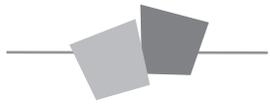
program in which students tutor at elementary schools, and the Executive Internship Program that provides students with opportunities to serve as interns to executive sponsors in government and industry. Telecom offers differential leveled courses in all subject areas — from study strategy courses to Regents level courses.

Over the past six years Telecom has incrementally expanded the inclusion of students with disabilities in their core curriculum. Sixty-six percent of Telecom's students with disabilities spend more than 75% of their day in the general education setting. Telecom relies on collaborative teaching between general educators and special educators and substantial assistance from paraprofessionals in general education classes.



I came from an intermediate school that had very dedicated staff but an administration that was very closed to the staff and not open to new ideas. It was a very different experience [than here]. It was not a happy place to work... [T]he leadership here... has really made this happen. Because of her [assistant principal of special education's] foresightedness and dedication and listening to us and hearing what we had to say, I think this is why we're where we are. If we didn't have the leadership, I don't think we would have come that far.

Special Educator



... I think, number one [in making inclusion successful] was her [assistant principal of special education] energy, her enthusiasm, and her vision. That was number one. Someone who was young — What I mean by that is she wasn't wedded to the past. She didn't have a vested interest in perpetuating something because she wasn't part of that past... [Secondly,] you had [a principal] who was relatively new in the job when we started this... and was willing to do things differently because they made sense... So you had an AP who was all gungho, [and] you had a principal who was willing to say the [kids in special education] are part and parcel of my school and they're not separate.

District Administrator

A Partial List of School Programs/Initiatives

- The Humanities Program links English and social studies classes; and in the ninth grade the program is also linked to technology classes.
- The Advanced Placement Program allows students to receive college credit for courses taken in high school.
- The College Early Intervention Program prepares special education students for post-secondary education by linking students up with the College of Staten Island.
- The College Now program provides students to earn up to eight free college credits during their senior year at the Kingsborough Community College.
- Citizenship and community involvement are top priorities at the school.
- There is an overall philosophy that emphasizes cooperative learning, critical thinking exercises, discovery learning, and hands-on instruction as essential to success.

For more complete information, visit the Beacons Web site at <http://ici.umn.edu/beacons>.

High School of Telecommunication Arts and Technology: The Significant Factor of Leadership

Leadership, according to stakeholders, has been a pivotal factor in the success of High School of Telecommunication Arts and Technology (Telecom). In connection with this success, three school administrators are frequently referenced

— the principal and two assistant principals — one of whom specializes in special education. Each of these administrators brings something unique to Telecom's leadership. The principal is supportive, flexible, and receptive to new ideas while he holds strong values in relation to clarity, direction, and creativity for staff and students. The special education assistant principal is a very social and assertive individual — a visionary — who strongly believes that inclusion is the best approach for all students, and who will work at great lengths to make her vision happen. And lastly, the general education assistant principal is described as a “forward thinker” who is receptive to new ideas and has a propensity toward systematic thinking about the logic and details of program implementation.

Although these three administrators have different characteristics, they are similar in their relentless focus on better services and outcomes for all students. Their non-hierarchical working relationship is an open, dialectical process — where new ideas are pitched, discussed, debated, revised, and formulated. All three are accessible and trusted by stakeholders, and they involve staff, students, and parents in their decision-making. Together as leaders over the past six years, they have (with the help of the superintendent) redefined Telecom from a relatively low performing, unfocused high school, to a school where expectations and standards are high and clear and apply to all students. Students are integrated under the same system of differentiated educational services, wherein staff feel supported and work collaboratively, and where innovation and improvement flourishes.

William H. Turner Technical Arts High School

Summary

William H. Turner Technical Arts High School (Turner Tech) is a comprehensive 9-12th grade high school that has a strong career focus. Located in a residential area of Miami, Florida, Turner Tech is housed in a large, relatively modern building that has open, airy, Florida-climate

architec-
ture. Of the
approxi-
mately
2,000
students at
Turner
Tech, 53%
are African
American
and 42%
are His-
panic.



Eleven percent of Turner's students have disabilities.

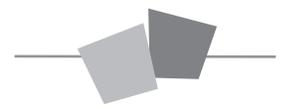
Turner Tech describes its education as a "two for one" opportunity — students are offered an academic diploma and a practical career-oriented skills certificate. The large school is divided into seven academies that offer students a relatively small community experience. The seven academies include Academy of Residential Construction, Agri-science, Applied Business Technology and Entrepreneurship, Fannie Mae/National Academy of Finance, Health, Industrial and Entertainment Technology, and Public Service/

Television Production. All students wear uniform shirts with each academy represented by a different color. Each academy offers a battery of courses that support a license, certificate, or preparatory training that reflects its focus. Much of the school's academic education comes from application-oriented activities within these academies, but some does not. Paralleling the academies are academic courses that reflect the diverse objectives of a comprehensive high school. The number of these courses that students take generally tapers off as the students get closer to graduation and closer to a career.

The building reflects these practical activities. A large room accommodates sections of a house that is being built. A large

garden and sheltered animal feeding area supports the interests of the Agri-science academy in the city. The school's supplies are managed by students in Applied Business Technology. In addition to these on-campus activities, Turner Tech is strongly linked with its community. Industry representatives spend time in the school, and students spend time training in outside industry.

All students, with or without disabilities, attend classes in their chosen academy. Seventy percent of the students with disabilities spend more than 75% of their time in core curriculum programs. As



If you put a school together with a lot of motivated people, unless somebody has a vision and has a dream... you can be hard-working, but how creative are you?

District Representative



I have to give credit where credit is due.

I got here in July.

I didn't make this all happen, you know.

We like to think that we enhance it and make things happen around here and keep the quality to the expectation, but it is a we thing.

Administrator

added support for students with disabilities, Turner Tech offers a number of special education classes in various academic areas. These represent smaller classes with special educators as their instructors.

A Partial List of School Programs/Initiatives

Turner Tech —

- Develops partnerships with industry to acquire needed support.
- Develops and implements a marketing plan to promote Turner Tech's goals regarding recruitment and curriculum that will enhance the school-to-work concept in existing programs.
- Promotes self-learning by adopting technology-enhanced curriculum and instruction that strengthens reading and mathematics skills.
- Is a member of the Coalition of Essential Schools, and views teachers as coaches and students as workers.
- Links its clubs to organizations that are consistent with the school's academies —
 - Vocational Student Activities
 - Future Business Leaders of America
 - Vocational Industrial Clubs of America
 - Distributive Education Clubs of America
 - Health Occupations Students Association
 - Future Farmers of America
 - Florida Public Service Association

For more complete information, check the Beacons Web site <http://ici.umn.edu/beacons>.

William Turner Technical Arts High School: The Significant Factor of Leadership

Turner Tech's success has made it a model high school for Dade County, which plans to build 10 more similar schools. Turner Tech has a relevant, practical vocational focus that is an attraction for students who are vocationally minded, regardless of exceptionalities. This tangible focus on student goals leads students, stakeholders, staff, and administration to rigorously serve that end as it applies to each student. Creative collaboration, curriculum, and supplemental services are constantly being utilized as a means to enable students to achieve their personal goals. Student engagement and satisfaction are high. Parent engagement and satisfaction are high, teacher engagement and satisfaction are high, and businesses are serious about contributing both time and money. From the district to the student, Turner Tech succeeds largely because it has incorporated its community into its leadership process. Consequently, the school represents the real and changing interests of its stakeholders.

Stakeholders associate leadership with Turner Tech's success. Turner Tech's founders had a strong and independent vision that set the school on a path of practical relevance. The current coordinator of special education, whose approach is very much student-centered, works endlessly to support students while searching for and instituting effective instructional and collaborative strategies. All stakeholder groups — students, parents, district, community, staff, and administrators — have an integrated role in the school's leadership system, assuring that support is broad, that relevancy is maintained, and that community resources are fully utilized. There is a focus on improvement, using data-informed decision-making. And lastly, the administration treats staff as professionals, experts at their craft, whose involvement in administrative decision-making is viewed as essential to effective improvement. Together, these leadership factors sustain a high level of stakeholder involvement and a culture of end-oriented innovation, which leads to tangible success for students.

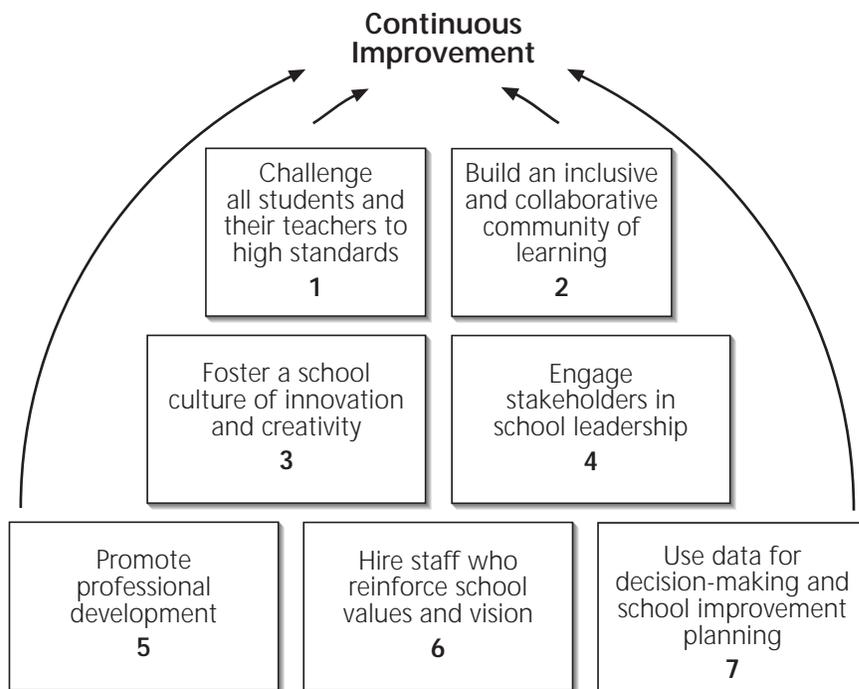


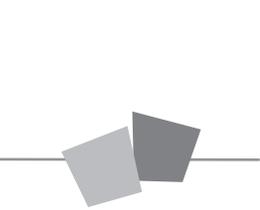
She [the special education coordinator] really has a good, strong vision of where things ought to be. She's like a dreamer. She comes up with really interesting new approaches to gather around a problem and to get to a solution.

Advisory Panel Member

Leadership Themes

1. Challenge All Students and Their Teachers to High Standards
2. Build an Inclusive and Collaborative Community of Learning
3. Foster a School Culture of Innovation and Creativity
4. Engage Stakeholders in School Leadership
5. Promote Professional Development
6. Hire Staff Who Reinforce School Values and Vision
7. Use Data for Decision-Making and School Improvement Planning





1 Challenge All Students and Their Teachers to High Standards

He expects kids to learn. He doesn't believe that just because you are poor or grew up in the country or are a minority, that you can't learn. [The principal's] attitude is one of 'If we expect quality, we'll get quality.' I think that he's out there expecting what he expects. He's very visible in and around the school.

District Representative

Stakeholders interviewed at three of the schools (Page, Telecom, and Turner) refer to high standards as an important theme associated with their success. In these schools, high standards provide a tangible and unified marker for students and staff to strive towards and measure themselves against. Standards are set and influence decisions at the school and classroom level. In all three schools there is an effort to apply the standards to everyone, and only under particularly exceptional circumstances, determined by an Individualized Education Plan, is a student exempted from these standards. However, the exemption is viewed as a temporary status.

In two schools (Page and Telecom), high standards were used to help set school reform in motion. Clarifying what the standards were and what would need to be done to reach them presented a new challenge, required new strategies, and necessitated the need for new thinking. While standards spawned this renaissance, they also set common goals and common expectations toward which staff could align their efforts. High standards not only provided students with a direction toward which to work and measure themselves against, it also provided staff with common direction and measures to assess their improvement. As these schools set these standards, they were, in essence, setting the blueprint and expectations for students and their services.

In these schools, standards are integral to a core value of continuous improvement. As school services improve and student performance increases, standards and expectations are appropriately raised.

Example: Fred J. Page High School (Page)

When the principal arrived at Fred J. Page High School he began to work on unifying the staff into a community with a common focus. The "first thing we worked on was climate and philosophy and mission and with where we were going," says an administrator. Aligning visions, goals, and objectives became essential to integrating the school-staff and students. More coordinated objectives were viewed as a means to a more effective school with higher outcomes. However, coordination of objectives first required an underlying philosophy and vision upon which objectives could be coordinated.

Page's vision was developed around the following explicit beliefs or assumptions —

- All students can learn.
- The level of learning is proportionate to the level of challenges.
- All students should have access to all the school's support.

"United in the pursuit of excellence. We educate each student by valuing respect, responsibility, and relevancy in a dynamic and enlightening environment."

— Mission Statement

Fundamental to the principal's objectives is an assumption that students will learn if the structure is set up to challenge them. This assumption is one that stakeholders refer to as an empowering premise, having a motivating affect on what staff believe they can do with students and, in turn, what students believe they can do with staff and themselves. This optimism is fundamental to Page's reform efforts and is the result of a variety of coordinated administrative objectives.

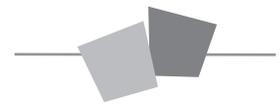
Developing and Maintaining High Expectations

The principal promotes high expectations for all students, regardless of background or disability. Each year, strengths and weaknesses of the school are discussed and evaluated, and the envelope of expectations is expanded where possible. For example, recently Page increased the criteria for a passing grade. The school had reached a performance level where a "D" was no longer useful as a measure of minimum student performance. Subsequently, the minimum performance level was graduated to the level of "C" while maintaining the same assessment criteria as before this change.

When expectations are clear and understood, it empowers students to make informed and responsible decisions. The principal personally takes it upon himself to reinforce and clarify expectations. Whether at an assembly, at a meeting, or in a classroom, the principal takes the opportunity to refresh the expectations and how they relate to the vision of the school. Often, the principal will meet with new students to clarify for them and their parent(s) what is expected of them and what the school will do for them.

Trusting Student Potential and Expanding Student Choices and Responsibility

Another way that the principal increases the challenges for students is by expanding their realm of responsibility. Page has pushed to increase student responsibility by giving them more academic latitude yet holding them accountable for their choices. While students may be more vulnerable to making choices that exceed their abilities, greater options can lead to greater challenges and engagement. For example, Page lowered the admission criteria for advanced placement classes to make them available to a larger number of students. Although some students overextend themselves and struggle within these classes, the performance measures remain the same, and the students are challenged and grow from the experience. A special educator describes a situation where a parent of a student who was not performing well requested an adjustment in the grading scale. "The principal's response to the parent was: 'We cannot modify to ensure passing; we can modify to ensure the ability to pass. But if he's not willing to take the responsibility, there are no modifications for passing any class.'" Standards are firm and students are given choices but held accountable. The school views these challenges as part of its goal of providing instruction and support that each student needs to achieve success.



The primary factor — I try to emphasize this with groups that I speak with when I have a chance to talk with other administrators at workshops — the thing I try to get them to see and the thing that I try to relate when we talk about the success that we've had here is that the first thing we worked on was climate and philosophy and mission and vision. That was of primary importance to us, to get everybody aligned with where we were going. I think that is one of the things that we've been able to do and it's not been easy..."

Principal



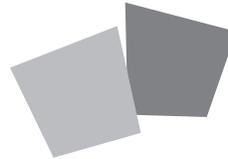
Since the beginning, the outlook [has been] ‘all kids can learn’; we need to figure out how.

Special Educator

One Learning Community

Page is focused on sustaining one learning community for all students. This is an expectation that is placed on the school and on all students. Out of a total of 219 classes during the fall of 1999, only one class was exclusively for students with disabilities. Where there is a special educator collaborating with a general educator, all students receive access to the same level of assistance. Teachers talk about students working together and

accepting each other’s differences, and offering each other classroom support when needed. Students talk about Page as a friendly place, an accepting community. Parents talk about Page as an inviting, respectful environment, where their children feel accepted and connected. Stakeholders in general talk about an environment where the same expectations apply to everyone, and everyone is part of the same community, sharing similar struggles, goals, and successes.



Recommendations That Emerged From the Schools: Challenging All Students and Their Teachers to High Standards

- Set expectations high, understanding that students and staff will excel to the degree that they are challenged.
- Trust in student potential, and expand their choices and responsibilities to an optimal degree while holding them accountable to their choices.
- Expect that all students will meet the school standards and that the school will successfully support them to do so within the general education curriculum.

Build an Inclusive and Collaborative Community of Learning

A prevailing theme at all four schools is the value of an inclusive learning community. Administrators, staff, students, parents, and other community members see their school as a single learning system and culture. This perspective unites the community, embraces all of its participants, and sustains an inclusive community of support that motivates and excites its members. Segregated settings, we/them dichotomies, and other forms of staff and stakeholder exclusions are not compatible with this value of community. This value is reflected in each school's structure, services, goals, and outcomes.

Within the four schools the fostering of community is viewed as a fundamental responsibility of the school, having implications for many levels of decision-making. Although this value has challenging implications for decision-making, there is a predominant belief that a unified community is fundamental to their objective, as it unites resources and staff around a common purpose and results in more freely-coordinated, ends-oriented collaborations and goals. In contrast, more delineated models of student services and staff objectives are perceived as inconsistent to the school's purposes, as they fragment a united effort or marginalize a student population. This self-imposed mandate has brought with it special ongoing challenges that have strengthened each school's community and effectiveness. Community requires and necessitates inclusion and collaboration among its members, and the resulting collaborative relationships have fueled

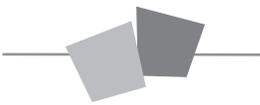
innovation, maximum utilization of its community talent and skills, and influenced the way each school works with teachers and students.

The concept of inclusion and mainstreaming in each school is indistinguishable from its concept and value of community. Inclusion is not a special program that has been installed in the schools to serve students with disabilities in the general education setting. Rather, inclusion applies to all students, staff, parents, and community. Exceptionalities exist in many different ways, at different times, for different durations. Each school works to include all of its members in one, shared, learning community.

Administrators and leadership within each school have promoted inclusive learning communities. Administrators have effectively communicated the value of community, and rigorously pursued strategies to expand and develop it. In varying ways, they have successfully united their staff, incorporated stakeholders and students, and facilitated structural supports that successfully support students and staff within the same educational system.

Example: High School of Telecommunication Arts and Technology (Telecom)

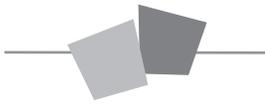
Telecom is an inclusive learning community. Administrators consistently reinforce a school identity that is singular — a message that says all students, parents, and staff are involved in the same school, with the same expectations, and same opportunities. This singularity facilitates school-wide understanding of goals and expectations while at the same time it clarifies for members their place within



I have tried very hard to do away with the traditional hierarchy that exists in schools.

My door's always open. Students are in. Parents are in... No one sees people according to their title. We all treat each other openly and very honestly.

Administrator



[Administrators
allow you to] come
at it from your own
perspective...

Everybody comes
at it with a totally
different agenda...

But in the end,
everybody is working
for the same goal.

Administrator

the school. The same system that supports all students also supports students with disabilities and other student exceptionalities. For example, less advanced classes, often bolstered with shared-teaching or smaller sizes, are available to students who need them, regardless of exceptionalities. As all services support all students, the fragmentation among departments, programs, staff and students that can often be found in high schools is replaced with a shared community perspective that reinforces direction, roles, and expectations.

The administration supports a culture of inclusion in several ways. One way is through an egalitarian approach to school management. The administration has made a conscious effort to eliminate the hierarchical structure that often exists between administrators, staff, and parents. Although each group has a different role, the administration strives to treat each other as equals. The administration has an “open-door policy” and welcomes whomever comes to their doors, while maintaining frequent communication with staff, parents, and students. Parents can be seen in classrooms collaborating with teachers, comfortably pitching their opinions and ideas.

School-wide decision-making at Telecom includes many individuals who that are comfortable with voicing strong opinions. The egalitarian openness leads to discussions that include diverse perspectives. This sometimes heated interchange is constructive for several reasons: It encourages the involvement of staff and parents; it draws in new and useful ideas and opinions; and it nurtures the value of sharing different perspectives.

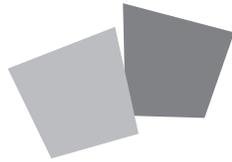
When a decision is made in this open context, it is a decision that is well understood by the people involved.

The policy of school inclusion leads to integration of staff as well as students. The administration advocates for teacher collaboration across departments and within departments. When teachers work together in single classes, administrators have set a directive that they teach collaboratively, toward the same goals and objectives, as they both serve all of the students. For this reason, the collaboration is called “shared teaching.” Special educators do not have a special curriculum. As a result, students can seldom detect if there is a special educator in the classroom, nor can they identify which students have disabilities. As a result, conceptual barriers that confuse learning and collaboration are reduced. Instead, staff and students simply focus on improvement, instruction, and outcomes.

Consistent with the administration’s egalitarian approach, shared-teaching has been introduced as a voluntary opportunity. Based on class need and personal teacher characteristics, administrators will identify potentially compatible matches and introduce the idea of working together to the two teachers. Required commitments last only for a semester, but often continue beyond then. This voluntary approach gives staff greater ownership in the collaborative arrangement, thereby increasing the likelihood of success. In a similar way, paraprofessionals are given an opportunity to prioritize — based on interest and personality — which teachers they would like to work with most. These matches also increase the likelihood that the collaboration will be successful, and that the personal interests and talents of the paraprofessional will be utilized.

When making substantial decisions, the administration formally involves students in the decision-making. Through this process students are given opportunities to understand the issues, present their opinions, and offer ideas. The administration believes that student

involvement is critical to substantial changes, as their support can provide the needed momentum to make the initiative successful. When the administration proposed the idea of school-wide inclusion, students became a critical contributor to the decision.



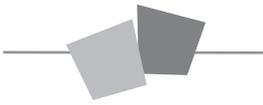
Recommendations That Emerged From the Schools: Building an Inclusive and Collaborative Community of Learning

- Have a clear vision of what the school should look like. Be committed, determined, enthusiastic, and hold the course.
- Expect that all students will participate in the general education curriculum and school activities. Expand activities to attract students who might not typically participate or who need support to do so.
- Establish creative support mechanisms for all students in need of them.
- Develop an accessible “open door” relationship with staff, students, parents, and others in the community. Establish a nonhierarchical working relationships with staff and colleagues. Be involved in the work of staff and students — on the intercom, in classrooms, hallways, cafeteria.
- Consistently communicate and reinforce the value of inclusion, regularly clarifying the message that it is one school serving all students.
- Promote communication between the school leadership and the school community through newsletters, communication protocols, regular meetings such as a monthly “Parent Coffee Hour,” etc.
- Involve parents and local businesses in decision-making processes regarding curriculum and extracurriculars programs and activities, treating them as equals, embracing differences, and negotiating and reconciling conflicting views.
- Facilitate and provide training and direct support for purposeful, intentional collaboration at all levels, involving special and general educators, administrators, paraprofessionals, and community members.
- Support an end-oriented focus, reinforcing services that enable students to identify and meet their goals. Within this framework emphasize student assets and view exceptionalities as tactical issues, not barriers.
- Ensure that administrators and staff realize that it is their responsibility to creatively support each and every student in successfully reaching his/her goals.



[When a special educator works with an English teacher in the same classroom,] whether you're a special education teacher or not, you're an English teacher. You need to be in the [English] department and you need...to work on curricula together.

Administrator



The philosophy of enabling people to experiment and take risks without there being a punitive part, but rather it being a very positive thing is something that I believe in and certainly has been embraced here. It's "Let's try something and if it doesn't work, let's not abandon it but let's make it better."

*School Advisory Group
Member*

Foster a School Culture of Innovation and Creativity

Probably the most resonating theme that emerged across the schools during interviews was related to school innovation and creativity. In fact, innovation is perhaps the predominant core value in the culture of each school, and is practiced at all levels. Whereas at one time it may have emanated from pockets within the school's community, the value now saturates the cultures of these schools and reinforces itself. The high prevalence of innovative attitudes and activities in each school are associated with several principles —

- A pursuit of continuous improvement.
- A value of experimentation.
- Nonhierarchical relationships between administrators, staff, and stakeholders.
- Emphasis on inclusive communication.

Each school's administration and leadership has been responsible for the growth and maintenance of their school's culture of innovation. As it is not something that can be mandated, the development of innovation has relied on sophisticated efforts to promote innovation, support innovation, and decrease barriers to innovation.

Example: High School of Telecommunication Arts and Technology (Telecom)

Innovation is perhaps the most powerful resource available to Telecom. The school building is filled to over-capacity, money is scarce, and the principal has little-to-no control over who is hired. It is largely the leadership's ability to sustain a culture of innovation that has led to Telecom's success — an improved and integrated curriculum, a large increase in teacher collaboration, more support services and opportunities for students, clearer goals, and greater school unity.

When administrators at Telecom increased their school's focus towards high standards, it fundamentally changed the way the school worked. Rather suddenly, administrators, staff, and stakeholders needed to redirect their efforts toward new goals. Changes demanded new ideas and innovation. And questions like "What if...?" and "Why not...?" began to infuse the school community with energy and momentum. This change in school goals laid the base for Telecom's culture of innovation.

Maintaining a culture of innovation is not only a by-product of a school-wide push for higher standards, but it continues to be a specific goal of Telecom's administration. The administration supports it in several ways —

- Provides staff with autonomy and leeway to innovate. Autonomy gives staff a level of control that enables them to believe they can change their environment. Leeway gives staff room to experiment.
- Encourages staff to think creatively, experiment, and take risks. New ideas are welcomed and recognized. The

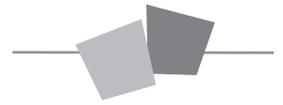
administration is receptive to ideas concerning school-wide issues and supportive of ideas concerning instructional programming.

- Minimizes the negative connotations associated with unsuccessful efforts. Risk-taking is defined as taking necessary steps toward improvement. Unsuccessful efforts are viewed as learning opportunities and do not — personally or professionally — discredit the person who is trying something new.
- Puts resource support behind requests — even if it requires reaching outside the school to the district, parents, community, or searching out grant opportunities. The administration views itself as serving teachers, helping them actualize their objectives.
- Models risk-taking by introducing new ideas to the staff.
- Invites students to discuss and assess new initiatives — through leadership positions, school activities, and classrooms activities. Students see that the school is focused on improvement and this can have its own effect on student engagement and performance.
- Supports a reciprocal relationship with staff regarding new ideas and initiatives. Staff are invited to discuss and assess administrative ideas. Conversely, this invitation encourages staff to include administrators in discussion and assessment of their new ideas. The reciprocity facilitates open communi-

cation and sharing.

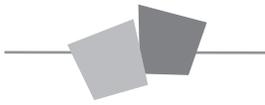
Telecom's focus on innovative improvement has attracted the attention of its district. When the district has new opportunities, it approaches Telecom because Telecom has the ability to process these ideas and take advantage of them. This can generate financial and other kinds of support for Telecom's teachers and students.

The administration's support of school innovation has resulted in innovation reaching a saturation point at Telecom. Teachers appear excited, open, and optimistic about their objectives. And with the emergence of new instructional approaches and programs, students are better able to succeed.



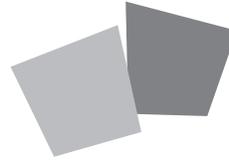
We've been very fortunate because we [the staff] have a tremendous amount to say. We're not [hearing from the administration], 'Oh, this is what you're doing' — we're asked. This is what's happening and [we're] not afraid to try something even if it doesn't work. And if it doesn't work, you don't feel like, 'Oh my goodness.' You're not afraid to try. And I think a lot of ideas have come from the faculty and they have been implemented because the leadership has allowed us to grow.

Special Educator



I think the supportive administration and an administration that is not so controlling that people can't try new things — I think that leads to the collaboration and a lot of other things that are going on in their school.

*Community Advisory
Panel Member*



Recommendations That Emerged From the Schools: Promoting a School Culture of Innovation and Creativity

Promote Reflection and Generation of Ideas

- Prompt staff, formally and informally, to reflect on their professional objectives.
- Infuse school with applicable research to prompt reflective thinking.
- Generate and propose substantive ideas regarding school improvement and initiatives.
- Reassess and update school mission and goals and evaluate programs on a routine basis.
- Promote risk-taking as part of improvement by minimizing the negative connotations associated with unsuccessful individual or departmental efforts.

Provide Direct Support

- Offer time and expertise to assist individuals and departments.
- Creatively locate resources to support individual and department requests.
- Assume responsibility for staff and stakeholder initiatives, if appropriate.
- Utilize humor and lightheartedness as a means of defusing stress and anxiety, which contribute to barriers to risk-taking.

Offer Staff Control and Individualization

- Allow staff to modify and adapt school-wide initiatives to conform to their professional contexts.
- Perceive and treat staff as highly trained, respected, and qualified professionals. Give them significant autonomy.
- Provide staff with leeway for experimentation.
- Invite teachers to formulate school programs, write specific grants, summarize school issues, etc.

Engage Stakeholders in School Leadership

To varying degrees, all four schools involve stakeholders in leadership decisions. Staff, students, parents, district representatives, and other community members have active roles in the leadership system of each school. Involving stakeholders strengthens the school's community, utilizes valuable resources, helps ensure that the school's direction and priorities reflect the community, and models a process that respects differences. In addition to what stakeholder involvement does for the school, it also has an effect on the stakeholders. Their involvement informs them, engages them, and motivates them to become more a part of the school. This in turn strengthens the bond between the community and the school and helps spread the school's educational message beyond the school walls, into the home, into community organizations, into businesses, etc. As a result, the stakeholders are quite active in the schools and students receive messages in their community that often coincide with the messages they receive at school.

All four schools have close relationships with their district. The district played an important role in enabling each school to achieve their reform objectives. Stakeholders described a reciprocal effect between their school and the district: As the school accelerated its pursuit of improvement through innovation and change, the district responded with interest and support; and as the district generated new initiatives, their attention would fall on the school as a site that could successfully implement them. This relationship developed a collaborative trust between

the two organizations, as each supported the interests of the other. This relationship sometimes brought to the school additional money, technical assistance, conference and training opportunities, and a significant degree of latitude and flexibility that is the result of a trusting relationship. Without the latitude, several of the schools would not have been able to implement the unconventional ideas that were important to their success.

Interviews revealed that two schools (Sinagua and William Turner) not only incorporate stakeholders in their leadership system, but depend on them. In these schools, administrators depend on staff, parents, student, district, and community members for direction — as administrators at these schools organize much of their work around facilitating stakeholder involvement and being responsive to stakeholder concerns and ideas.

Example: Sinagua High School (Sinagua)

Sinagua's leadership system is participatory and stakeholder based. Stakeholders commonly refer to the school's Site Council as a school steering committee that represents all stakeholder contingencies — administrators, teachers, parents, students, and other community members. Through this committee anyone can initiate discussion about a concern or idea. In addition, there are several school procedures in place to ensure that various stakeholder concerns and ideas are equitably received by the leadership. In the case of Sinagua, the administration's role is facilitative. They establish trusting relationships with stakeholders; gather opinions, ideas, and satisfaction levels;



[The Site Council] has been very supportive. When a teacher comes with a new idea, she [the Chair] asks them how they want to handle implementing it and what steps need to be taken. She really supports faculty.

Special Educator



I've always felt... (and I see it with respect to other parents) that the parents are treated as equals, too. If there's a group or committee or people working on things, the principal may be involved but I always felt there wasn't a hierarchy of "We're the administration, we're the teachers, and we'll let you participate." It's been a very equal kind of participation, which I've appreciated.

Community Member

facilitate committee discussions; keep stakeholders informed of initiatives; and work to carry out the desires of stakeholders.

As Sinagua's leadership is participatory, so are its goals. The nature of Sinagua's decision-making system ensures that school goals represent the desires and concerns of its stakeholders, which represent many perspectives that evolve and change with time. To accommodate these variances, the leadership system functions flexibly, and school goals reflect this flexibility. When stakeholders talk about school goals, they identify relatively short-term and response-oriented goals, rather than goals that are long-term and relatively fixed. For example, a driving safety issue arose from the concerns of one department. This led to an analysis of the situation and an eventual plan to solve it. Although schools often rely on long-term goals to provide consistency in direction from one year to the next, it appears that this consistency, for Sinagua, emerges from the continuous saturation of stakeholder input.

When asked about school goals, stakeholders frequently (with pride) refer to three characteristics of goal development —

1. They are often stakeholder-driven initiatives.
2. They are processed in a participatory manner.
3. The administration makes sure that everyone feels involved.

In Sinagua's leadership system, school initiatives can be proposed from anyone inside or outside of this system. Simply by identifying a problem or an idea, a person can launch the process toward

goal development. Although all issues are accepted in earnest, they are evaluated in the context of time, priorities, and resources. Ultimately it is the Site Council that determines the fate of the issue.

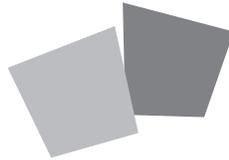
As school direction is dependent on the initiatives and input of stakeholders, stakeholder involvement is particularly important. Lack of involvement by a stakeholder group may result in a critical oversight, with school-wide implications.

There are four ways that Sinagua keeps stakeholders involved in leadership —

1. Representatives from each stakeholder group have formal positions on the Site Council, the school-wide decision-making council.
2. Staff have roles (voluntary and mandatory) as committee members or formal group members. These groups are directly linked to the Site Council, and structurally facilitate the involvement of stakeholders. For example, a Steering Committee concerns itself with school direction, and each goal is spearheaded by a committee; and department heads meet monthly to review initiatives and make recommendations.
3. Procedures are also in place to ensure that departments are highly involved. For example, each department must submit its own budget proposal to the Site Council.
4. Lastly, a receptive and responsive system like this one is not only designed to receive input from stakeholders, but depends on their involvement. Stakeholders are aware of (and proud of) this dependency.

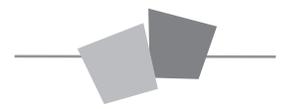
Although the participatory leadership system ensures equitable stakeholder representation, the administration plays an important role in maintaining and facilitating this representation. They keep people connected and help support them

by escorting their issues through the leadership process. They also make sure that the supporting committees and groups complete the needed tasks so that information is readily available.



Recommendations That Emerged From the Schools: Engaging Stakeholder Involvement in School Leadership

- Develop a participatory leadership structure that includes stakeholders from all constituent groups — administration, staff, students, parents, and community.
- Ensure that councils within that structure are sensitive, receptive, and responsive to stakeholder ideas, opinions, and concerns, emphasizing that all stakeholders are needed and their ideas valuable.
- Develop methods to keep stakeholders informed and to gather opinions and establish roles to ensure involvement.
- Encourage trusting relationships between stakeholders and constituent groups.
- Maintain a close and open relationship with the district — seek their cooperation and input.
- Incorporate all members as resources for curriculum, relying upon teachers as experts and recruiting industry to offer post-school curriculum advice and partnerships.



What is critical, I think, for a group like this [the Site Council] is that it's recognized as all the constituencies. It covers all the bases so that everybody has a voice and a place to come if they have a concern.

*School Advisory Panel
Member*



Promote Professional Development

About four years ago [the principal] called me and said a bunch of teachers are going, and he's driving the van...to Atlanta to go to a school-to-work conference. The next year I was driving with him somewhere to present at a school.

District Representative

All four schools promote professional development as a decisive strategy for school improvement. Proactive and staff-responsive professional development is an essential factor associated with each school's success. Professional development promotes improvement that is aligned with goals, it nurtures innovation, and it provides the practical knowledge to implement changes. It also reduces barriers to change as it helps to make known many of the stressful, previously unknown, aspects of change implementation — increasing the likelihood of success while also increasing the motivation that comes from incurring this optimism. All four schools eventually learned that professional development was an expense and effort that was fundamental to school success. Once understood, administrative efforts turned toward identifying professional developmental needs, responding to departmental and individual professional development desires, and coming up with creative ways to finance teacher training and cover for resulting teacher absences.

Example: Fred J. Page High School (Page)

Ongoing professional development is a key to success at Page. The principal nurtures professional development by promoting staff learning opportunities that are aligned with the school improvement plan, and supports departmental and individual desires for additional training that may or many not be aligned with the school improvement plan. In addition to targeted training objectives and programs, the principal infuses the school culture with new information to stimulate new ideas relevant to teaching and particular school issues.

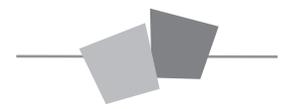
When the principal first arrived at Page, he brought with him a positive momentum. This momentum was communicated to staff through thought-provoking articles, thought-provoking questions, and thought-provoking discussions. Topics were broad and pertinent, including readings by such authors as Deming and Covey. A summer reading list was initiated that included, among other authors, *Total Body/Soul* and *Teaching In The Block*.

In addition to initiating new ideas, the principal promotes opportunities that further school improvement plans. This includes identifying and supporting staff involvement in objective-related learning opportunities. But the principal doesn't stop at support: He often leads the effort in learning by initiating and participating in these events himself. A special educator offers an example where the principal loaded up a van of faculty and, with a sense of camaraderie, drove to several cities to observe programs that modeled initiatives that Page was wanting to develop. In another example,

the principal identified a school in Delaware that would be useful as a model for Page. He then accompanied department heads and other faculty on a three day site visit to observe the Delaware school program.

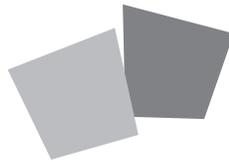
The principal also supports individual staff learning objectives, primarily (but not exclusively) when the objectives are

aligned with school-wide goals. These activities include conferences, workshops, as well as other learning opportunities. When staff return from training, they share what they have learned with their colleagues. This climate of learning and sharing has prompted staff at Page to offer more presentations at conferences than any other school in the district.



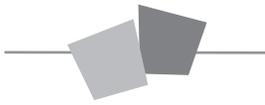
They went one year to learn how to do it, they did it, they got grants, and then a year later [the situation] was turned around. That happens with a lot of things here.

District Representative



Recommendations That Emerged From the Schools: Promoting Professional Development Among Staff

- Encourage staff to assess their own performance by facilitating a teacher self-assessment program and/or observing and constructively critiquing teachers on their teaching methods.
- Promote creative thinking — provide new ideas and current research to staff through journal articles, summer book readings, etc. — and respond creatively to individual requests for development.
- Identify, provide, and facilitate learning opportunities for staff, ensuring that all educators have access and that a mix of staff — for example, general educators, special educators, and paraprofessionals — attend programs together.
- Display personal investment in staff development by attending professional development opportunities with staff, organizing committees to develop goal-specific staff capacities, and aligning professional development with school-wide goals.
- Make efforts to promote and facilitate the sharing of ideas and collaboration between colleagues, i.e. arranging for opportunities for staff to present to their colleagues and others what they have learned at workshops.
- Entrust teachers with administrative responsibilities that extend their professional capacities beyond the classroom and department, while rewarding them for this effort.



No matter what system or organizational structure you have, if you don't have good teachers and you don't have good staff and support staff, then it's not going to work. So that has been our primary [job].

Administrator

Hire Staff Who Reinforce School Values and Vision

Stakeholders at two schools (Page and Sinagua) attributed part of their success to the school administrator's ability to hire staff who unite the school and push its progress. Although subject knowledge is an important factor in the administrator's selection of teachers, a greater factor is the level of the teacher's commitment to ensuring that students learn. Administrators at Fred J. Page High School view hiring as perhaps the most important part of their job. They have identified criteria for staffing that they believe supports the direction and priorities of their school. They search far and wide for the best candidates. They have a rigorous application processes. And once staff are hired, the administrators allow them the autonomy they deserve as professionals.

Example: Fred J. Page High School (Page)

Administrators at Page believe that a school can only be as good as its staff. For this reason the principal sees his most important job as "being able to attract quality faculty." Once identified, scrutinized, and hired, he then empowers staff with a lot of professional autonomy.

Through a process of inquiry and research the principal will identify teachers throughout the region who have strong reputations in the areas he needs to fill. He will attempt to attract their attention with whatever means he has available, while making sure that he is ready to hire quickly if the candidate

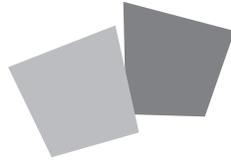
meets his criteria. On a few occasions the district representative has even been asked to come to the school on a Saturday to finalize a contract.

The administration uses a rigorous screening process when selecting teachers to hire. One teacher describes the process as "brutal." Although there have been a few exceptions to this hiring process, it usually follows these steps: First, prospective teachers complete an application at the district level. If this is accepted, the teachers produce a video that is available to principals throughout the district. Next, there is the school-level interview. As one teacher explains, "We've had teachers who we thought were going to be great, and they didn't pass the interview process." The teachers may have exceptional knowledge of their disciplines, but that is only one of four criteria used.

The other criteria that Page's administration uses for selecting teachers is well defined. They are as follows —

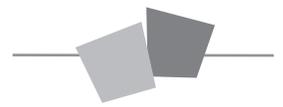
- Altruistic: Is the teacher teaching because he or she cares about children?
- Compatible: Is the teacher compatible with the school's culture, purpose, and philosophy?
- Open-minded: Is the teacher personally interested in learning?

A combination of the above attributes has been the recipe for a vital, responsive, and cohesive staff that embraces the concept of community and continuous improvement.



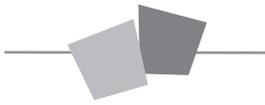
Recommendations That Emerged From the Schools: Hiring Staff Who Reinforce School Values and Vision

- Approach staff selection as an essential component to building the base for a quality school.
- Give staff professional autonomy.
- Aggressively pursue good teachers through creative research and recruiting efforts.
- Develop a clear understanding of what the school has to offer the prospective teacher as incentive.
- Implement a rigorous screening process.
- Conduct a rigorous screening process, including a teacher observation on video.
- Hire teachers who are not only qualified, but are altruistic and student-centered, compatible with school values and culture, are favorable to learning, and dedicated.



The thing that comes through that I look for the most is altruism. It's caring about kids. Why are they doing this? Is it about them? Is it about fulfilling their needs and their desires or their goals? Is it because they love English or they love math? Or is it about wanting to help kids?

Administrator



As I understand it, there is a database of specifics, the demographics and statistics of our school, like test scores and student achievement. That is examined by the school improvement team and the EESAC [Education Excellence School Advisory Council] committee. We sit in this room and have a brainstorming session.... We brainstorm needs and concerns that we have and came up with a list of problems or concerns. Then the writing team tried to make that fit into the format of the school improvement plan.

School Advisory Panel

Use Data for Decision-Making and School Improvement Planning

Stakeholders at two schools (Page and William Turner) highlighted the role of self-evaluation in school improvement plans and decision-making. This is done for two purposes: One, to identify weaknesses around which to set new goals and objectives; and two, to assess progress made on elements of the improvement plan. This data-informed decision-making and planning complements a systematic, proactive management style. Whereas the administration of Fred J. Page High School (a relatively small school) is, itself, spearheading the design of data collection and data analysis, the administration of William Turner (a much larger school) allocates these responsibilities to others while focusing on the orchestration of the process.

In both schools informed decision-making involves reviewing the school mission and goals and identifying variables that measure progress toward these objectives. Once objectives are identified, administrators select variables which are key indicators that can be practically assessed. The administrators of both schools have close and trusting relationships with their districts and have relied on the district for assistance in designing the evaluation framework, analysis, and, to a certain extent, the reporting of the findings. In fact, this relationship has helped to nurture a stronger and more respectful bond between the school and the district. Once the data are collected, the findings are used to prompt discussion and inform decisions. Data are not, however, used to override the perceptions

and ideas of those involved in school leadership. Committees and councils debate issues from varying stakeholder perspectives, and decisions are grounded in a broad range of perspectives.

Example: William Turner Technical Arts High School (Turner Tech)

Administrators at Turner Tech utilize school data in the development of their annual improvement plans and ongoing improvement decisions. In addition, the administration encourages and facilitates the use of data for teacher curriculum and instructional improvement. These efforts are partly facilitated by state and district requirements in annual improvement plans, but data gathering and use are extended beyond these requirements. Data are used to inform specific projects and objectives, to identify school strengths and weaknesses, to monitor progress on the annual improvement plan, and as one means by which teachers can assess their curriculum and instruction.

The state of Florida and Dade County require that Turner Tech submit to the district an annual improvement plan. This school-wide improvement plan is primarily developed by a school advisory committee, called the Educational Excellence Council — which is composed of teachers, parents, community members, and one administrative designee. By conducting a school needs assessment and an assessment of progress on the previous annual improvement plan, the Educational Excellence Council updates school goals and improvement plans.

Assessing the needs of the school includes an analysis of statistical information that describes Turner Tech's demographic characteristics and student performance scores. Armed with this data, the school's Improvement Advisory Committee and the Educational Excellence Council meet together and discuss the findings, areas of success, and areas of concern. The diverse stakeholder composition of the attendees ensures that diverse interests are represented and considered. The meetings are described as big "brainstorming" sessions, located in what is referred to as the "war room." Their primary goal is to identify, plan, and support effective strategies for improvement. Once clarified, a subcommittee is put in charge of describing the plan and its details in the annual report. Although the administrator facilitates the process, the stakeholders are largely put in charge of the report.

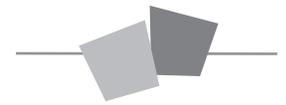
A guiding touchstone used in the school assessment process is the school's mission statement which, according to many stakeholders, has lost some of its original relevancy. In response, there is an elaborate effort to "refresh" the mission, to develop greater continuity between the school's mission and the school's current expectations and goals. Consistent with the leadership's inclusive approach, the process of revising involves input from all levels of the school — starting in each department and graduating to nine ad hoc committees that are managed primarily by teachers who have a large degree of control over the outcome.

Besides the annual improvement plan, Turner Tech's leadership also pursues ongoing improvement in curriculum, instruction, and relevancy. A particularly significant effort is aimed at learning

from the insights of business leaders in the community. As Turner Tech is oriented toward tangible, vocational outcomes for its students — such as occupational certificates and licenses — its leadership wants its educational outcomes to be congruent with employer needs. In addition, the school's administrators are partial to the business model of organizational management. To satisfy these interests, administrators have formalized a role for the business community at Turner Tech, on what is called the Industry Advisory Committee. Business leaders on this committee include such notables as the president of the Nation's Bank and the vice president of Solomon Smith Barney. Some of the committee members are quite familiar with Turner Tech's curriculum, teachers, students, and issues. On a regular basis, this committee meets, discusses issues, and generates recommendations to the school's leadership.

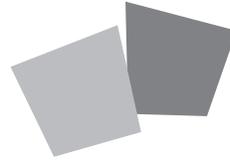
Improvement is also generated by the ongoing efforts of the Improvement Advisory Committee, which keeps Turner Tech's leadership informed of improvement related issues and progress related to the school's improvement plan.

In addition to the school-wide improvement focus, administrators encourage and facilitate data-based self-assessment among teachers. Although it is described as a "tedious" process, a program was initiated where all student report cards were assessed every nine weeks. Teachers were taught how to interpret the data, and adjustments were made to curriculum and activities to respond to deficient areas (in some cases, individual student schedules were changed). By analyzing the data every nine weeks the adjustments could be assessed until improvement was achieved.



[We] have the Improvement Advisory Committee that's been able to help us find out if anything is going on that we need to get ahead of instead of reacting to.

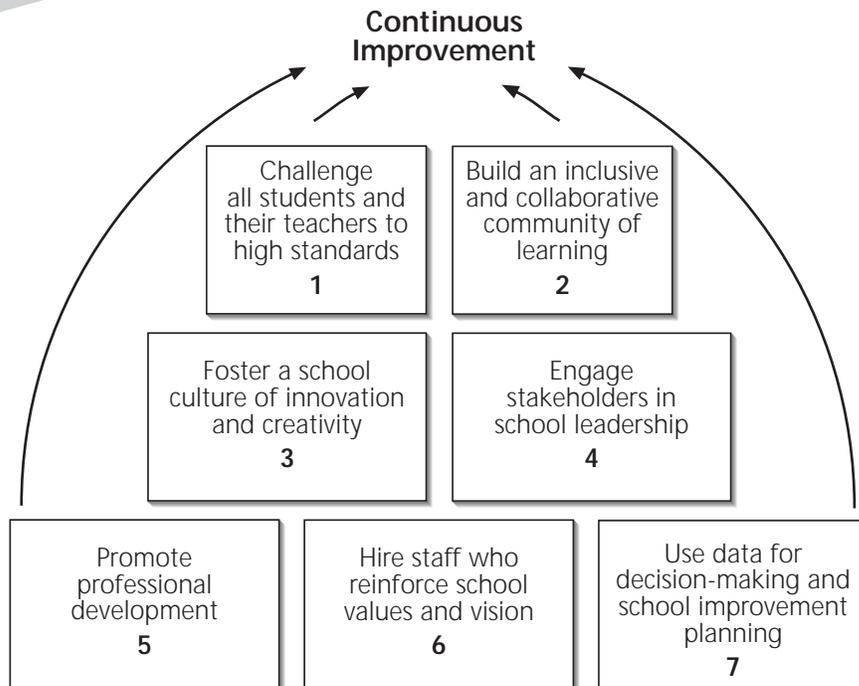
School Advisory Panel



Recommendations That Emerged From the Schools: Using Data for Decision-Making and School Improvement Planning

- Develop an improvement framework that is systematic and based on a vision.
- Refresh the school vision, goals, and objectives as part of an ongoing process involving stakeholders.
- Utilize the framework of an existing reform program to assist in developing an improvement framework; for example, the High Schools That Work program.
- Use school data in the development of annual improvement plans and ongoing improvement decisions.
- Encourage, facilitate, and train teachers in the use of data for teacher curriculum and instructional improvement.
- Use data to inform the development of specific projects and objectives, to identify school strengths and weaknesses, and to monitor progress on the annual improvement plan.

Relationship Among Themes



Continuous improvement and exemplary outcomes at each of the four schools can be associated with a pyramid of goals, supports, activities, and attitudes as depicted above. The relationships among the themes is important, as many of these relationships are interdependent — one would not work if not for the existence of the other. Each school pursues continuous improvement as each school's vision is modified in response to achieved goals and objectives. The leadership themes that school stakeholders identify work together to make improvement happen on a holistic scale — for all students and staff.

Stakeholders in all four schools focus on the following leadership themes within their school: a culture of innovation and creativity, learning communities that are compelled to include all students and staff, the pursuit of goals of high and inclusive standards for students and staff, the substantial involvement of stakeholders in their leadership processes, and strong support for professional development. Two of the schools highlight data-based decision-making and the hiring of a base of staff that reinforce the school's direction and values. Each of the four schools is holistically oriented, and all seven stakeholder-identified themes enable and reinforce each other.

Although there are many relationships among these continuous improvement themes, several seem to be paramount:

High Standards and Inclusive Community

When high standards apply to all students and staff, a natural aligning of the community occurs. Staff work together toward common goals and objectives. Barriers to effectiveness — segregated services and segregated objectives — are reduced as cooperation and collaboration become necessary. In all schools, the collaboration that was part of including students with disabilities in the core curriculum demonstrated the value of collaboration to other segregated elements of the school — teacher-to-teacher, department-to-department, activity-to-activity. This demonstration unleashed a momentum of collaboration that, over time, enveloped the whole school, in many spheres. A dedication to high standards and inclusion also binds the whole community within a common struggle — improving the performance of all students. Responsibility overlaps, accountability overlaps. In response, cooperation, innovation, and creativity emerges across the whole school, benefiting all students.

Culture of Innovation

The importance of innovation becomes clearer within an inclusive, high standards community. Conversely, high standards and inclusion will not occur without innovation. Innovation spawns the ideas and initiatives that produce high standards and the means by which they are reached. Stakeholders at all four schools underline this factor over and over.

Stakeholder Involvement in Leadership

Innovation, an inclusive community, and high standards are all closely linked to stakeholder involvement in leadership. The involvement of staff, students, parents, community, and district in leadership connects the standards with the community. Stakeholder involvement in leadership ensures that school goals and standards represent more of the community, and increased stakeholder control over direction and process motivates stakeholder investment of time, effort, and resources. As ideas have greater impact, they have greater meaning — and greater meaning leads to greater involvement. Involvement of stakeholders in leadership is essential as stakeholders are probably the largest resource available to each school.

Professional Development, Using Data-Decision Making, and Hiring Staff Who Support School Values

Three themes that stakeholders referred to — promoting professional development, hiring staff who reinforce school values and direction, and using data-based decision-making — support innovation, high standards, and community. Professional development was referred to by all four schools as an essential ingredient to successful change. It enables the school to expand beyond its current capacities. This is particularly important when continuous improvement is pursued through high standards and community inclusion — as the future of each school is uncharted. The use of other people's success increases the likelihood of successful change, as it builds confidence, links resource networks, and buttresses school objectives. Professional development is related to hiring quality staff who are apt to reinforce school direction and values, as this strengthens the community and increases the likelihood of the school reaching its objectives. The use of data in decision-making also reinforces community and the likelihood of achieving success, as it reveals, prods, and challenges schools to reflect on what they are doing and how well they have done it.

Administration

Stakeholders referred to the actions of administrators as being vital to the school-wide and interdependent themes that have been associated with the success of these schools. Administrators were given credit for successfully leading or facilitating the development of these themes at each school. These administrators pursued these themes from different contexts, circumstances, and directions. They also differed in some of the ways in which they developed these themes within their school communities. However, the results are similar: inclusive communities, dedicated to high standards, working together to achieve their goals.

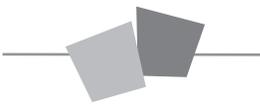
Changing To Inclusive Education: A Chronology of Administrative Decisions

Stakeholders at each of the four schools describe a different scenario that led to their decision to integrate special education with general education. William Turner's career focus required, from the beginning, that all students take core courses to prepare them for their career goal. Sinagua's orientation toward inclusion was also set from its very start, as its original administrator was progressive in her inclusive educational philosophies. But for Page and Telecom, inclusive education reform emerged as a natural companion to other school reforms that were being implemented. Among them, high standards and inclusive education were complementary reforms. To improve outcomes for all students, all students needed access to content experts, effective instructional strategies, and individualized support services.

Example: High School of Telecommunication Arts

The initiative to transform Telecom's system of segregated special education services to that of full inclusion and services for all was correlated with the presence of a relatively new administration that was solutions-oriented. This solutions-orientation compelled them to look around and beyond barriers to change — establishing a tendency to try to maneuver around bureaucratic norms to reach their goals. This creative “bootstrap” approach to problem solving was embraced by school staff as it represented a leadership that put improvement above tradition.

At Telecom, the fundamental school changes to high and accountable standards raised questions about the standards for students with disabilities. The momentum behind this reform — a reassessment of what can be expected of students — quickly spread to higher expectations for students with disabilities. As there is a federal mandate (IDEA) that students with disabilities be placed in the least restrictive environment, the notion to have one supportive education system for all students was not inconsistent with the goals of special education.



There was a culture in this school from [the current and past administrators] which said, ‘We don’t need to follow the rigid bureaucratized rules... [T]here was support, there was a culture, and [in regards to the idea of integrated settings] I think they were willing to say, ‘Let’s give it a try. If it works, let’s run with it.’ It took a lot of things to make it work, but I think they saw that there was support from [the principal, the assistant principals, and] support from the superintendent’s office.

District Representative



What they also saw is that the kids, the suspensions they had, those were down.

The behaviors improved.

The attendance improved.

The kids started to academically improve.

District Representative

Furthermore, the district representative who worked most closely with Telecom was a strong proponent of the inclusive approach to educating the exceptional student. The district representative had already been promoting inclusion among district superintendents, and he had organized a program for superintendents to attend a conference on inclusion. He then created opportunities for school administrators to attend the same program and approached Telecom. He stipulated, however, that for every special education administrator attending the conference an equivalent general education administrator must also attend. Although Telecom's principal was not able to participate in the conference, two assistant principals went. They returned from the conference convinced that inclusion was the right direction for Telecom to take.

Telecom's staff viewed a state grant that was designed to promote inclusion within schools as the start. After an arduous process of conceptualizing inclusion at Telecom and the process to put it in place, staff completed the application and ultimately received the three year grant. As a first step, administrators began introducing "shared-teaching" to the school by doing the following —

- Focusing on one grade level
- Beginning with non-academic classes
- Matching up likely successful teaching partners, one by one —
 - Identifying general and special educators that would work well together
 - Introducing the idea and the opportunity to these teachers, individually

- Maintaining the opportunity as voluntary, and not a commitment for more than a semester

In particular, the special education administrator coordinated this stage of the transition. Over several semesters, shared-teaching partners worked together, some eventually choosing to work alone, and some eventually choosing to work together again. Inclusion grew slowly, partially, class by class, and into other grade levels. Staff noticed the positive affect it had on the students, and these observations kept staff open to the possibility of participating.

A pivotal day in the transition occurred when the district representative met with key school administrators to push for faster change. He proposed moving inclusion to an entire grade level. The administrators' first response was that of serious apprehension, but finally they agreed. The administrators and district pitched the idea to the staff, parents, and students. Having already observed its positive affects on student performance, each stakeholder group agreed to the substantive change.

A structure of courses representing academic levels was organized. Voluntary shared-teaching was established in classes where students had particularly challenging objectives. In other classes, some appropriately smaller than others, a special or general educator would teach alone. In some classes a paraprofessional was added. Nearly all classes were open to all students, and all distinctions between students with disabilities and students without — such as on class rosters — were removed for the first two weeks of classes. Advanced classes were also offered. In addition to these general

classes, there were classes that offered particularly specialized assistance.

Over time, administrators found that collaboration began to flourish among staff and ideas began to flow as the barriers of specialization were reduced. Furthermore, student overall performance significantly improved. As the model sold itself to stakeholders, inclusion was eventually moved to another grade level, and then another grade level, until the entire school was transformed. As a result, a common or shared school identity began to emerge among students. The performance level for students without disabilities improved, as there were support services for all students who were having difficulties. Furthermore, the performance of students with disabilities rose as they became integrated into the now-unified school. In all, the academic performance of students with and without disabilities improved as the school increased its standards, unified, and modeled inclusion and support at all levels.



I don't define special ed as a special ed issue; I define it as a general ed issue.

District Representative

School Leadership Self-Assessment Worksheet

The following worksheet is provided as a way of self-assessing the degree to which individuals involved in the school leadership process implement the themes that emerged from the participating high schools — themes that support exemplary outcomes of students with and without disabilities. Each theme is represented with a set of leadership behaviors. By assessing each behavior and noting the degree to which it is currently occurring, school leadership groups can identify their strengths and weaknesses in relation to these leadership themes. To further

utilize this worksheet, it is suggested that people involved in school leadership respond to this assessment by discussing the results, involving stakeholder groups, and generating specific actions that would maintain strengths and address indicated weaknesses.

The definition of who is involved in school leadership varies from school to school. School leadership can include committees that involve administrators, staff from varying levels and disciplines, students, parents, and community members.

1. Challenge All Students and Their Teachers to High Standards

	Yes	Somewhat	No
A. Our school leadership sets expectations high, and understands that students and staff will excel to the degree that they are challenged.			
B. Our school leadership trusts in student potential, and expands their choices and responsibilities to an optimal degree while holding them accountable to their choices.			
C. Our school leadership expects that all students will meet the school standards and that the school will successfully support them to do so within the general education curriculum.			

2. Build an Inclusive and Collaborative Community of Learning

	Yes	Somewhat	No
A. Our school leadership has a clear vision of what our school should look like. We are committed, determined, enthusiastic, and hold the course.			
B. Our school leadership expects that all students will participate in the general education curriculum and activities. We have expanded activities to attract students who might not typically participate or who need support to do so.			
C. Our school leadership has established creative support mechanisms for all students in need of academic or other kinds of support.			
D. Our school leadership has developed an accessible “open door” relationship with staff, students, parents, and others in the community. We have established nonhierarchical working relationships with staff and colleagues. We are involved in the work of staff and students — on the intercom, in classrooms, hallways, cafeteria.			
E. Our school leadership consistently communicates and reinforces the value of inclusion, regularly clarifying the message that our school is one school serving all students.			
F. Our school leadership promotes communication between the school leadership and the school community through newsletters, communication protocols, regular meetings such as a monthly “Parent Coffee Hour,” etc.			
G. Our school leadership involves parents and local businesses in decision-making processes regarding curriculum and extracurricular programs and activities, treating them as equals, embracing differences, and negotiating and reconciling conflicting views.			

H. Our school leadership facilitates and provides training and direct support for purposeful, intentional collaboration at all levels — involving special and general educators, administrators, paraprofessionals, and community members.			
I. Our school leadership supports an end-oriented focus, reinforcing services that enable students to identify and meet their goals. Within this framework we emphasize student assets and view exceptionalities as tactical issues, not barriers.			
J. Our school leadership ensures that administrators and staff realize that it is their responsibility to creatively support each and every student in successfully reaching his/her goals.			

3. Foster a School Culture of Innovation and Creativity

	Yes	Somewhat	No
<i>Promote Reflection and Generation of Ideas</i>			
A. Our school leadership prompts staff, formally and informally, to reflect on their professional objectives.			
B. Our school leadership infuses the school with applicable research to prompt reflective thinking.			
C. Our school leadership generates and proposes substantive ideas regarding school improvement and initiatives.			
D. Our school leadership reassesses and updates the school mission and goals and evaluates programs on a routine basis.			
E. Our school leadership promotes risk-taking as part of improvement by minimizing the negative connotations associated with unsuccessful individual or departmental efforts.			

<i>Provide Direct Support</i>			
F. Our school leadership offers time and expertise to assist individuals and departments.			
G. Our school leadership creatively locates resources to support individual and departmental requests.			
H. Our school leadership assumes responsibility for staff and stakeholder initiatives, if appropriate.			
I. Our school leadership utilizes humor and lightheartedness as a means of defusing stress and anxiety, which contribute to barriers to risk-taking.			

Offer Staff Control and Individualization

J. Our school leadership allows staff to modify and adapt school-wide initiatives to conform to their professional contexts.			
K. Our school leadership perceives and treats staff as highly trained, respected, and qualified professionals, and gives them significant autonomy.			
L. Our school leadership provides staff with leeway for experimentation.			
M. Our school leadership invites teachers to formulate school programs, write specific grants, summarize school issues, etc..			

4. Engage Stakeholders in School Leadership

	Yes	Somewhat	No
A. Our school leadership has developed a participatory leadership structure that includes stakeholders from all constituent groups — administration, staff, students, parents, and community.			

B. Our school leadership ensures that councils within that leadership structure are sensitive, receptive, and responsive to stakeholder ideas, opinions, and concerns, emphasizing that all stakeholders are needed and their ideas valuable.			
C. Our school leadership develops methods to keep stakeholders informed and to gather opinions and establish roles to ensure involvement.			
D. Our school leadership encourages trusting relationships between stakeholders and constituent groups.			
E. Our school leadership maintains a close and open relationship with the district — seeking their cooperation and input.			
F. Our school leadership incorporates all members as resources for curriculum, relying upon teachers as experts and recruiting industry to offer post-school curriculum advice and partnerships.			

5. Promote Professional Development

	Yes	Somewhat	No
A. Our school leadership encourages staff to assess their own performance by facilitating a teacher self-assessment program and/or observing and constructively critiquing teachers on their teaching methods.			
B. Our school leadership promotes creative thinking — provides new ideas and current research to staff through journal articles, summer book readings, etc. — and responds creatively to individual requests for development.			
C. Our school leadership identifies, provides, and facilitates learning opportunities for staff, ensuring that all educators have access and that a mix of staff — for example, general educators, special educators, and paraprofessionals — attend programs together.			

D. Our school leadership displays a personal investment in staff development by attending professional development opportunities with staff, organizing committees to develop goal-specific staff capacities, and aligning professional development with school-wide goals.			
E. Our school leadership makes efforts to promote and facilitate the sharing of ideas and collaboration between colleagues, i.e. arranging for opportunities for staff to present to their colleagues and others what they have learned at workshops.			
F. Our school leadership entrusts teachers with administrative responsibilities that extend their professional capacities beyond the classroom and department, while rewarding them for this effort.			

6. Hire Staff Who Reinforce School Values and Vision

	Yes	Somewhat	No
A. Our school leadership approaches staff selection as an essential component to building the base for a quality school.			
B. Our school leadership aggressively pursues good teachers through creative research and recruiting efforts.			
C. Our school leadership conducts a rigorous screening process.			
D. Our school leadership hires teachers who are not only qualified, but are altruistic and student-centered, compatible with school values and culture, are open to learning, and dedicated.			
E. Our school leadership develops a clear understanding of what the school has to offer the prospective teacher as incentive.			

F. Our school leadership gives staff professional autonomy, once hired.			
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7. Use Data for Decision-making and School Improvement Planning

	Yes	Somewhat	No
A. Our school leadership develops an improvement framework that is systematic and based on a vision.			
B. Our school leadership refreshes the school vision, goals, and objectives as part of an ongoing process involving stakeholders.			
C. Our school leadership utilizes the framework of an existing reform program to assist in developing an improvement framework.			
D. Our school leadership uses school data in the development of annual improvement plans and ongoing improvement decisions.			
E. Our school leadership encourages, facilitates, and trains teachers in the use of data for teacher curriculum and instructional improvement.			
F. Our school leadership uses data to inform the development of specific projects and objectives, to identify school strengths and weaknesses, and to monitor progress on the annual improvement plan.			

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