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Casting a vision for student learning while remaining flexible in the means



The year before I left the classroom to become a school administrator I engaged one day in a discussion with peers at my school. In the course of that conversation I shared something I envisioned for our students. I remember one individual looking directly at me and asking, “Cecile, where do you live, on the moon?”

What I have learned in my leadership practice is that the vision does not dictate the route we take to achieve it. There are many paths to success.

The context in which we work, the mission and beliefs of our school, the values of our community, all these contribute to and impact our decisions. In addition, we live within practical, resource driven limitations. So, our ability to think outside-the-box and bring creativity and flexibility into our circumstances is key to achieving our goals.

One of the ways I have asked my teachers to think more flexibly is in the redesign of our Special Education Department from a grade-level-centric arrangement into a clustered arrangement (K-1, 2-3, 4-6, FSC). It has not been easy to convince others to work differently than they have been and in all honesty, two years in, this is still a work-in-progress. It is sometimes easier to do your own things in silos than to work collaboratively, which our new structure requires. Indeed, struggles and frustration have come. But above the practicalities of rearranging our teams, the idea I want my teachers and leaders to grasp is that in order to solve complex problems, we must be willing to think creatively and find solutions that have sometimes never been tried before. In that we find our synergy and momentum and really make a difference for our students.