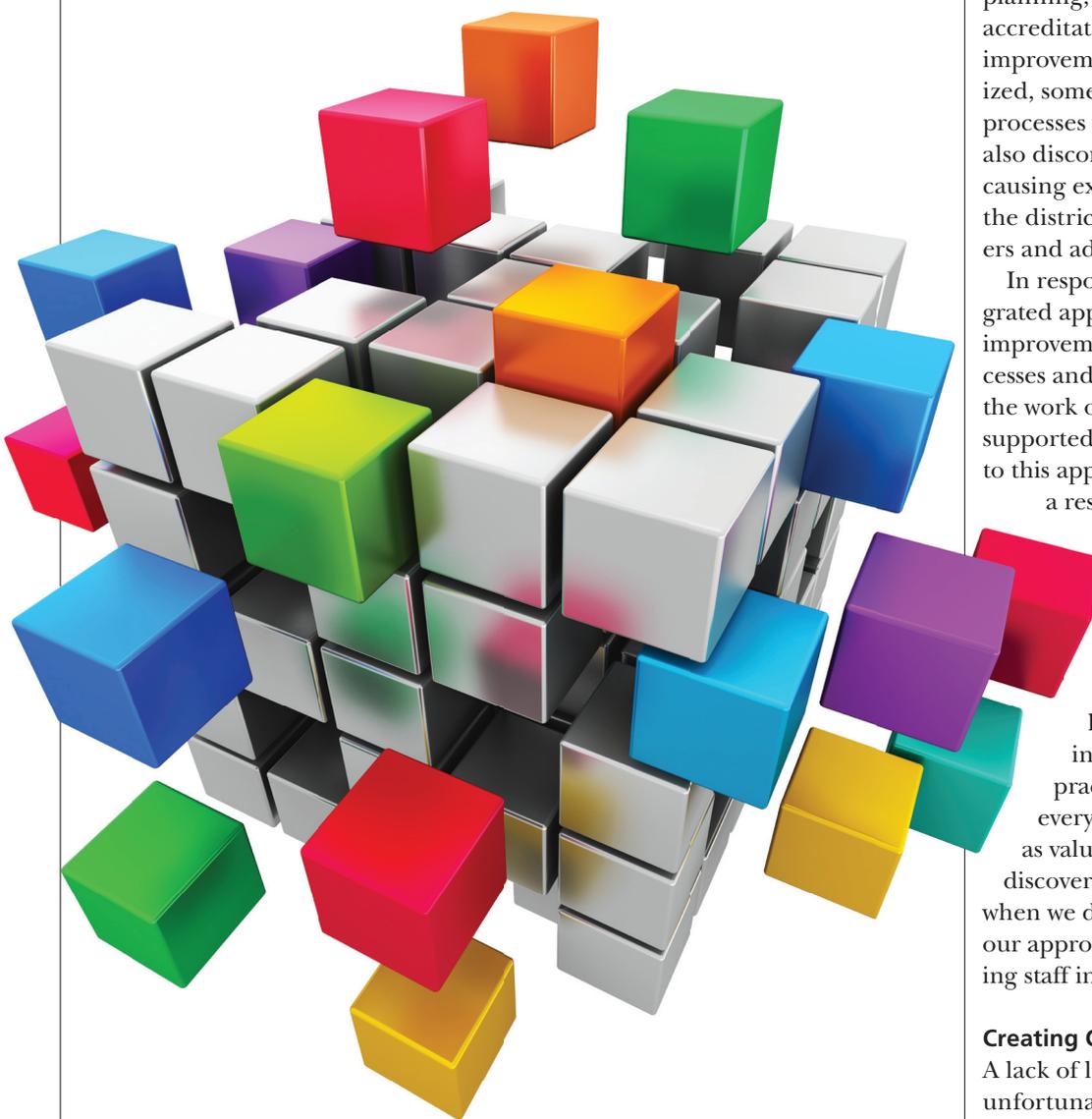# Leadership Is Everybody's Business

As education has become increasingly complex, so has educational leadership. With the never-ending and often overwhelming demands placed on today's school leaders, shared leadership has become a very popular—and some would say necessary—model in K-12 education.

In theory, having teachers and staff help plan and carry out improvement initiatives eases the burden on the principal and also leads to better results. In practice, however, leadership roles are frequently thrust on those who may not have the capacity to meet the expectations of those roles. What we've learned in Sublette County School District #1 in Pinedale, Wyoming, is that the underlying belief of the shared leadership model—that everyone in a school can lead in some capacity—may be true, but only with leadership training for all.

An Integrated Approach

Several years ago, our small, geographically isolated but rapidly changing district was trying to juggle three important processes (strategic planning, preparation for an external accreditation visit, and local school improvement work) at once. We realized, somewhat painfully, that these processes were not only separate but also disconnected in many ways—causing extra work for everyone in the district and overwhelming teachers and administrators alike.

In response, we created an integrated approach to continuous improvement that aligned these processes and ensured that this work and the work of every person on our staff supported the goals of the district. Key to this approach was implementing a research-based leadership framework. Once we chose a framework, we set about training all of our district- and school-level administrators, which quickly created a common language and understanding of effective leadership practices that we now apply to every improvement initiative. But as valuable as this process was, we discovered the greatest benefit came when we decided to truly integrate our approach and include our teaching staff in leadership training.

Creating Coherence

A lack of leadership training is, unfortunately, all too common in education—among both teachers and administrators—and can have disastrous results for schools. Principals create leadership teams and delegate tasks to teachers, such as creating a building schedule or developing a grading policy, without providing them with the necessary knowledge or skills to complete these tasks effectively. Teachers do the best they can, but in the process can alienate their colleagues, superiors, and perhaps even their school boards.

Our district is fortunate to have a

board of trustees that is committed to leadership training for its own members and models this expectation for staff. So, with this support, we began training teachers in our leadership framework and found that, as their understanding of building-level responsibilities and involvement in the leadership process increased, so did their overall engagement and collaboration with their principals. This kind of improved environment helps a principal with one of the most difficult challenges he or she faces: creating school and organizational coherence in ways that promote student achievement.

A lack of coherence can result in various consequences, but often the most harmful is a lack of coherence in programming. For example, in our district, we are in the process of implementing a multitiered system of supports in all of our schools. At one point, our elementary school was ahead of our other schools in terms of implementing tiered instruction. That's not uncommon, but as a result, tiered instruction wasn't yet in place at the middle school when the elementary students transitioned there. We immediately saw students on both ends of the spectrum (those needing remediation and those needing enrichment) begin to struggle. Now, imagine if building goals or programming are not aligned at all. What happens to student achievement if the elementary and middle schools have completely different priorities or don't even have plans?

Our leadership framework is what helps us keep the focus on student achievement. When plans are collaboratively developed and implemented properly, and when teachers are trained in a leadership framework, school and organizational coherence increases significantly. When coherence occurs, the "macro-functions" implemented by principals are recognized by teachers as being meaningful, and teachers are able to convert them into the more "micro-functions" of research-based classroom practices.

Making the Most of Opinion Leaders

In every school, there are teacher leaders who have high levels of acceptability among their peers. As most of us have found out the hard way, those teachers don't always have leadership capabilities. However, they influence change management and community building. Thus, including them in leadership training increases the probability of success for key initiatives.

Opinion leaders can be negative or positive in their attitudes toward change. Those who are negative often feel that little thought was given to

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the changes being asked of them. In our experience, leadership training helps them gain a greater understanding of the complexity of the principal's job and the decisions being made. And, overall, this causes them to become far less negative about new initiatives. We find that the training allows them to feel that they can voice their opposition in appropriate ways and through appropriate mechanisms and, often, they become part of the

process. Also, as understanding of leadership practice spreads throughout a school, unrealistic criticisms become marginalized or recognized as without merit because all teachers have been given the opportunity to be part of the solution.

For positive opinion leaders, training provides a concrete way to get involved in the process and assume teacher leader roles. They also act as a positive voice in more informal settings. For example, if they hear resistance to an initiative in the teachers' lounge or in a grade-level meeting, they can step in and say, "No, wait, it's not what you think. This is why we're doing it."

Lastly, training creates a pathway to leadership for teachers with real-life experience in your schools. All of our recent administrative hires, despite broad external searches in many cases, were internal candidates trained in our leadership framework. On the flip side, training helps some teachers realize that administration isn't for them, which prevents those who may be marginal leaders from entering the leadership field.

Making Accountability Reciprocal

For our district, the decision to begin leadership training with teachers was a fairly straightforward one. How could we expect everyone to do work that supported district goals without making sure they had the capacity to meet those expectations?

As we have proved in Sublette County, if you invest in a research-based leadership framework that aligns with classroom practices, take the time to train all of your staff, and work with them to ensure fidelity of implementation, you will see improvement—not in just one or two schools, but across the board. That's not so complex, is it? ⊡

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