



From the Boardroom to the Classroom:

Value added leadership....

Presented to the
WSSDA Conference

November 15, 2007

By

Tim Waters Ed.D.
Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning

Presentation Slides

From the Boardroom to the Classroom: *Value added leadership....*

Presented to
WSSDA Conference
November 15, 2007
by
Tim Waters Ed.D.

McREL
Making a difference ...

© McREL 2007
For copyright permission contact info@mcrel.org

Mission

McREL's mission is to make a difference in the quality of education and learning for all through excellence in applied research, product development, and service.

www.mcrel.org

McREL
Making a difference ...

© McREL 2007
For copyright permission contact info@mcrel.org

We have looked back at...


- Quantitative research on **teaching, schooling, and leadership.**
- Looked around at **demographic, economic, technological, global, and social** trends that will shape the future.
- Reviewed **qualitative and theoretical** work on the art and science of leadership

McREL
Making a difference ...

© McREL 2007
For copyright permission contact info@mcrel.org

We've arrived at several conclusions...


1. We can more fully optimize U.S. schools.
2. In light of political, social, resource, and design realities, it is unlikely we will optimize them enough to prepare all children well to compete in the emerging global economy.
3. We need leaders at every level of the system who can, through the *art* and *science* of leadership, lead the changes implied in conclusions 1 and 2.


© McREL 2007
For copyright permission contact info@mcrel.org




The importance of re-examining practices


Perhaps a crux of success or failure as a society is to know which core values to hold on to, and which ones to discard and replace with new values, when times change.

Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed.
Jared Diamond. 2006. p. 433


© McREL 2007
For copyright permission contact info@mcrel.org

Keys to optimizing our schools; Influences on achievement

LEADERSHIP	
School 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Guaranteed & Viable Curriculum 2. Challenging Goals & Effective Feedback 3. Parent & Community Involvement 4. Safe & Orderly Environment 5. Collegiality & Professionalism
Teacher 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Instructional Strategies 7. Classroom Management 8. Classroom Curriculum Design
Student 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Home Environment 10. Learned Intelligence/ Background Knowledge 11. Motivation
LEADERSHIP	


© McREL 2007
For copyright permission contact info@mcrel.org

Findings from two studies on school level leadership

1. The effect size of general school level leadership
2. Specific leadership responsibilities and practices with statistically significant effects on achievement
3. Strong leaders do not always have a positive effect on achievement
4. Two major factors: 1st order/general leadership and 2nd order/change leadership
5. 21 responsibilities with positive correlations to change perceived as 1st order
6. 11 responsibilities (both positive and negative) with correlations to change perceived as 2nd order

McREL
Making a difference ...

© McREL 2007
For copyright permission contact info@mcrel.org

Findings from McREL's study on district level leadership

1. The effect size of general district level leadership
2. Specific leadership responsibilities and practices with statistically significant effects on student achievement
3. Strong leaders do not always have a positive effect on student achievement

McREL
Making a difference ...

© McREL 2007
For copyright permission contact info@mcrel.org

Finding #1: The general effect of district-level leadership

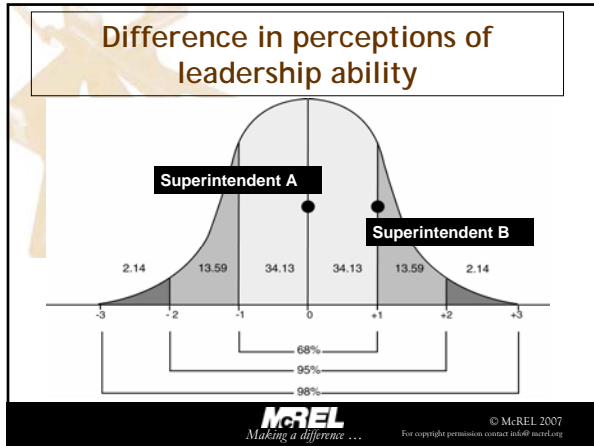
The average correlation (r) between district-level leadership behavior and achievement is **0.24**.

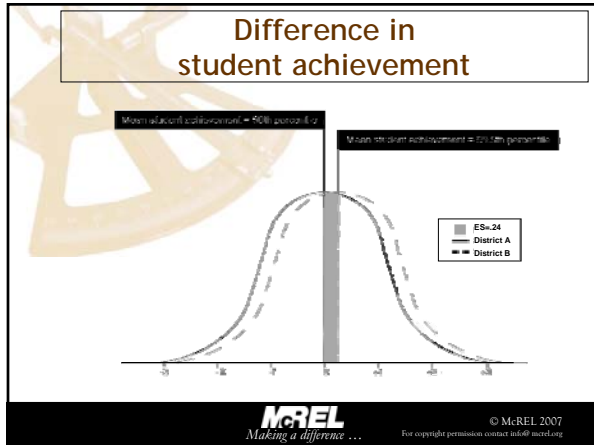
This means ...

A one standard deviation increase in district-level leadership is associated with a 9.5 percentile point difference in mean student achievement.

McREL
Making a difference ...


© McREL 2007
For copyright permission contact info@mcrel.org





Questions to consider

1. Does this finding confirm or challenge your beliefs about school and district-level leadership?
2. What might it take to improve leadership performance by one standard deviation?
3. Is finding #1 significant enough to warrant an investment in performance improvement?



McREL
Making a difference ...

© McREL 2007
For copyright permission contact info@mcrel.org

What does it take to improve performance by one standard deviation?

- Appropriate use of research
- Professional development that builds **declarative, procedural, experiential, and contextual** knowledge
- Support
- Coaching with practice
- Timely and specific feedback



© McREL 2007
For copyright permission contact info@mcrel.org

Interpretation of a correlation of 0.24 in terms of expected passing rates for districts

	Percentage of schools/dist. passing the test	Percentage of schools/dist. failing the test
Districts with top half of superintendents	62%	38%
Districts with bottom half of superintendents	38%	62%



© McREL 2007
For copyright permission contact info@mcrel.org

**Expected Heart Attacks With
and Without Aspirin**
($r=.034$; $PV=.00116$)

	Heart Attack	No Heart Attack
Aspirin	48.3%	51.7%
No Aspirin	51.7%	48.3%

Rosnow, R.L. & Rosenthal, R. (1989). "Statistical Procedures and the Justification I Know in Psychological Science". *American Psychologist* 44, 1276 - 1284

McREL
Making a difference ... © McREL 2007
For copyright permission contact info@mcrel.org

Finding #2: Six areas of district-level responsibilities

1. Collaborative goal-setting
2. Non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction
3. Board alignment & support of district goals
4. Use of resources to support achievement and instruction goals
5. Monitoring goals for achievement and instruction
6. **Defined autonomy: Relationship with schools**

McREL
Making a difference ... © McREL 2007
For copyright permission contact info@mcrel.org

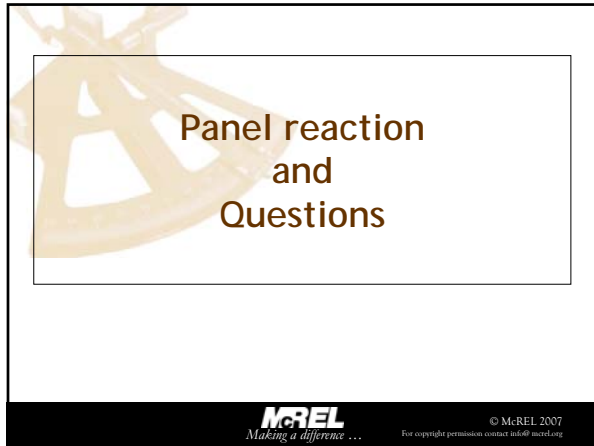
One additional "bonus" finding

Stability in superintendent leadership matters:
the available data indicate the effect of superintendent tenure is (r) .19, which appears after two years and is evident at least through year ten.

In contrast...

The average effect of CSR models after seven years is (r) .075

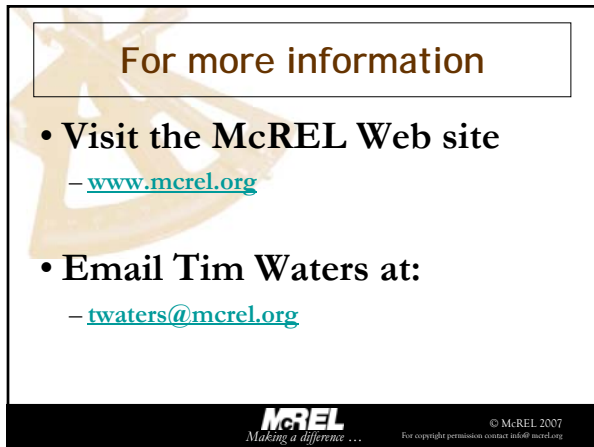
McREL
Making a difference ... © McREL 2007
For copyright permission contact info@mcrel.org



Panel reaction
and
Questions

McREL
Making a difference ...

© McREL 2007
For copyright permission contact info@mcrel.org



For more information

- Visit the McREL Web site
– www.mcrel.org
- Email Tim Waters at:
– twaters@mcrel.org


McREL
Making a difference ...

© McREL 2007
For copyright permission contact info@mcrel.org

Reference Slides


Collaborative goal setting

The extent to which the superintendent...	Practices Used to Fulfill the Areas of Responsibility
Involves board members and principals in the process of setting goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Develops shared understanding among principals and district staff as to the nature and function of the goal setting process •Involves board members, school, and central office administrators in the goal setting process •Develops goals that reflect changes necessary to enhance student achievement rather than goals intended to maintain the status quo


© McREL 2007
For copyright permission contact info@mcrel.org


Non-negotiable goals

The extent to which the superintendent...	Practices Used to Fulfill the Areas of Responsibility
Ensures that goals for student achievement and instructional program are adopted and are based on relevant research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Establishes clear priorities among the district's instructional goals and objectives with district achievement and instructional goals at the top of the list •Adopts 5-year non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction •Adopts varied and diverse instructional methodologies that allow for a wide range of learning styles that exist in a multiracial and multiethnic student population


© McREL 2007
For copyright permission contact info@mcrel.org


Board alignment and support

The extent to which the superintendent...	Practices Used to Fulfill the Areas of Responsibility
Maintains board support for district goals for achievement and instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Alignment of the board president regarding district achievement and instructional goals, the type and nature of conflict in the district •Along with the board president, remaining situationally aware, agreeing on the political climate of the school district •Provides professional development for board members •Establishes agreement with the board on the extent to which district goals are being met


© McREL 2007
For copyright permission contact info@mcrel.org

Defined autonomy

The extent to which the superintendent...	Practices Used to Fulfill the Areas of Responsibility
<p>The superintendent provides autonomy to principals to lead their schools, but expects alignment on district goals and use of resources for professional development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Hires well qualified teachers •Establishes a teacher evaluation process that focuses district instructional priorities •Establishes strong agreed-upon principles/values which direct people's actions •Ensures that schools have a clear mission focused on district goals •Maintains high expectations for school performance



© McREL 2007
For copyright permission contact info@mcrel.org

District instructional program goal

All Johnson County instructional, instructional support staff, and principals will successfully implement the district's instructional program.


Indicators of successful implementation include:

- Use of the district adopted instructional planning template.
- Use of research-based instructional strategies.
- Teacher modeling and observation.
- Principal monitoring for quality, fidelity, consistency, and intensity of implementation.


© McREL 2007
For copyright permission contact info@mcrel.org

District instructional program goal

Indicator	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Use of planning template	Implement template grades 5-8	Implement template grades 4-9	Implement template grades 3-10	Implement template grades 2-11	Implement template grades K-12
Use of research-based strategies	Use of strategies grades 5-8	Use of strategies grades 4-9	Use of strategies grades 3-10	Use of strategies grades 2-11	Use of strategies grades K-12
Teacher modeling		Modeling program grades 5-8	Modeling program grades 4-9	Modeling program grades 3-10	Modeling program grades 2-11


© McREL 2007
For copyright permission contact info@mcrel.org

Nine categories of instructional strategies

Category
Identifying similarities and differences
Summarizing and note taking
Reinforcing effort and providing recognition
Homework and practice
Nonlinguistic representations
Cooperative learning
Setting goals and providing feedback
Generating and testing hypotheses
Activating prior knowledge

McREL
Making a difference ...

© McREL 2007
For copyright permission contact info@mcrel.org

Glossary of Terms

McREL's BALANCED LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK: School Leadership that Works™ Glossary of Terms

Capacity is the collective efficacy and capability to develop and use assets to create the conditions necessary to accomplish purpose.

95% confidence interval is a range of scores (e.g., correlations) within which we are 95% sure that the true score (e.g., correlation) falls.

Correlation (r) is a measure of the degree of linear relationship between two variables. When one goes up, the other goes up (or down). The larger the correlation, the stronger the linear relationship between the two variables. Correlation coefficients vary between -1.00 and +1.00. A correlation of 0.00 indicates the absence of a relationship.

Dependent variable is a variable measured in a study. In an experimental study, the dependent variable is affected by the independent variable. In a correlational study, the dependent variable is associated with one or more other (independent) variables.

Effect size is a measure of the magnitude of impact of an independent variable on a dependent variable. The most commonly used effect size is the standardized mean difference that depicts how many standard deviations the mean of an experimental group is above or below the mean of a control group. The correlation (r) is another type of effect size commonly used.

Factor analysis is a statistical procedure that reduces a set of items on a measuring instrument to a smaller number of dimensions called factors.

First-order change implies a logical extension of past and current practices intended to make incremental improvements in the current situation. First-order changes can be implemented with current knowledge and skills.

Focus of change the specific school and classroom practices on which a principal concentrates his or her improvement initiatives.

Holding environment is a figurative “safe place” for staff members to talk about what is going on in the organization. It is where they can talk with one another about the challenges they face, debate issues, and clarify assumptions. It is especially important for leaders to create a holding environment in the early stages of the change process, when people have been uprooted from the familiar and feel vulnerable.

Independent variable is a variable considered to cause variation in a second variable (the dependent variable).

Leaders influence individuals and organizations. At the individual level, leaders support learning that leads to individual and organizational goals. At the organizational level, leaders develop a shared vision and broad goals. Leaders accept responsibility for achieving results and create the necessary environments that contribute to individual and organizational success.

Leadership is a shared responsibility for achieving collective/organizational goals regardless of positional or organizational authority, acknowledging that increasing levels of positional authority yield greater impact in an organization. Leadership is accomplishing together what individuals cannot accomplish alone.

Leadership density is characterized by active involvement from all levels of an organization. These active involvements mean that many people (breadth) assume leadership responsibility (depth) by taking action based on the needs of the organization.

Leadership practices are the specific knowledge, skills, and/or tasks identified in the research that are necessary for fulfilling responsibilities.

Leadership responsibilities are areas of principal behaviors and practices identified in the research as being positively associated with student achievement.

Meta-analysis is a research technique for quantitatively synthesizing a set of studies to estimate the average or expected impact of an independent variable on a dependent variable.

Order of change is the magnitude and implications of change for the people expected to implement them or those who will be impacted by them.

Purposeful community is a community with the collective efficacy and capacity to develop and use assets to accomplish purposes and produce outcomes that matter to all community members through agreed-upon processes.

Second-order change implies a fundamental or significant break with past and current practices that is intended to make dramatic differences in the current situation. Second-order changes require new knowledge and skills for successful implementation.

Shared leadership implies shared responsibility and mutual accountability toward a common goal or goals for the good of an organization. Shared leadership is not a program or a model. It is a condition that can be enabled and sustained through organizational authority.

Standard deviation is a measure of the average distance of each score in a distribution from the mean of the distribution. The larger the standard deviation, the more “different” are the scores in a distribution.

Variance is the square of the standard deviations. It indicates the degree of variability of individual scores and is a measure of how different the score of individuals are from each other and from the typical score.

Recommended Reading

**Reprinted with permission from the March
2007 issue of The School Administrator
magazine**

The Primacy of SUPERINTENDENT LEADERSHIP

The authors' new research finds a strong connection between the work of the district CEO and student achievement

BY J. TIMOTHY WATERS AND
ROBERT J. MARZANO

Imagine two superintendents, both viewed as strong leaders by their school boards, their communities and their staffs. Let's give these two superintendents names, Jane and David.

Both Jane and David serve in mid-sized school districts with communities comparable in terms of student, teacher and administrator populations. Per-pupil expenditures in each district are at the state average. Both are seen as strong superintendents who hold high expectations for their districts. However, average district-level achievement is approximately 10 percentile points higher in one of these districts than the other.

Our recent meta analysis of the effects of district-level leadership on student achievement, summarized in the 2006 McREL report "School District Leadership That Works," explains this difference in student achievement. Before sharing our findings, though, let's take a quick comparative look at these superintendents and their districts to better understand how two superintendents, both considered strong leaders, can have very different effects on mean district-level student achievement.

Both superintendents believe in the importance of strong school-level leadership and expect their principals to provide it. They extend considerable auton-

omy to their principals. Yet there are differences in how much autonomy Jane and David allow in particular areas.

David's view is that meaningful change and improvement in education occur at the school level. Schools are small enough organizational units to initiate and sustain organizational change in a reasonable period of time.

Jane's "theory of action," on the other hand, is that meaningful change and improvement must occur at district and school levels simultaneously. Though the time trajectory of change at the district level may be extended, Jane believes that for change and improvement to be substantial and sustainable, it also must be systemic, which makes the school district and the responsibilities fulfilled by the district critical.

David's Approach

David is convinced instructional decisions are best left to each individual school, principal and teacher. He believes decisions about instruction should be made by those who are closest to students. After all, they were hired for their expertise and understand their students.

He takes seriously the guidance from the total quality management movement to move decision making about core institutional functions to appropriate lev-



els of the system. In his view, instruction is a core institutional function and the appropriate level of decision making is the classroom.

David's approach to setting district goals for student achievement has been to "aggregate up" from individual school goals to establish districtwide goals for achievement. His district, like so many others in the United States, is focused on improved achievement in math and reading. The district goals for achievement in these two areas are that each school will improve sufficiently to meet or exceed state and federal standards for adequate yearly progress.

Because goals for achievement and instruction are set at the school level, and each school's instructional program reflects the knowledge, skills and experience of the principal and teachers, the district professional development program also is decentralized. The district

budgets resources for professional development, but each principal, along with his or her teachers, decides how best to use these resources.

David spends a considerable percentage of his time and attention managing the interest and energy of his school board members. They, along with David and his central-office staff, field many questions from parents and other community members about schools, programs and district effectiveness.

The board has a difficult time responding to questions about achievement and instruction because the district's approach is so decentralized. The district office staff is challenged to find ways to support the variety of instructional and professional development programs being delivered in the district.

David is frustrated that districtwide achievement is lower than expected, and despite his efforts, it has not improved

annually at an acceptable rate or to an acceptable level. Disappointing levels of student achievement lead to additional questions from board members and the community. David nonetheless remains confident that individual school performance will eventually be reflected in higher district-level achievement.

Jane's approach

Given Jane's theory that sustainable improvement occurs simultaneously at district and school levels, she takes a different approach to her responsibilities as superintendent. Jane includes her school board members, principals and other key district stakeholders in a goal-setting process that produces broad, five-year district goals for achievement and instruction.

As in David's district, these goals are focused on math and reading. For each goal, Jane's district establishes measurable success/progress indicators and annual



Caption

performance targets. Jane and her board members review school-level progress on these goals each quarter and consider revisions to annual performance targets based on evidence of progress (or the lack of it). This process helps as Jane, the school board and the principals closely monitor implementation of the district's instructional program.

In Jane's district, the school board also adopts goals for a districtwide instructional program. Jane's instructional staff and her board decide what constitutes good instruction, especially where they have set achievement goals. They adopt a districtwide approach to instruction based on the best available research. It includes a framework for planning units and lessons and the use of research-based instructional strategies. It creates a common vocabulary about instruction for students, teachers, administrators and board members.

Principals in Jane's district closely monitor implementation of the district's instructional program. They conduct routine "walkthroughs" of classrooms to monitor the quality, fidelity, consistency and intensity of implementation of the district's instructional program. They update Jane, who in turn reports to the board on a quarterly basis, on the status of implementation.

The professional development program in Jane's district is designed to build the knowledge and skills teachers and

principals need to implement the district instructional program. It is budgeted and coordinated at the district level to ensure a districtwide approach to high-quality professional development that is based on research, ongoing and job embedded. It includes specific and immediate feedback to teachers and principals on the quality and fidelity of implementation of research-based practices.

Having a districtwide approach to instruction allows Jane's central-office staff to more effectively coordinate resources and services to support school-specific needs. Instead of spending time trying to figure out each school's instructional program, district staff devotes their energies to helping principals and teachers implement the district's instructional program.

While Jane expects her principals to provide strong leadership in their schools and extends considerable autonomy to them, she makes it clear that she expects them to align their school-level efforts with the district's overall direction. In other words, she and the board set direction at the district level, then grant principals the latitude they need to guide implementation of the district's instructional program, organizational development and school-level change.

Like David, Jane is optimistic about her district and confident in its capacity for producing higher levels of achievement. Jane has reason to be optimistic. Teachers, students, parents, principals

and central-office staff understand the district's achievement goals and instructional program. Professional development resources are coordinated, aligned and used to develop research-based practices correlated with the district's goals.

Jane and the principals continually monitor the implementation of these practices and their effects on teaching, on student learning, and on the people implementing them. They use formative and observational data to make ongoing adjustments to implementation schedules and to professional development programming.

Based on demographics and economics, average district achievement in Jane's district should be identical to David's. However, mean achievement in Jane's district is 10 percentile points higher than David's. Using the results of our most recent analysis of the effects of superintendent leadership, we can explain this difference. Jane's theory of action about the meaningful and sustainable change occurring simultaneously at district and school levels, and her approach to fulfilling these responsibilities, is aligned with our findings.

A Research Grounding

In our study at McREL, we asked the following basic research question at the outset about the effects of superintendent leadership: What is the strength of relationship between leadership at the district level and average student academic achievement in the district?

In addition, we asked these related research questions:

What specific district-level leadership responsibilities are related to student academic achievement?

What specific leadership practices are used to fulfill these responsibilities?

Although not part of our initial set of questions, we are able to answer another question that we believe to be of interest to superintendents and local school board members, but is not specifically focused on superintendent responsibilities and practices: Is there a relationship between length of superintendent service and student achievement?

We think of the answer to this fourth question as a bonus finding that was not initially part of our inquiry.

We conducted our study using meta-

Leadership Responsibilities and Practices

Superintendent responsibilities	Selected examples of practices used by superintendent and central office to fulfill superintendent responsibilities
<p>Goal-setting process <i>The superintendent involves board members and principals in the process of setting goals.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Developing shared understanding among principals and district office staff as to the nature and function of the goal-setting process ▶ Involving board members and school and central-office administrators in the goal-setting process ▶ Developing goals that reflect changes necessary to enhance student achievement rather than goals intended to maintain the status quo
<p>Non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction <i>Goals for student achievement and instructional program are adopted and are based on relevant research.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Establishing clear priorities among the district's instructional goals and objectives with district achievement and instructional practices at the top of the list ▶ Adopting five-year non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction ▶ Adopting varied and diverse instructional methodologies that allow for a wide range of learning styles that exist in a multi-racial student population
<p>Board alignment with and support of district goals <i>Board support for district goals for achievement and instruction is maintained.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Establishing alignment of the board president regarding district achievement and instruction goals, the type and nature of conflict in the district ▶ Along with the board president, remaining situationally aware, agreeing on the political climate of the school district ▶ Providing professional development for board members ▶ Establishing alignment with the board president on the extent to which district goals are being met
<p>Monitoring goals for achievement and instruction <i>The superintendent monitors and evaluates implementation of the district instructional program, impact of instruction on achievement, and impact of implementation on implementers.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Monitoring progress toward district achievement goals ▶ Monitoring the implementation of instructional methodologies identified by the district. ▶ Annually evaluating principals in terms of their support for district goals ▶ Reporting student achievement data and data regarding instructional goals to the board on a regular basis ▶ Ensuring that the instructional needs of students from diverse populations are being met ▶ Ensuring classroom observation are conducted frequently and systematically by central-office and school-level staff
<p>Use of resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction <i>Resources are dedicated and used for professional development of teachers and principals to achieve district goals.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Adopting an instructional and resource management system that makes it easy to track progress on district goals ▶ Providing extensive teacher and principal staff development that pertain directly to district achievement and instructional goals ▶ Training all instructional staff in a common but flexible instructional model ▶ Controlling resource allocation ▶ Developing a master plan to coordinate in-service activities of the district so that all directly relate to district goals
<p>* average grade</p>	

analysis, a technique for scientifically synthesizing research findings from smaller studies into a single, large sample. In this case we targeted all available studies conducted in the United States from 1970 through 2005 that met the following criteria:

- ▶ Reported a correlation between district leadership or district leadership variables and student academic achievement or allow for the computing or estimating of a correlation, and

- ▶ Used a standardized measure of student achievement or some index based on a standardized measure of student achievement.

Of the 4,500 studies conducted during this period, 27 met these criteria. The demographics for these 27 reports were as follows:

Number of districts involved: 2,714

Number of ratings of superintendent leadership: 4,434

Estimated number of student achievement scores: 3.4 million

Key Correlation

The correlation between district leadership and student achievement was .24 (95 percent confidence interval). This

correlation is significant at the .05 level.

One way to interpret this .24 correlation is to consider an average superintendent who is at the 50th percentile in terms of leadership abilities and leading a school district where average student achievement is also at the 50th percentile. Now assume the superintendent improves his or her leadership abilities by one standard deviation (in this case, rising to the 84th percentile of all district leaders). Given the correlation between district leadership and student achievement of .24, we would predict that average student achievement in the district would increase by 9.5 percentile points. In other words, average student achievement in the district would rise to the 60th percentile.

Imagine a normal bell-shaped curve to represent the range of achievement in David's district. Now imagine average achievement in David's district at exactly the 50th percentile. Finally, imagine on this same curve average achievement in Jane's district at approximately the 60th percentile, nearly 10 percentile points higher than in David's district. This difference represents effect of superintendent leadership on student achieve-

ment when the superintendent effectively fulfills the responsibilities we have identified.

District leadership responsibilities correlate with student achievement. In addition, the general effect of superintendent leadership, our second research question, sought to identify the specific leadership responsibilities that produce gains in student achievement.

In the responses, we found five district-level leadership responsibilities with a statistically significant (p. 05) correlation with average student academic achievement. They are as follows:

- ▶ The goal-setting process;
- ▶ Non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction;
- ▶ Board alignment with and support of district goals;
- ▶ Monitor progress on goals for achievement and instruction; and
- ▶ Use of resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction

The accompanying table includes correlations (or effects) of these five responsibilities with mean district-level student achievement, brief descriptions of them and selected examples of the practices superintendents use to fulfill them.

Defined Autonomy and Practices

Superintendent responsibilities	Selected examples of practices used by superintendent and central office to fulfill superintendent responsibilities
<p>Defined autonomy; superintendent relationship with schools <i>The superintendent provides autonomy to principals to lead their schools, but expects alignment on district goals and use of resources for professional development.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Expecting principals to foster and carry out district achievement and instructional goals ▶ Developing a shared vision and understanding of defined autonomy ▶ Committing the district and schools to continuous improvement ▶ Hiring well-qualified teachers ▶ Establishing a teacher evaluation process that focuses on district instructional program as a priority for principals ▶ Establishing strong agreed-upon principles/values which direct actions of people ▶ Ensuring that schools have a clear mission focused on district goals ▶ Ensuring that all students have the opportunity to learn ▶ Maintaining high expectations for school performance ▶ Directing personnel operations to assure a stable yet improving and well-balanced work force ▶ Allowing for and promoting innovation at the school-level within the context of district goals ▶ Providing leadership for principals regarding how to implement district goals

Perplexing Finding

One set of findings from the meta-analysis that at first appears contradictory involves building-level autonomy within a district. One of the studies we examined reported that building autonomy has a *positive* correlation of .28 with average student achievement. However, this same study reported that site-based management had a negative correlation with student achievement of minus .16.

Other studies on site-based management reported slightly better results, yet the average correlation between site-based management and student achievement was (for all practical purposes) zero. This apparent contradiction begins to make sense, however, in light of the five district-level leadership responsibilities described above.

How can we find school autonomy positively correlated with student achievement and site-based management exhibiting a negligible or negative correlation with achievement? This question might be answered in at least two of the earlier findings.

The superintendent who implements inclusive goal-setting processes that result in board-adopted non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction, who assures that schools align their use of district resources for professional development with district goals and who monitors and evaluates progress toward goal achievement, is fulfilling multiple responsibilities correlated with high levels of achievement.

When this superintendent also encourages strong school-level leadership and encourages principals and others to assume responsibility for school success, he or she has fulfilled another responsibility; to establish a relationship with schools. This relationship is characterized by defined autonomy, which is the expectation and support to lead *within the boundaries defined by the district goals*. The accompanying table (page xx) shows the correlation of defined autonomy with mean district-level achievement, a brief description of this responsibility and selected examples of practices superintendents use to fulfill this responsibility.

A Bonus Result

Our meta-analysis produced an additional finding that initially was not a focus of

our study. Two studies that we examined reported correlations between superintendent tenure and student academic achievement. Together, the weighted average correlation from these two studies was a statistically significant .19, which suggests the longevity of the superintendent has a positive effect on the average academic achievement of students in the district. These positive effects appear to manifest themselves as early as two years into a superintendent's tenure.

The positive correlation between the

length of superintendent service and student achievement affirms the value of leadership stability and of a superintendent remaining in a district long enough to see the positive impact of his or her leadership on student learning and achievement. Of equal significance is the implication of this finding for school boards as they frequently determine the length of superintendent tenure in their districts.

In his 2005 book *Crash Course*, Chris Whittle contrasts CEO stability in major corporations with superintendent stabil-

Page 15

NSBA

.5 page island

Four Color Process

New Materials by Jan. 23

.5 point rule on base negative FPO

ity in large urban school districts. Over the last 20 years, Kansas City has had 14 superintendents, yielding an average tenure of 1.4 years. Washington, D.C., has had nine superintendents over that time for an average tenure of 2.2 years. During the same time frame, General Electric was run by two CEOs. Federal Express, Microsoft and Dell had one chief executive each.

Whittle, who founded the Edison Schools, asserts that CEO stability at the corporations accounts for a large measure of their success. He argues that the instability of superintendent leadership accounts for much of the low student achievement found in too many school districts. If the stability of superintendents were to approximate the stability of CEO leadership, he claims, school districts likely would experience greater success, assuming superintendents focus on the right priorities and skillfully fulfill their responsibilities. The bonus finding in this supports Whittle's conclusion.

Measurable Impact

David and Jane, of course, are fictitious superintendents in fictitious school districts. Their experiences, however, are much closer to fact than fiction and play out in real-time in school districts across the country.

Jane's theory of action and her prac-

tices are clearly grounded in research based on our findings. In her experience, Jane skillfully fulfilled key leadership responsibilities with statistically significant relationships to student achievement. She worked with her board of education to adopt and support district goals for achievement and instruction. The board supports district-level and school-level leadership in ways that enhance, rather than diminish, leadership stability.

It is important to note that superintendents cannot fulfill the responsibilities we identified in our research on their own. They need their school boards as well as central-office staff members to share their understanding of these responsibilities and to integrate them consistently into their practice. Along with district-level responsibilities and practices, they must support the school-level leadership responsibilities and practices. When they do, the primacy and impact of superintendent leadership is obvious and measurable. ■

Tim Waters, a former superintendent, is president and CEO of the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning, 4601 DTC Boulevard, Suite 500, Denver, CO 80237. E-mail: twaters@mcrel.org
Robert Marzano is a senior fellow at McREL. They are co-authors of *School Leadership That Works* (ASCD).

Accessing Their Report

A 27-page, downloadable version of "School District Leadership that Works: The Effect of Superintendent Leadership on Student Achievement," the study conducted by Tim Waters and Bob Marzano, is available on the McREL website (www.mcrel.org).

Their study produced the following major findings:

▶ **No. 1: District-level leadership matters.**

The McREL research team found a statistically significant relationship (a positive correlation of .24) between district leadership and student achievement.

▶ **No. 2: Effective superintendents focus their efforts on creating goal-oriented districts.**

McREL researchers identified five district-

level leadership responsibilities that have a statistically significant correlation with average student academic achievement. All five of these responsibilities relate to setting and keeping districts focused on teaching and learning goals.

▶ **No. 3: Superintendent tenure is positively correlated with student achievement.**

McREL found two studies that looked specifically at the correlations between superintendent tenure and student achievement. The weighted average correlation in these two studies was a statistically significant .19, which suggests that length of superintendent tenure in a district positively correlates to student achievement. These positive effects appear to manifest themselves as early as two years into a superintendent's tenure.

Page 16

MilkPEP 2 of 2

1/3 vertical

Four Color Process

Materials: pick up December 2006

.5 point rule on base negative FPO

POSITION: 1/3 Page ad must be inside column adjacent to full page ad