

How Leadership Influences Student Learning

By Leithwood, Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom

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<http://education.umn.edu/CAREI/Leadership/ExecutiveSummary.com>

"Dear Journal"

by Brenda Reed 10/30/2010

EAD 801

Important Ideas for Leaders- Set direction, develop people, and make the organization work.

Dear Journal:

July 1-

I did it! You are now listening to the new principal at Counter Middle School! I knew that I had a good chance because of my background and connection with the community, but I am still in a state of disbelief that I am now a principal. Wow!

July 9-

I went in to look at my new school today. Although I've been there many times, I've never been through it as the principal. My entire perspective has changed. Now instead of a school gym, I see a meeting place for our low to middle class community. I see how gray and chipped the paint is. I see the need for improvement and new life.

July 12-

I mailed invitations today to all of my staff members to meet at the local diner for breakfast and a "get-to-know-you" session. I expect a great turn-out as I'm sure my staff members are as eager as I discuss our upcoming year. I'm interested to hear what they consider top priorities for our students' learning this year.

July 19-

Breakfast was a great success! All 28 teachers showed up, and everyone had a great morning. I noticed departments sat together, not talking much to other departments. We will work on that. Most teachers shared their concerns about improving math, reading, and writing scores.

Concerns about the class sizes were also discussed. Perhaps smaller classes will help those struggling in these subjects? I will discuss this with each department next month. For now I will let the teachers rest and call them in when they have fresh minds.

August 1-

Okay, time to dig in! The teachers and I are meeting today to set our goals for the year. We will work as departments first to set priorities and address change requirements for each, and then we will begin blending the department goals into one overall school improvement plan. I have set aside many days for this. Also, I plan to tell the staff about a professional development series offered at the ISD. Each department will send staff throughout the year in an effort to improve instruction and student learning.

August 9-

Things are going well. The English and Math departments seem content with their departmental improvement plans. Each seems to have informally assigned leaders for different aspects of their plan. Changes include team teaching in Pre-algebra, and extended study time during lunch thanks to a newly devised staff lunch rotation which will allow some teachers to eat while others return to help struggling students. I commend them for their creativity in scheduling!

August 21-

I have discussed with the staff my concern with the physical set up of our school. It seems that each department is too isolated from the others. I thought that if we want our students to learn holistically, our students need to recognize a connection among their subjects. I'm wondering if shifting some of the classrooms will give students better access to teachers and more connectedness that will help their learning.

August 29-

Well, each department graciously made shifts in their rooms as they agreed that more connectivity would help students. We now have each grade's classrooms next to each other, rather than divisions by department. The teachers are excited about their enhanced ability to communicate throughout the day as well. Everyone seems eager to get the year started next week. The staff and I have prepared a special "Sweeps Week" theme for introducing school policy and expectations. We all anticipate positive reactions from students based on the new energy that greets you when you enter the school.

(On a side note, the staff and I are opening the gym for a community volunteer "Painting Day" this Saturday. Those dingy gray walls will soon be gone as they will be replaced by a fresh coat



of “Victory Blue” paint (chosen by the parents). I can’t wait to see the faces of the students when they walk into the newly painted gym on their first day back and see our new sign (generously donated by our local businesses): “Every Student Counts at Counter Middle School”. Yes, this is going to be a crazy ride- and I can’t wait to get it started!)

This journal shows the importance of strong leadership and how it impacts schools and student learning. As a leader, one needs to know how to empower and develop others, to make changes that strengthen culture and learning, and to be flexible enough to meet different needs and issues as they arise. The new principal of Counter Middle School recognized a need for change and energy in his school. He chose to work with staff, parents, and others in the community to find ways to improve the culture and atmosphere in order to better serve their students. This principal did not make decisions by himself. Rather, he shared his ideas with others and then asked for input. Allowing others to have a voice in the overall plan promoted a sense of unity among the staff and community members.

This material is valuable in terms of our class. However, it is a very short piece of information. In order to truly understand the impact that leadership has on student learning, I would suggest further research.