SUCCESSION PLANNING FOR SUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP FOR THE SCHOOL PRINCIPALSHIP

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Rapid principal turnover often signals the end of not only existing formal leadership for school improvement but also the gains of previous success (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012). A change of direction accompanying a change in the formal leadership of the school frequently results in growing cynicism on the part of teachers toward proposed school improvement initiatives (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012). How can school divisions deal effectively with the predictable challenges that arise when principals leave their assigned schools? In this paper, I briefly expand on two ways school divisions can address this issue: shared leadership and alignment of school policies and practices.

Shared Leadership

Many of the principals currently represent the *Boomer Generation* (i.e., individuals born between 1946 and 1963). These individuals are entering retirement, and, as a result, many schools are presently facing a high turnover of their school leaders. No longer does a paradigm of a charismatic leader able to address all the problems of the school work effectively. To deal with challenges associated with school leaders leaving their position, Hargreaves and Fink (2006) emphasized "creating a culture of leadership development throughout the organization" (p. 72). This leadership development provides an established pool of talented individuals to draw on when the need arises. Rhodes and Brundrett (2009) stressed the importance of being clear about leadership needs, both now and in the future, and developing capacity to meet those needs. It is essential that school divisions develop the leadership capacity of teachers able to assume formal leadership positions as current principals retire.

Leithwood and Seashore Louis (2012) confirmed that, second to teaching, the greatest influence on student achievement is the principal's leadership. For the most part, the principal exerts this influence in two indirect ways. First, principals influence the dominant goals promoted within the school, while supporting school division or provincial priorities as non-negotiable. Aligned with these school goals, teachers are expected to work toward improving instruction in a manner that fosters increased student achievement. Effective principals are cognizant that teachers need to be involved in the process of determining the best way to achieve these school goals in light of the differentiated needs of the student body. Second, principals influence the culture and tone of the school by encouraging teachers to work in a collaborative manner and by supporting the teachers' use of an inquiry approach to improving instruction. On this topic, researchers such as Hattie (2012) and Leithwood and Seashore Louis (2012) strongly support the merits of teachers collaboratively prioritizing common learning outcomes, choosing common instructional strategies, developing common assessment tools, interpreting test results, and guiding future teaching based on these

results. Rapid turnover of principals can result in back-sliding where collaborative efforts are soon shelved and old habits of teachers working in isolation resurface. Fink and Brayman (2006) emphasized, if shared leadership is to prove successful, principals must be allowed "to stay longer in their schools so that the improvements become strongly embedded in the hearts and minds of the teachers and their cultures" (p. 86). Simultaneously, with planned continuity, Hargreaves and Fink (2006) stressed informal leaders within the school can see that improvements adopted by the staff can continue to serve as the foundation for future changes. Shared leadership can be an effective strategy to stabilize cultural changes so progress toward school improvement is not dependent on the continued tenure of the principal in the school.

Alignment of School Policies and Practices

To ensure a cycle of continuous improvement, school divisions must be proactive to ensure there is sustainable leadership capable of providing ongoing instructional leadership within the school division. Fink and Brayman (2006) indicated this process includes "identification, recruitment, preparation, placement, induction, and ongoing in-service education of leaders" (p. 65). Competence in the area of shared leadership must be supported through selection practices for the position of principal, professional development for principals, and appraisal of administrative work. Hartle and Thomas (2003) stressed school divisions must "have a clear and shared view of what qualities future leadership will need to encompass" (p. 9). Further, they specified these qualities incorporate four main areas: previous performance and delivered results; behavior attributes and attitudes; skills, knowledge, and experience; and values.

Fink and Brayman (2006) outlined that increased accountability for student learning has resulted in many teachers questioning the career path leading to school administration. Rhodes and Brundrett (2009) pointed out, that for some schools, a less than stellar academic record and/or a lack of adequate financial rewards were barriers to ensuring leadership succession. Fink (2010) indicated, "Existing leadership models developed by older generations are incompatible with the values and need for a life–work balance of generation X and the millennials" (p. 71). In turn, Fink suggested that school division personal and educational stakeholders must make the job more doable and attractive, provide leadership capacity building opportunities, and address the issue of appropriate remuneration. Further, Fink communicated the need for principals to share both the positive and negative aspects within their role so aspiring leaders can develop a more balanced perspective of the principal's role. As Zepeda, Bengtson and Parylo (2012) pointed out, the principalship today is perceived as a "less desirable job with applicants becoming much more selective in where they are willing to work" (p. 139).

Recently two Saskatchewan studies have produced similar results. Renihan (2012) revealed 43% of 169 teachers surveyed indicated they would never consider seeking a principal or vice-principal position. Common deterrents (in order of frequency) included: lack of support from central administration during change, perceived increases in the demands and workload placed upon principals, lack of time, and lack of agreement with current directions and philosophies. Hardie (2011) found

82% of principals surveyed believed teachers saw the principal's role as one of trying to satisfy unrelenting demands often in the form of meeting external mandates and resulting in extended work hours. As a result, many teachers did not view becoming a principal as a desirable career goal. Another interesting finding of this study was that principals believed new criteria for the position of principal were presently emerging and not fully communicated to aspiring leaders. In addition, principals believed their school divisions were seeking strong instructional leaders but often failed to take into account how applicants would be able to manage the day-to-day operations in schools.

School divisions must retain the existing leaders within the school division. While some school principals opt for early retirement (Hargreaves, 2005; Hartle & Thomas, 2003; Renihan, 2012), Hardie (2011) revealed, even among continuing principals, many felt that they were unsupported and that their work was undervalued. One way to retain present principals is to ensure adequate support for principals through continuous professional development and formal mentorship. Principals need to know their efforts to extend their capacity for instructional leadership are acknowledged and valued by central office administrators.

Moreover, senior school division administrators need to model core leadership practices including "building vision and setting directions; understanding and developing people; redesigning the organization; and managing the teaching and learning programme" (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris & Hopkins, 2006, p. 29). These practices support the development of shared leadership across the school division.

Conclusion

All school divisions are facing the burgeoning challenge of having enough leaders capable of providing effective instructional leadership. Succession planning, which includes shared leadership and alignment of school policies and practices, can help to successfully meet this challenge.

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