

Engagement for Success:

Paulding County School District's Distributed Leadership

Overview

Innovation at a Glance

Paulding County School District implemented Distributed Leadership throughout the district, engaging over 60 stakeholders (teachers, parents, community, and students) within this school system on teams to work on student achievement.

Impact at a Glance

Plans were developed and implemented for Central Office, Principal, Teacher, Parent/Community, and Student Leadership teams. The intervention resulted in clear evidence of increased collaboration and communication across the district and increases in student achievement.

The Impact Story

Background/Context

For a school system experiencing explosive growth, Distributed Leadership is critical for success. Paulding County School District, with an increase of 36 percent in student enrollment during the last five years, is a district that is utilizing Distributed Leadership to improve student achievement.

Paulding County's proximity to Atlanta has drawn many newcomers to the community over the last two decades. Located 40 miles northwest of Atlanta, residents of Paulding County have the benefits of metropolitan resources while enjoying a small-town lifestyle. Paulding County is currently one of the fastest growing counties in the state and the nation. The population in the county is comprised of three major ethnic groups: white (90.6 percent), black (7 percent), and Hispanic (1.7 percent). The median household income is \$58,801, with 33 percent of the school population being eligible for free/reduced meals. Based on the 2000 census, 81 percent of the county's population finished high school or a Graduation Equivalency Degree (GED) and 15.2 percent completed college.

The school system of approximately 30,000 students is continuously building new facilities to accommodate the increasing population. With new schools being built each year to keep up with growth, the constant demand for new leadership has become a challenge. The county school system is hiring an average of eight new principals and 300 new teachers each year. In a district facing the constant transition of new leaders and teachers, a culture and climate for Distributed Leadership becomes essential.

What Was Done?

The Paulding County School System recognized that leadership needed to be expanded to include all stakeholder groups in order to support the schools in improving student achievement. The former school Superintendent had a strong desire and commitment to a Distributed Leadership culture within Paulding County Schools. Prior to the Distributed Leadership pilot work with Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement (GLISI), the Superintendent had created a teacher leadership team composed of one teacher from each school, and these teachers met four times a year with the Superintendent to discuss ways to improve the schools within the district. However, once these teacher leaders returned to their schools, they had no formal or informal impact or opportunity for leadership. The goal of Distributed Leadership was not being met through the teacher leadership team.

The Superintendent consulted with GLISI and asked for assistance in supporting the teacher leadership program. A GLISI Performance Consultant (PC) was contracted to work with the Paulding County School District to support the systemic process of engaging all stakeholders in leadership within the schools to improve student achievement. During early conversations with the Superintendent and her cabinet, the GLISI PC reviewed the data from previous perception surveys and realized that there was no current data on how schools were engaging teachers, parents/community, and students in improving student achievement.

Because there was no tool for collecting this information, the GLISI PC developed a *Beliefs and Current State* perception survey to administer to all administrators and teachers. The results of this perception survey rubric confirmed that responders believed that all worker groups influenced student achievement; however, it also revealed all worker groups were not being utilized to lead student achievement. The responder groups identified the district's Board of Education, central office, and principals as leading student achievement and indicated that teachers, parents/community, and students were not currently involved in leading student achievement initiatives.

The Superintendent, along with her Cabinet, discussed the results of the perception rubric and agreed that Distributed Leadership was needed not just for teachers, but also for parents, community, and students. Systemic change was needed in order to be prepared for the impact of current and future growth, retain high-quality staff, validate staff, increase community satisfaction with the school district, identify high-performing leaders, and redefine professional culture for the Paulding County School District. With this purpose in mind, the Superintendent convened a Design Team composed of 60 teachers, school administrators, district administrators, parents, and community members for the purpose of overseeing the framework of Distributed Leadership.

During the initial meeting with this group, the Design Team was randomly assigned into sub-teams, with various stakeholders on each sub-team. The teams were given a charge to address the current status of Distributed Leadership for one of the five identified areas: 1) Central Office Leadership Team; 2) Principal Leadership Team; 3) Teacher Leadership Team; 4) Parent/Community Leadership Team; and 5) Student Leadership Team. Each sub-team was

taught by GLISI to utilize a methodology for analyzing the root causes that create barriers for engaging stakeholders in leadership.

Each sub-team completed “fishbone” (root cause) diagrams to answer these essential questions:

- What barriers does this sub-team create that keeps teachers from being involved in leadership to improve student achievement?
- What barriers does this sub-team create that keeps parents/community from being involved in leadership to improve student achievement?
- What barriers does this sub-team create that keeps students from being involved in leadership to improve student achievement?

The barriers that were revealed were categorized according to the factors that GLISI research has shown most often affect organizations: Information, Consequences, Design, Capacity, Action, and Alignment. Through this process, the sub-teams were able to identify the areas most significantly impeding teachers, parents/community, and students in leading improvement in student achievement.

Through this process, it was determined that the district lacked a formalized design process for involving teachers, parents/community, and students in leading student achievement initiatives. With this knowledge, the GLISI PC was able to lead the district to create a design plan for providing leadership opportunities for all stakeholders. The following solutions were developed for addressing Distributed Leadership in the system:

Solution for Teacher Leadership: Each school would create Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) that would meet weekly. These PLC's would be created with subject-area teachers, and all teachers within the school would be part of the PLC. Each PLC would have a common protocol to work on developing common units, developing common assessments, analyzing student work, and creating intervention strategies. Within each PLC, a teacher would be assigned/appointed as the Team Leader. The Team Leaders would meet with the principal as a Leadership Team at least monthly. These learning teams would be evaluated with the “lagging” indicators of improving Criterion-referenced Competency Test (CRCT) and Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHS GT) scores as well as graduation rate and progression data. The “leading” indicators would be the number of common units developed, number of common assessments developed and given, and a decrease in the number of students failing classes.

Solution for Parent/Business Leadership: Each school would create a Parent/Business Leadership Team that would meet with the principal monthly. During these meetings, the principal would share or have teachers share school data. This Parent/Business Leadership Team would develop a student achievement goal to implement, track, monitor, and measure. Topic examples might include improving student attendance, developing a homework policy, or a student internship program. These Parent/Business Leadership Teams would be evaluated on the effectiveness of their programs. Since each team would develop its own plan, each measure would vary.

Solution for Student Leadership: Each high school and middle school would create a Student Leadership Team that would meet with the principal monthly. During these meetings, the principal would share or have the teachers share school data. Students would determine an area of focus such as tutoring underperforming math students. This Student Leadership Team would carry out the work that they developed. These teams would be Action Teams that had a direct impact on assisting students to improve. The Student Leadership teams would be evaluated on the effectiveness of their Action Plan. For instance, if the students were providing math tutoring for struggling students, the measure would be a decrease in the number of students failing math.

Once the solutions were clarified for the Teacher, Parent/Business, and Student Leadership groups, project plans for each of the Distributed Leadership groups (including the central office and school principals), were developed. The plans identified goals, roles, and behaviors of the distributed leaders, and actions needed. A timeline for implementation was also developed, as well as a communications plan.

What were the Results?

The impact of this process was that the Paulding County School District developed and began to implement a process for involving all stakeholders in leadership for student achievement. Through this process, the collaboration and communication among the various entities increased noticeably. In January 2008, the former Superintendent retired. The new Superintendent had worked in Paulding County previously, but had been away from the district for four years. Upon his return, the new Superintendent observed that when he left the district, there was little collaboration or value for collaboration. He said in the first month back in the district; he was impressed with the teacher and parent/community leadership groups, but he was most impressed with the student leadership that was being demonstrated.

What was the Impact?

Based on the Distributed Leadership Plans, the solution outcomes were to be evaluated by improving student achievement. The student achievement outcomes for the 2007-2008 school year provide evidence to support the expectations of the Distributed Leadership Plans. The Paulding County schools have steadily increased the graduation rate for all students over the past several years and had a substantial increase in graduation rate for subgroups of students during the 2007-2008 school year. The graduation rate for Economically Disadvantaged students increased from 57.7 percent in 2007 to 66.9 percent in 2008, and the graduation rate for black students improved from 75.3 percent to 78.7 percent during the same time period. In 2008, the graduation rate for all students was 75.5 percent, which is an increase of 5.5 percent over the last five years. Because of the excellent work of the leadership programs in this district, the students in Paulding have increased scores on the Math and Science GHSQT, especially for Students with Disabilities (SWD). The number of SWD students in the pass/pass plus categories for Math in 2008 was 60 percent, an increase of three percent from 2007. Pass/pass plus scores on the Science GHSQT for SWD students also improved from 30 percent in 2007 to 62 percent in 2008.

It is difficult to measure the change in culture and climate, but all indications are that the tide has shifted from an organization that was not valued to an organization that has value added due to the expanded ownership and leadership within all of the stakeholders. As the Assistant Superintendent for School Improvement noted, "The most exciting aspect of this process has been the student leadership teams and the 'voice' they have developed at their schools."

Next Steps

The new Superintendent is an outstanding leader who is data-driven and wants initiatives in his district that have proven results. He values the GLISI work and recognizes the potential it has for Paulding County. The new Superintendent continues to take Paulding County forward, and the preliminary work of the five leadership teams will be solidified by continuing the current work and encouraging each team to take the initiative and identify future work.