

Collaborative Leadership in the Era of New Normal

"The significance of the problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we had when we created them."

Albert Einstein

Roslin Growe, EdD

Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership
College of Education
University of Louisiana Lafayette
Lafayette, LA

ABSTRACT

Schools are experiencing tough times with even tougher demands for accountability with limited financial resources. Solving this dilemma calls for working together in a collaborative manner to develop cost-effective solutions. With the new normal now being the standard, it is critical that school leadership becomes connective in nature rather than practiced in an educational vacuum.

The New Normal

The New Normal is a term coined by William H. Gross in March 2009. The impetus is on the changing economic landscape, not only now but in the future. Shifting from one economic and social order to another is a phenomenon which involves less household debt, higher personal savings, and lower rates of consumption (Galston, 2010). With a dismal budget outlook, the new normal is causing much concern as it spreads a ripple effect in our economy. Differing fiscal constraints placed on every aspect of American society portray this new economic schematic. Schools and education are struggling with stretching the shrinking dollar. U.S. Secretary of State Arne Duncan (2010) describes the new normal as a reality and certainty by which everyone seeking to improve education must accept. Doing more with less has become the scenario for achieving better academic outcomes for all students. A bright revenue forecast in education is not likely anytime soon. For the next several years, preschool, K-12, and postsecondary educators are projected to face the challenge of stretching resources in creative ways as never before witnessed (Duncan, 2010).

Budgets at educational institutions have been slashed over the past few years and those institutions are preparing for deeper and more dramatic cuts in 2012, according to NEA chief economist, Richard Sims (2009). Sims predicted there will be bleak years ahead even with Stimulus funds earmarked for educational institutions.

With the pessimistic fiscal outlook increasing, Duncan (2010) surmises the new normal to be a wake-up call to America and a time to rethink how to invest in the education of our children. A repositioning, by way of moving educational management from an individual attribute to contingent enactment makes it possible to study its specific workings including how it operates to produce, and to challenge, the generalizing logics of market and economism that characterize contemporary education (Ball, 2007).

Frederick Hess and Eric Osberg (2010) in their book *Stretching the School Dollar: How Schools and Districts Can Save Money While Serving Students Best*, offer a differing view of the new normal. Their focus is more of a celebration of budget cuts, provision of strategies and approaches for identifying waste, and concrete examples of serious dialogue about the political and practical challenges.

School Leadership Re-Defined

The ever-changing dynamics of schools has had a great weight on what occurs in schools as well as the perception of school leadership (Montgomery & Growe, 2003). Those attributes are increasingly associated with effective school leadership and administration (Growe & Montgomery, 2000).

The traditional concept of leadership is largely equated to leaders' competences, behaviors and values. At the very least, this definition warrants expansion if leadership development can meet the needs of complex organizations in the 21st century (James, 2011).

Fullan's (2001) *Leading in a Culture of Change* agenda emphasizes "thinking about and leading complex change" (p. 3). According to Fullan (2001), this framework represents independent forces that mutually bring about positive change. Relative to leadership in the school, Fullan (2001) stressed that leaders must treat schools as if they have minds. Forging new relationships is crucial to the addition of resources and establishing greater coherence for the school's purposes and programs (Fullan, 2001). Fullan explained, "first, people will not voluntarily share knowledge unless they feel some moral commitment to do so; second, people will not share unless the dynamics of change favor exchange; and third, that data without relationships merely cause more information glut" (p. 6).

The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) *Standards for School Leaders*, developed in 1996, redefined school leadership standards to "reflect principals' present leadership role that centers on enhancing teaching and learning and creating powerful learning environments" (Kaplan et al., 2005, p. 31). A goal of the ISLLC standards is to re-culture the leadership of schools. The standards are research-based and meant to "focus on indicators of knowledge, dispositions, and performances important to effective school leadership" (Kaplan et al. 2005, p. 31).

Collaborative Leadership

This period of stripped down budgets is causing educators, community leaders, policymakers and other stakeholders to be more aware of the need to use scarce resources to maximize results (Blank, Jacobson, Melaville, and Pearson, 2010). "Most schools, health and social service providers, youth development organizations, higher education institutions, public and private agencies and government officials work in isolated "silos," concentrating on single issues. Experience teaches that these single issues overlap and diverse stakeholders are all, in effect, responsible for the same children, the same families and the same communities. But bureaucratic organization and fragmented funding streams make it hard for their respective sectors to work together to better meet community and family needs" (p. iii). .

Collaborative leadership and community school theories align with what is being addressed and examined in developing cross-section collaboration. The Connecticut State Board of Education (2002) adopted a position statement endorsing the requirement for 21st century schools to initiate the type of leadership that can promote the changes essential to adequately prepare students for the world today and in the future. Research suggest that the underpinning for high academic achievement, more productive schools and students is strong collaborative leadership which includes community-based collaborative leaders.

Collaborative leadership is demonstrated by groups working together to solve agreed upon issues. It uses supportive and inclusive methods to ensure that all people affected by a decision are part of the change process. For effective collaboration to take place, it is important for people to release their ego and participate honestly and openly in the process (Sergiovanni,1994).

A fact which cannot be disputed is that schools are facing increasingly complex situations, uncertainty, ambiguity, and high expectations for innovation and reform. Educational leaders, adopting more collaborative forms of leadership, which involve parents, teachers, students and other stakeholders in the process could prove enriching and connective for all involved (Murphy and Hallinger, 1992 and Hallinger 1992. Working collaboratively is an unavoidable feature of the 21st-century school and a consistent part of government policy for the provision of services to children. Unfortunately, little research has been undertaken into the nature of leadership required to maximize the potential of such partnerships based on working within this context (Coleman, 2011).

New collaborative leadership models are differentiated from more traditionally individualistic models of leadership (Senge and Kaeufer, 2001; Fletcher and Kaeufer, 2003; Fletcher, 2004). Although, research in new leadership thinking details collective, collaborative and distributed forms of leadership as better leadership models for dealing with contemporary organizational challenges, the leadership development literature still focuses primarily on the individual leader. New conceptualizations of leadership are overlooked while continuing to focus on traditional skills (DeRue and Wellman, 2009).

School leaders will face challenges that seem to have no solution. Johansen (2009) states that interestingly, they will have to make tough decisions anyway. "Leaders will be buffeted, but they need not allow themselves to be overwhelmed, depressed or immobilized. Leaders must do more than just respond to the whirl of events, though respond they must. They must be positive change agents in the midst of chaos, creating the future. Some things can get better, even as other

things get worse." (p.3). To help create a better future, leaders must seek experiences and opportunities to learn and apply new leadership skills more applicable to the new normal.

Leadership in Aligning External Services with Schools

The new normal has brought about a different mindset in how to provide a quality education to our students. It reaches beyond the scope of the educational community for resources in accomplishing this goal. This coalition is with people who are different from us. Gerberding (2007) cites that "we need to learn how to build a connectivity that includes people who are not like us—people in business, people in the faith-based sector, people in the health care delivery system, people in the nonprofit community—and there is one absolutely essential requirement to our capacity to do this kind of collaboration. It is the concept of meta-leadership" (3).

With the meta-leadership concept in mind, implementation of collaborative school-linked services is a viable approach in addressing the nuances associated with the new normal. Dolan (1992) examined school-linked programs across the country and identified characteristics of programs that have lasted over a period of time, have been well accepted, and have had positive outcomes. Research by Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1995) supports the notion that

Collaborative school-linked services require altering the way services are delivered. Service integration calls for service providers to work together in coherent ways to bring improved educational, medical, mental health, and legal services to students and their families. Inherent in the concept of school-linked services is the recasting of children's services from the perspective of overcoming children's 'academic,' 'physical,' or 'physiological' problems to 'cases' of children and families with a variety of needs. Labels and artificially separate categories of problems are replaced with a broad-based working framework that redefines client needs and increases interprofessional collaboration. (p.1)

In *Connecting Families, Schools & Communities* (2004), school-linked services were described as an inclusive concept which encompasses a number of diverse initiatives, including community schools, extended service schools, community education, wraparound services for students in schools, school based health clinics, staff of public and nonprofit agencies placed in schools, school-linked services, and school/community partnerships.

Conclusion

In our schools, the paradigm has shifted to a leadership that embraces different kinds of organizational components to achieve the best for the greater good. The focus tends to be on a connectivity designed to bridge the gap in schools by creating systems that reach beyond educational boundaries. Connecting and building linkage with individuals and organizations not like us could lead to the leveraging of funding streams necessary for economic survival. This new normal has gone beyond a label. The reality is to do much more with far less.

References

- Blank, M, Jacobson, R, Melaville, A, & Pearson, S. (2010). *Financing community schools: Leveraging resources to support student success*. Washington, DC: Coalition for Community Schools, Institute for Educational Leadership. Retrieved from www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/finance-paper.pdf
- Coleman, A. (2011, March 17). Towards a blended model of leadership for school-based collaborations. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 39(3), 296-316.
- Connecticut State Board of Education Hartford. (2002, December 2). Position statement on *Educational leadership: A collaborative effort to improve student achievement*. Retrieved from www.sde.ct.gov/sde/LIB/sde/pdf/board/stusuptserv.pdf
- Connecting families, schools & communities. A brief of The Family Strengthening Task Force of the National Human Services Assembly* (2004, October 13). Retrieved from www.nassembly.org/fspc
- DeRue, D. S., & Wellman, N. (2009). Developing leaders via experience: The role of developmental challenge, learning orientation, and feedback. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 94, 859-875.
- Duncan, A. *The new normal: Doing more with less* (2010, November 17). Remarks at the American Enterprise Institute. Retrieved from <http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/new-normal-doing-more-less-secretary-arne-duncans-remarks-american-enterprise-institut>.
- Dolan, L. J. (1992). *Models for integrating human services into the school*. Center for Research on Effective Schooling for Disadvantaged Students. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 347 244)
- Fletcher, J. (2004). The paradox of postheroric leadership: an essay on gender, power, and transformational change. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 15 (5), 647-661.
- Fletcher, J., & Kaeufer, K. (2003). Paradox and possibility. In C. Pearce & J. conger (Eds.). *Reframing the hows and whys of leadership*. London, England: Sage.
- Fullan, M. (2001). *Leading in a culture of change*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Galston, W. A. (2010). *The "New Normal" for the U. S. economy, where will it be?* Brookings Institution. Retrieved from http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2009/0901_economy_galston.aspx?p=1.
- Gerberding (2007, July 7). *21st century global health: A new leadership paradigm*. (PowerPoint slides). Retrieved from www.nwcph.org/docs/fphli/leadership_paradigm.ppt
- Gross, W. (2009). *What is the new normal?* Retrieved from <http://www.forbes.com/forbes/2010/0208/investing-mutual-funds-stocks-pimco-new-normal.html>
- Growe, R., & Montgomery, P. (2000). Women and the leadership paradigm: Bridging the gender gap. *National Forum Journal*, 17E, 1-7. Retrieved from <http://www.nationalforum.com>.
- Hallinger, P. (1992). The evolving role of American principals: From managerial to instructional to transformational leaders. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 30(3), 35-48.
- Hess, F., & Osberg, E. (Eds), (2010). *Stretching the school dollar how schools and districts can save money while serving students best*. Cambridge, England: Harvard Education Press.

- James, K. T. (2011). *Leadership in context development: Lessons from new leadership theory and current leadership development practice*. Paper commissioned by the Kings Fund to inform the Leadership Commission. Retrieved from www.kingsfund.org.uk/.../leadership_papers/leadership_theory.html
- Johansen, B. (2009). *Leaders make the future: Ten new leadership skills for an uncertain world*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.
- Kaplan, L. S., Owings, W. A., & Nunnery, J. (2005). Principal quality: A Virginia study connecting Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards with student achievement. *NASSP Bulletin*, 89(643), 28.
- Montgomery, P., & Growe, R. (2003, Spring). Visionary leaders by design. *Advancing Women in Leadership*, 1-10. Retrieved from <http://www.advancingwomen.com/awl/spring2003/MONTGO-LHTML>.
- Murphy, J. , & Hallinger, P. (1992) The principal in an era of transformation. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 30(3), 77–88.
- Mulcahy, D., & Perillo, S. (2011). Thinking management and leadership within colleges and schools somewhat differently: A practice-based, Actor-Network Theory Perspective. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 39(1), 122-145, first published on December 8, 2010. Ball (2007) is cited in abstract.
- Senge, P., & Kaeufer K. (2001). *Communities of leaders or no leadership at all*. New York, NY: Prentice Hall.
- Sergiovanni, T.J. (1994). *Building communities in schools*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.
- Sims, R. (2009). What does a post-stimulus world look like? *The New Normal for Ed Tech* . SIIA Ed Tech Business Forum. Retrieved from <http://www.siiia.net/blog.index.php/2011/08/ed-techs-new-normal/>.
- Wang, M. C., Haertel, G. D., & Walberg, H. J. (1995). *Effective features of collaborative school-linked services for children in elementary school: What do we know from research and practice?* The National Center on Education in the Inner Cities. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 399 309)

To survive and flourish in a new normal, leaders must be willing to change. Conventional approaches and capabilities are unlikely to be effective in our post-Covid-19 environment. Steps for Self-assessment and Growth. Now is the time for every leader to commit to personal growth. Start by developing a keen self-awareness to establish your foundation for growth. The following three steps will jumpstart your self-assessment. Do they hold up in the present circumstances? Many of us think and act on autopilot much of the time. We tend to repeat actions that have resulted in successful outcomes in our past. Perhaps this approach makes sense when our world is stable. Yet stability is fleeting and, at times, almost nonexistent. Your well-worn assumptions may let you down. The ABC's of Collaborative Leadership. ASSESS "Your Current Infrastructure. Gather information and pave the way for a new direction. BUILD "Your New Model. Identify ways to build on what works and open space for board and staff to share ideas, responsibilities and ownership. COMMUNICATE. Understand how decisions are currently made, who the decision-makers are and how each role's voice is represented in the process. Examine existing channels of communication between board and executive leadership, board and staff, and staff and leadership. Determine whether there are clear role descriptions and an understanding of those roles by all parties. Evaluate whether board members clearly understand their fiduciary responsibilities. Build Your New Model. New collaborative leadership models are differentiated from more traditionally individualistic models of leadership (Senge and Kaeufer, 2001; Fletcher and Kaeufer, 2003; Fletcher, 2004). Although, research in new leadership thinking details collective, collaborative and distributed forms of leadership as better leadership models for dealing with contemporary organizational challenges, the leadership development literature still focuses primarily on the individual leader. Leadership in Aligning External Services with Schools. The new normal has brought about a different mindset in how to provide a quality education to our students. It reaches beyond the scope of the educational community for resources in accomplishing this goal. This coalition is with people who are different from us. In the New Normal, therefore, leaders will need to focus their organizations' attention to long term results that can be achieved through data sharing, rather than to short term exploitation of proprietary datasets. 3. Celebrating the catalysts rather than the disruptor. Innovation studies of the last decades have praised the disruptors, who succeed in an industry by eliminating competitors. The heroes were those rebels who changed the rule of the game against the herd. Innovation in the New Normal needs less disruptors and more catalysts. The New Normal will be the moment of truth to test the real commitment of leaders towards promoting a purposeful business. Health, Wealth, and Meaning. Among all these six criteria, the focus on purpose is the most important.