



The Building Blocks of World Class School Districts

Results: The focus is always on results, not activity. Results can be seen and verified. They are a change in behavior, a change in performance. Activity may involve plenty of hard work and good intentions but often it does not improve results. Results come from a constant emphasis on two major components: execution and innovation. Execution involves significantly improving the quality of current performance. Innovation means finding new approaches that outperform current practices.

Leaders: In order to excel, organizations and school districts need results leaders. Results leaders are driven to make a difference. Their energy and action is a galvanizing force to enlist and sustain the engagement of others. They take personal responsibility for achieving results – no excuses. Nothing stands in their way, not student demographics, not limited resources, not staff attitudes. Results leaders are not lone rangers. They know that the key to achievement is teamwork.

Teamwork: The best results come from people working in teams – teachers who teach the same subject or grade level, staff members who share the same role, the faculty and staff at each school. Those who are closest to the action usually know best how to improve execution and how to introduce innovation. Besides, they are the people who deliver the goods.

Time: Teams cannot succeed without time. Consider all the time sports teams spend in practice. Organizations that are serious about results schedule time for teams to do their best thinking together. They also commit time for teams to share their thinking and results with colleagues. Good thinking is contagious.

Cycle: The results cycle is not complicated. Simply put, it involves action, data, action again, and new data. Teams analyze data together, identify areas for improved performance, set targets, act to hit the target, gather and analyze data about results, then adjust and act again.

Data: Good data are clear, accessible, and widely communicated. While state scores are important, much of the best information is local - teacher observation, reading scores, unit tests. Constant feedback is essential for teacher teams and students to succeed. Working together, teams develop information that creates a window on improved performance. When used well, data is a motivator for results, not a threat.

Targets: Results seldom improve without targets. After establishing the baseline performance, the choice of the target involves a stretch. The target draws behavior toward it. Once people are freed from the drag of playing it safe, they want to achieve. At the same time, it is alright to not always get there. Learning comes from falling short, as well as hitting the target. The pursuit of results involves getting going, and learning and adjusting along the way.

Resources: It's rare that an organization ever has enough resources. To become world class, it is essential that the available resources are focused on achieving results. This is even more important in tough times. School districts are famous for chasing trends and scattering their efforts. Results come from a single-minded commitment to always advancing achievement and then channeling the energy and the funding where it counts.

Responsibility: The key to results is responsibility, not accountability. Accountability is a loaded word these days – it often implies blame. Responsibility means we are all in this together, each responsible for doing our part in achieving results. Leaders are responsible for making sure all of these building blocks are in place. The leadership team and the faculty and staff, in partnership with the parents and community, are responsible for delivering results. No excuses, no finger pointing. Becoming world class takes everyone and it never ends.