

## **Partially Decentralizing Administrative Practices in Secondary Schools to Develop Collective Staff Efficacy and Improve Student Achievement**

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### **ABSTRACT**

**Schools must have the capacity to change. School administrators must be able to find a balance in distributing administrative authority in schools. In an effort to evoke meaningful change within the organization of secondary school structures, administrators must be advocates of change and support their staff members by decentralizing key roles by designing the decision making process. By doing this, staff efficacy will be stronger which will yield better gains in student achievement.**

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**P**artially decentralizing school administrative practices in secondary schools will build stronger, more united organizational structures and promote greater staff efficacy and stronger gains in student achievement. This is an especially important concept for administrators to grasp in the twenty- first century because it involves change within school organizations and all of the factors associated with it. According to Fullan (2001), “leading in a culture of change is about unlocking the mysteries of living organizations.” School administrators must personally support change and encourage

others in their organization to become effective change agents if they are to ensure or guarantee that their schools are able to adapt to change (Bennis & Nanus, 1985). Administrators will be more obligated to become stronger leaders, especially in curriculum and instruction, and be able to better develop staff efficacy in a collective effort to improve student achievement overall. By distinguishing key administrative roles, many school staff members may feel limited as to what they could do to build stronger professional learning communities and departmental teams to create and design new instructional strategies for the classroom and beyond. Schools should be places of high creativity and marketability. They embody members of society and hold its values and beliefs. By focusing in on developing stronger staff efficacy and decentralizing the role of administrators and staff, administrators will be able to better improve student achievement at their campuses. In a sense, they will no longer just be the administrator of their campus, but they will actually begin to embrace the ideology of being instructional leaders and embrace the humanistic component of school improvement and empowerment.

The purpose of this essay is to discuss key ideas that administrators could use in partially decentralizing their role on their campuses in an effort to develop strong staff efficacy to obtain strong gains in student achievement. The underlying purpose of schools is to help students and the only way to demonstrate the improvement of students or show accountability is in how they obtain and retain knowledge that will impact themselves and society at large for the rest of their lives. Secondary schools have one of the largest impacts on student achievement because it is aligned with each student's exodus into society. People in society expect that students who graduate from secondary schools to be able to perform on higher cognitive levels based upon the skills and knowledge they obtained in school. Administrators who are in the main role as the instructional leader on their campuses hold the pulse of the knowledge level of students in their schools. They know how their students are performing at any given moment and can access how far their students need to go before determining strong levels of achievement in the different subject areas.

### **Partial Decentralization of Administrative Practices**

Decentralization of administrative authority does not eliminate complete administrative authority; however, it should provide the administrator with better access to distributing control to selective segments of the school's organizational structure that directly impacts the staff itself. According to Brown (1990), the decentralization of some of the administrative authority will be able to provide flexibility, accountability, and productivity to schools. Flexibility gives staff members the opportunity to address real problems in their specific school. Decentralization makes staff members more accountable in their departments. They are better able to assess and evaluate their particular component of the school organization and provide immediate feedback to the principal on what is working and what is not. Additionally, decentralization builds better

productivity by allowing administrators to determine how resources can better be applied within the school structure.

### **Building a Professional School Culture**

School administrators must evoke change in their organizations by decentralizing the modernistic creation of the bureaucratic structure established in schools and build a more post modernistic professional culture. The school administrator should embrace the ideology that “the importance of this management/ decision making distinction is that management does not actually manage the organization” (Weick, 1985). He further purports that it is the role of the administrator to be inventive enough to design or create decision structures. One such decision- making design should involve all of the aspects of a professional school culture. The characteristics of a professional school culture include an organization that possess the following: collaboration, shared decision making, knowledge about change, knowledge about climate and culture, individual growth opportunities, relevant and sustained staff development, and administrative role changes (Kowalski, 2003, p. 158). The administrators must also change along with the staff. The principal needs to emphasize high productivity and allow teachers to feel empowered. This will improve employee morale and collaboration between staff and administrators.

### **A Culture of Collective Staff Efficacy**

A culture of collective staff efficacy can be obtained through four sources as described by Hoy & Miskel (2005). These sources bring in the human element of school culture and improve its climate. The four sources are mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and affective state. Mastery experience is viewed as “successes build strong beliefs in a faculty’s sense of collective efficacy; failures undermine it” and “a resilient sense of collective efficacy requires experience in overcoming difficulties through persistent effort.” (Pg. 176) Vicarious experience is viewed by Huber (1996) as having an organization learn the successes and failures of other organizations. Social persuasion is described by Hoy & Miskel (2005) as “another means of strengthening a faculty’s convictions that they have the capabilities to achieve what they seek.” (pg. 177) Organizations have affective states. They react to stresses that come with change. It is highly important for administrators to be able to foster true educational change by helping their staff learn about its own and other schools’ successes and failures, strengthening faculty’s beliefs about what the organization as a whole beliefs to be true, and by assisting their staff through major changes by helping them to deal with the stress of imparting change to reap strong student achievement gains.

### **Gains in Student Achievement**

Bandura (1993) writes that student achievement is significantly and positively related to collective efficacy and that collective efficacy has a much greater effect on student achievement than socioeconomic status. In another study by Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy (2000), it supports Bandura's 1993 study and reiterates that collective efficacy aids in facilitating high student achievement. If staff collaboration and shared decision making are encouraged within the school system, then students and staff work for common educational goals. As a result, one may see the entire school staff feel more supported by the administration by valuing and appreciating their professional judgments and contributions to the school. From this, students are embraced in a positive culture.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, partially decentralizing administrative practices will build stronger staff efficacy and improve student achievement. Schools work in structures. Lessons, staff developments, and students' schedules, etc. are grounded in this order. However, more can be accomplished when the staff takes control and provides feedback on what is working and what is not working in the school's organizational structure. According to Fullan (1999), the guru on educational change, meaningful reform or change cannot occur if administrators are too authoritative where little or no control is given to staff members and if the system is too decentralized, then too much chaos may result. He believes that a balance must exist if true change is to exist. It must be noted that since schools are powerful catalysts for change, decentralizing administrative practices builds strong relationships among staff members. In an era when academic accountability is at its highest, school leaders need to be aware and adjust to the changing times. One vital component that is missing in many schools is the linkage between school climate and culture and its impact on students. A strong, healthy school climate promotes and builds positive relationships between the entire school staff and students and ultimately raises student achievement levels.

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