JEEL

JOURNAL OF ETHICAL EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

CULTURALLY COMPETENT COMMON CORE:
THE NEWEST DEAL
York Williams, Ph.D.
West Chester University

Abstract

There are five essential elements that will enable school leaders to implement culturally competent school reform under the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSS) in K-12 schools. These five elements have been selected from the best practices of school leadership and are the theoretical constructs believed to be critical for the most successful implementation of the CCSS. The following are included in this design: (a) culturally competent leadership, (b) shared vision, (c) community collaboration, (d) culturally inclusive practices, and (e) ethical dimensions of school leadership. Each element is described in the article and implications are provided for school leaders and school community members. Educational leaders who embrace these elements will be better equipped to move through the phases of whole school reform, while moving away from a deficit model of student learning into a more dynamic mode of school engagement and educational reform.

INTRODUCTION

School leaders have the task of providing ethical leadership, guidance and sound decision making, each of which impacts the students, teachers and community members that they serve (Hargreaves, Earl, Moore, & Manning, 2001; Hart & Bredeson, 1996; Harris 2002; Hopkins, 2000; Kotter & Heskett, 1992; Masland, 1985). Such leaders include, but are not limited to, school principals, instructional facilitators, coaches, and lead teachers. School and instructional leaders possess the responsibility of guiding the implementation of curricular changes, such as those occurring under the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) initiative (Phillips & Wong, 2010; Kohn, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2010; Wurman & Stotsky, 2010). The "Common Core" is a state-led effort orchestrated by the National Governors Council and the Council of Chief State School Officers to provide clear-cut goals for what students in K-12 United States schools should know, understand, and be able to do to be successful in college and the workplace (Council of Chief State School Officers and National Governors Association, 2011).

The CCSS initiative is not a curriculum. Instead, this group of standards is a clear set of shared goals and expectations based on what knowledge and skills are necessary for students to succeed. State leaders have, and will continue to make determinations as to how the standards will affect educational programming in their respective states. In some cases, at the state level, CCSS and a cache of other standards have been combined to better meet the individual needs of those states. As school leaders, it will be principals and superintendents, among others, who will decide how the standards are to be met. As instructional leaders, teachers will continue to devise lesson plans and tailor instruction to the individual needs of students in their classrooms.

The core of the CCSS is based on achievement data gleaned from a variety of sources for United States students, in addition to data and input from critical stakeholders. These stakeholders include scholars, teachers, school leaders, professional organizations, and parents, who developed a set of Common Core Standards that provide learning outcomes for all students in K-12 schools across the country. The standards can be viewed as a quasi roadmap to reform for administrators, schools, students, teachers, and parents. However, unlike some past school reforms and educational initiatives that dictated curriculum, assessment instruments, and pacing of instruction, the core of the CCSS do not dictate how teachers must teach or how administrators and teachers must lead. The development and implementation of curriculum to meet these goals is left to individual states, districts, schools, and specifically to those school leaders with oversight from the national government (Council of Chief State School Officers and National Governors Association, 2011).

Although school leaders have the responsibility of deciding how best to meet these standards, there are a variety of factors that should be considered to assist with the effective implementation of the CCSS. Most importantly, culturally competent leadership and collaboration, guided by ethical principles of instructional leadership, teaching, and best practices can prove helpful in this endeavor (Benjamin, 2011; Brown, 2004; Williams, 2008). Because of the immediacy and requirements from state departments of education, many schools may find themselves dictating instructional changes that have not been carefully considered in an

effort to implement these standards under the CCSS. Without culturally competent leadership to guide ethical policy and practice, students and teachers are likely to experience frustration and failure, thus reminiscent of the achievement gap (Ford & Grantham, 1998; Ikpa, 2003; Williams, 2008). To avoid another avalanche of failed school reform, school leaders must consider and meet certain challenges, while implementing specific elements as they embark on this new initiative. The following five essential elements have been selected from the best practices of school leadership, and together, serve as a theoretical construct that is believed to be critical for the most successful implementation of the CCSS (Benjamin, 2011; Brown, 2004; Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning, 2010; Engels, Hotton, Devos, Bouckenooghe & Aelterman, 2008; Friedman, 2004; Fullan & Knight, 2011; Printy, 2010; Seashore & Wahlstrom, 2011; Thessin & Starr, 2011; Wise & Jacobo, 2010). Included in the discussion are the following: (a) culturally competent leadership, (b) shared vision, (c) community collaboration, (d) culturally inclusive practices, and (e) ethical dimensions of school leadership.

Culturally Competent Leadership

The first essential element of effective CCSS and school reform is based on building a framework of culturally competent administrative and teacher leadership. A bulk of school leadership research (Seashore, Louis & Wahlstyrom, 2011; Shapiro, 2006; Williams, 2008; Williams, 2012) argues that a framework of inclusive leadership and teacher practices coupled with a shared purpose and vision, are essential for effective teaching and learning. School and teacher leaders must develop an informed, shared vision for how their staff will interact and adopt a posture of cultural reciprocity that views the others as equal collaborators and agents in the goal of education reform. School leaders must identify points of intersection and interest with teachers, who will do the same with co-teachers and students, in order to make progress measurable, malleable, and sustainable. Such progress must: 1) be culturally congruent and competent, 2) reveal student attendance and parent participation, and 3) reveal strong teacher tendencies to deliver high quality instruction. Progress is measurable and malleable when, upon critical reflection, data points are used to reveal that teaching, assessment and measurement methods are either effective or need to be adapted to meet the needs of the student body. Progress is sustainable when, in cycles, student outcomes are met with success based on standardized achievement data and progress for all students, including students served under the Individual Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004). Under culturally competent leadership, schools will operate to implement the standards fully. In order for broad success to occur, cultural competency must be fully and equally distributed amongst the school's stakeholders.

Shared Vision

The second essential element of the effective implementation of CCSS is centered on the development of a shared vision. A shared and goal-oriented vision is one that is in itself a culmination of a shared purpose, a goal-oriented mission, and a focused course of action (Brown 2004; Engels et al., 2008; Friedman, 2004; Printy, 2010). School leaders must develop an

informed, shared vision for how their schools will operate to implement the standards fully. School and teacher leaders must place themselves within the paradigm of shared decision making with a central purpose in mind in order to promote: 1) depth of content, rather than mere "coverage", 2) a blended balance of a variety of texts consistent with learning styles with greater access to the CCSS, 3) standards-driven pedagogy for mathematics and science content, 4) an interdisciplinary focus on the humanities and technology, 5) inclusive, culturally competent special and gifted education practices from K-College; and 6) a broad emphasis on various types of technology embedded into all curricular areas (Council of Chief State School Officers and National Governors Association, 2011). The shared vision entails a clear vision and familiarity of the curriculum and faculty resources available to school personnel in order to implement the standards. The shared vision element must be clearly established with buy-in from teachers, students and parents, occurring from the initial stages, in order to ensure overall success.

Community Collaboration

The third essential element of effective implementation of CCSS is whole scale community collaboration. The broad goals of community collaboration interwoven with any whole school reform model include: 1) family involvement, 2) community business investment, 3) collaboration amongst local governmental and public agencies, 4) improved use of public facilities and community based family services, and 5) the development of social networks that involve crime prevention and public safety for students, families and staff. The components of community collaboration as noted here provide a cohesive framework that envisions a community that is inseparable from the broad goals of the school, creates a shared vision and grassroots buy in, and allows for greater presence within and around the school itself. This nexus is established through high trust and reciprocity (Gronevetter, 1983; Hechter & Okomato, 2001), and creates a form of *habitus* (Bordieu & Passerson, 1977) for successive family and community members to follow.

Culturally Inclusive Practices

The fourth essential element of effective implementation of CCSS is culturally inclusive practices within and outside of the school. This component is based on five principles recommended by Knight & Wiseman (2005): 1) validation of the background and learning styles of teachers and assisting them in better understanding who their students are, 2) instructional design that engages general and special educators and school administrators, 3) an awareness among school and teacher leaders of the knowledge, skills, and values that are associated with access to socio-economic and political power, 4) engaging participants in learning through a wide array of culturally relevant and authentic instructional strategies and contexts; and 5) using multi-modal learning assessments for students. This focused framework envisions a school that possesses a repertoire of practices, facilitated by the school and teacher leaders, and one that includes all students and family members. This inclusive lens reaches beyond the curriculum, and sheds light on engaging and inclusive practices that support the whole student. Successful

delivery of CCSS is assured and its impact is far reaching, through a focus on holistic education, rather than merely deficit and/or needs-based instruction. Through the implementation of these practices, school leaders would develop culturally responsive professional development models, which can further alter failed school practices, and address conflicts between school administrators and practitioners, while at the same time, strengthen the roles of teacher researchers in the consultation process of developing strong ties within high-need urban schools and charter schools (Granovetter, 1983; Williams, 2007).

Ethical Dimensions of School Leadership

School leaders must adopt an ethical stance of social and political justice in order to ensure that any school reform effort addresses the needs, wants and assumptions that underlie the best interests of the school's students. A school leader, or teacher leader, that makes informed decisions from the positions of care, justice, and critique demonstrates the ability and willingness to work from a multiple ethical paradigm approach (Shapiro, 2006). As argued by Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001), both the field of education and the profession of school leadership are incomplete if those involved fail to adopt a framework that is interwoven with ethical leadership, policy and practice and does not utilize evidence-based teaching, scholarship and research. Through the use of the lenses of justice, care, critique, and the profession, a scaffolding may be developed for ethical school leadership (Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2001). In this sense, it also must be understood that turbulence exists within schools and communities, and that such instability creates the need for school leaders to use these ethical lenses in navigating the light to extreme conditions of hardship and uncertainty that K-12 schools offer (Gross, 1998, 2006). Accordingly, a conceptual understanding of Gross' turbulence theory may provide school leaders with the ability to more easily navigate leadership obstacles and make more informed educational decisions when severe issues occur. For example, under the CCSS, a school may be low on highly qualified math teachers who have the ability to successfully include all learners with special needs, and as a result, may produce a pool of students who fail to meet proficiency on standardized tests. The analysis of obstacles, through Gross' turbulence theory, would allow the school leader to provide an equitable remedy in the domains of hiring qualified staff, dismissing unqualified staff, and/or rearranging the existing department to better reflect one that is prepared to meet the needs of particular student demographics, and thereby intervening with a broad ethical decision that is focused on whole scale reform.

CONCLUSION

The CCSS sets standards for learning to ensure that all students in public schools are prepared for college and transition into the workplace. Although implementing any mandate requiring change is a challenge, the CCSS thrusts an additional task onto schools' shoulders, since they do not provide a clear blueprint for leaders. Rather, school leaders are required to design and construct a successful road map, by identifying the appropriate individuals and resources for the journey, and by keeping students, teachers and community members on-board and on-task throughout the process. Here, five essential elements have been identified as

hallmarks for a framework that aims to successfully produce effective leadership and proper implementation of the CCSS. These elements provide a framework for action that will enable school leaders to transform schools into centers of authentic and meaningful learning where students can gain access to curriculum and culturally responsive practices that lead to successful outcomes, in the form of college and career success. Skilled administrative and teacher leaders are needed to facilitate the required reforms through evidence-based and culturally competent school practices that establish more rigorous and robust schools under CCSS. Educational leaders who embrace these elements will be better equipped to move through the phases of whole school reform, while moving away from a deficit model of student learning, and into a more dynamic mode of school engagement and educational reform.

REFERENCES

Benjamin, S. (2011). Simple leadership techniques: Rubrics, checklists and structured collaboration. *Kappan, 92*(8), 25-30.

Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. (1977). *Reproduction in education, society, and culture*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Brown, R. (2004). *School culture and organization: Lessons from research and experience* (A background paper for the Denver Commission on Secondary School Reform). Retrieved on Friday February 8, 2013from http://www.dpskl2.org/pdf/culture _organization.pdf

The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning. (2011). *School leadership: A key to teaching quality* (A policy brief on the role of principals in strengthening instruction). Retrieved on Friday February 8, 2013from hrtp://www.cftl.org/documents/2011 /StrengtheningScience_full.pdf

Council of Chief State School Officers and National Governors Association. (2011). *Common core state standards initiative: Preparing America's students for college and career*. Retrieved on Friday February 8, 2013from http://www.corestandards.org

Engels, N., Hotton, G., Devos, G., Bouckenooghe, D., & Aelterman, A. (2008). Principals in schools with a positive school culture. *Educational Studies 34*(3), 159-174.

Ford, D. Y. (2005). Beyond cultureblindness: A model of culture with implications for gifted education. *Roeper Review, 27*(2), 97–103.

Ford, D., & Grantham, C. T. (1998). A case study of the social needs of Danisha: An underachieving gifted African-American female. *Roeper Review, 21*.

Friedman, A. (2004). Beyond mediocrity: Transformational leadership within a transactional framework. *International Journal of Leadership in Education 7*(3), 203-224.

Fullan, M., & Knight, J. (2011). Coaches as system leaders. *Educational Leadership 69*(2), 50-53.

Granovetter, M. (1983). The strength of weak ties: A network theory revisited. In R. Collins (Ed.), *Sociological Theory,* 1, 201-233, California: Jossey-Bass.

Gross, S. J. (1998). *Staying centered: Curriculum leadership in a turbulent era Staying centered: Curriculum leadership in a turbulent era*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

Hargreaves, A., Earl, L., Moore, S., & Manning, S. (2001). *Learning to change: Teaching beyond subjects and standards.* San Francisco, Jossey-Bass A Wiley Company.

Harris, A. (2002). School *improvement: What's in it for schools?* New York: Roadledge Falmer.

Harry, B. (2008). Collaboration with culturally and linguistically diverse families: Ideal versus reality. *Exceptional Children*, *74*(3), 372-388.

Harry, B., & Klingner, J. (2006). *Why are there so many minority students in special education? Understanding race and disability in schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Hart, A. W, & Bredeson, R V. (1996). The *principalship: A theory of professional teaming and practice.* New York City: McGraw-Hill.

Hopkins, R. (2000). *Transition culture: An evolving exploration in to head, heart and hands of energy descent,* USA: The Walnut Books.

Individuals With Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 2004 (IDEA). U.S.C. §1400 et seq (2004).

Ikpa, V. (2003). A longitudinal analysis of the achievement gap between African Americans and European American students in the Norfolk Public Schools District. *Education Research Quarterly, 24*(4), 38–47.

Ikpa, V. (2004). Leaving children behind: the Institute of Education Sciences (2010). *Status and trends in the education of racial and ethnic minorities*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

Kohn, A. (2010, January 14). *Debunking the case for national standards: one size fits all mandates and their dangers*. Retrieved January 13, 2010, from http://www.alfiekohn.org/teaching/edweek/national.htm.

Knight, S.L., & Wiseman, D.L. (2005). Professional development for teachers of diverse students: A summary of the research. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk, 10*(4), 387-405.

Kotter, J. P., & Heskett, J. L. (1992). *Corporate culture and performance.* New York: Hardcover.

Masland, T. A. (1985). Organizational culture in the study of higher education. *The Review of Higher Education, 8* (2), 157-168.

Phillips, V. & Wong, C. (2010, February). Tying together the common core of standards, instruction and assessment. *Phi Delta Kappan, 91*(5), 37-42.

Printy, S. (2010). Principals' influence on instructional quality: Insights from U.S. schools. *School Leadership and Management, 30*(2), 111-126.

Seashore Louis, K. & Wahlstrom, K. (2011). Principals as cultural leaders. *Kappan 92*(5), 52-56.

Shapiro, J. A. (2006). Ethical decision making in turbulent times: Bridging theory with practice to prepare authentic educational leaders. *Values and Ethics in Educational Administration, 4*(2), 1–7.

Shapiro, J. A., & Stefkovich, J. A. (2001). *Ethical leadership and decision making in education: Applying theoretical perspectives to complex dilemmas*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Thessin, R. & Starr, J. (2011). Supporting the growth of effective professional learning communities. *Kappan 92*(6), 48-54.

U.S. Department of Education. (2010). "Press Release: Obama Administration's Education Reform Plan Emphasizes Flexibility, Resources and Accountability for Results." Retrieved August 24, 2010. http://www2.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2010/03/03152010.html.

U. S. Department of Education (2010, March). *A blueprint for reform: The reauthorization of the elementary and secondary education act*. Retrieved April 10, 2010, from http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/blueprimt/blueprint.pdf

Wise, D. & Jacobo, A. (2010). Towards a framework for leadership coaching. *School Leadership and Management 30(2),* 159-169.

Williams, Y. (2012). Race to the Top: Implications for higher education policy and students who come from culturally and linguistically diverse and at risk backgrounds. *Journal of Pennsylvania Black Conference on Higher Education*. (18), pp. 27-38 at www.Pbcohe.org.

Williams, Y. (2008). Deconstructing gifted and special education, policy and practice: A paradigm of ethical leadership in residentially segregated schools and communities. In V. Ikpa & K. McGuire (Eds.) *Advances in educational leadership and Policy: K-16 issues impacting student achievement in urban communities* (pp. 207-222). New York: Information Age Publications.

Wiliams, Y. (2007). *Charter school reform as rational choice: An analysis of African American parents' perceptions of a charter school located in a residentially segregated community*. Philadelphia: Temple University.

Wurman, Z. & Stotsky, S. (2010, February). *Why race to the middle? First-class state standards are better than third-class national standards*. Boston: Pioneer Institute. Retrieved March 7, 2010, from http://www.pioneerinstitute.org/pdf/100223whyracetothemiddle.pdf.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

York Williams, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of Special Education at West Chester University. Currently, he conducts research primarily in gifted and special education and urban school choice reform. Specifically, his work focuses on: (1) recruiting and retaining culturally diverse students in gifted education; (2) multicultural and urban education school choice; (3) minority student achievement and underachievement; and (4) family involvement. He consults with school districts and educational organizations in the areas of gifted education and multicultural/urban education. Additional interests include the intersection of urban school violence and achievement amongst African American males through the lens of social and juvenile justice. Dr. Williams has been a public school teacher for over fifteen years and has worked as an administrator and supervisor of special and gifted education programs. Dr. Williams is the founder of Children's Advocates for Social Justice (CASJ, 2003) and the Young Urban Leaders Program (YULP, 2007). Dr. Williams' work has been recognized by various professional organizations: American Education Research Association (AERA); Family Involvement Network of Educators (FINE); Temple Education Research Award (TERA); The Temple University Benjamin Verdile Alumni Association Award; and Whose Who Amongst America's Teachers Recognition Award. As a young scholar, Dr. Williams has written over two dozen research papers and articles and presented them at numerous conferences and workshops nationwide.

PREFERRED CITATION