

The Journal of the Coalition of Essential Schools

horace

Democratic Leadership in Coalition Schools

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**Democratic Leadership
in Coalition Schools**

Leadership

Alan Dichter emphasizes the leader's role as an information gatherer and facilitator. School leaders do their behind-the-scenes information gathering in all sorts of different ways. Some ask teachers to contribute their thoughts in writing on a spontaneous or periodic basis. All listen skillfully to voices from across the school community. "The principal," Dichter says, "is the protector of the integrity of the system. She's the person who runs around and makes sure everyone knows what's going on. You can't do all your communicating at the meeting—you have to make sure that people are up to speed and have the information they need ahead of time. Meeting time isn't for getting people prepared to decide. It's for being sharp and concise and making decisions." Dichter notes that there are times when a new teacher deserves to be heard but the wisdom of a twenty-year veteran has got to count for more, somehow. The principal's work is to balance and filter opinions and experience. (See "Leadership Paradoxes Common in New and Small Schools" on page 18 for more on the school leader's role.)

*Leadership can vary and move around,
but when it comes down to it, no matter how much
decision making is shared, there does have to be
someone who is in charge.*



Even in schools where teachers see themselves as generalists, able to teach across disciplines and perform multiple functions in the school, not everyone can be in on every decision. Where should people direct their energies? What decisions should be made democratically and which should one or two people make? How does one balance the need for efficiency with the need for inclusion?

In Bainbridge Island, Washington, Catherine Camp is the director of the Commodore Center alternative programs, five distinct educational programs grouped with seven community service programs. Camp describes the relationship among the programs as a "spontaneously generated ecosystem in its sixth year as a whole school community." The Commodore Center's

alternative programs include homeschool support, an alternative high school, a day treatment program for elementary students with profound disabilities, a contract studies program and the family-centered Odyssey multiage K-8 school. As the different programs were founded, Camp, the teachers and the involved parents worked to define roles as clearly as possible in order to make decision-making flow smoothly. "For the first few years we spent a lot of time focused on who makes what decision. We talked explicitly about teacher responsibility, parent responsibility, and administrative responsibility." Camp says the work in defining roles rewarded Odyssey parents and staff members, allowing them to manage a wholly collaboratively-governed school program.


SUPERLATIVE COMMUNICATION IS INDISPENSABLE

Successful collaboration is completely dependent on powerful communication skills. "The kids notice how we communicate with each other. We want the adults here to model how a community works and we do that all the time, when we're with the kids and when we're not," says San Francisco Community School's Kristen Bijur. Teachers, students and parents use the school's conflict resolution policy to work through communication impediments and tensions. They have posted the policy around school prominently and frequently, and discussions with staff and students reveal that it lives in their bones. (See page 11 for the San Francisco Community School conflict resolution policy.)



San Francisco Community School staff share dinner and a laugh

*Once you've worked here,
you always think on behalf of the whole staff,
the whole school. You think for the long term when
you're a part of making a decision.*



THINKING FOR THE LONG TERM

Nancy Mohr reminds schools, "You can do anything you want; you just can't do everything you want." An advantage of limited time is that it forces schools to make choices, and if they choose wisely, they can use collaborative time to focus on the decisions that keep them connected to the core values of their schools and commitments to their students. This awareness of limits within collaborative leadership allows school community members to focus on what they know best for the overall good of the school. The result can be a school where the teachers, students and parents—the decision-makers—experience commitment that transcends their personal fortunes. "Once you've worked here, you always think on behalf of the whole staff, the whole school," says Anzar's Charlene McKowen. "You think for the long term when you're a part of making a decision."

Creating a school that functions democratically is not an easy task. But at schools where teachers are focused on making curriculum decisions collaboratively—rather than relying solely on curriculum created by far away corporate publishers—the curriculum is connected to the students. When a school develops structures for participatory decision-making, the needs of the whole community are much more likely to be understood and met. And as a significant proportion of teachers, students, and parents develop leadership skills, the chances are good that the school and its democratic culture will sustain the inevitable loss of its founders or key visionaries. Despite its challenges, democratic school leadership places decisions about teaching and learning in the hands of the people who know the students best, and it offers a powerful model of how a participatory democracy can function to serve the common good.

References Cited (see Horace's Where to Go for More, page 19, for additional resources):

Carvin, David A. and Roberto, Michael A. "What You Don't Know About Making Decisions," *Harvard Business Review*, September, 2001

Mohr, Nancy and Dichter, Alan. "Building a Learning Organization," *Phi Delta Kappan*, June, 2001

SAN FRANCISCO COMMUNITY SCHOOL'S CONFLICT RESOLUTION POLICY

The San Francisco Community School Conflict Resolution Policy demonstrates a process that helps everyone—teachers, students, parents, support staff, anyone who spends time in the school building—to use their minds well as they solve problems. Staff members say that they use the conflict resolution policy to model effective nonviolent communication for students; they feel that it allows them to stay focused on real issues and transcend personal conflict.

SAN FRANCISCO COMMUNITY SCHOOL CONFLICT RESOLUTION POLICY

Our school community has committed to using conflict resolution to settle arguments and to prevent violence. We believe that effective conflict resolution can help us learn to disagree respectfully, to understand each other better and to respect the minds, hearts and bodies of everyone in our community. In order to live and learn and grow together, we need to build trusting, positive relationships.

We expect all members of our community— young and old, teachers, parents, students and staff—to practice this method and ask for help when we need it. We encourage families to reinforce this method at home and also to adapt it to meet your family needs.

HOW AND WHEN TO USE THE CONFLICT RESOLUTION POLICY:

We use our conflict resolution policy for major disagreements as well as for minor misunderstandings. We encourage everyone to talk directly to each other when conflicts first arise. People can follow the steps on their own (without an outside conflict manager) or ask someone (a teacher, head teacher, conflict manager, another parent) to help guide them through the steps.

THE PROCESS:

- ~ Cool off (sit in a quiet place, take a walk, talk to a mediator)
- ~ Agree on the ground rules (no interrupting, no put downs, no yelling)
- ~ Each person tells what happened and how s/he felt (use I-statements)
- ~ Each person says what s/he needs to happen next
- ~ Brainstorm solutions
- ~ Choose one solution (write down the agreement, plan to check if it is working)
- ~ Use the solution

If the above process does not result in a solution:

FOR STUDENTS:

A teacher will repeat the process
The head teacher or a class meeting will mediate
Parents will participate in the process
The district will participate

FOR ADULTS:

A teacher will mediate
Two adults (staff or parents) will mediate
The entire staff & interested parents will participate
The district/union will participate

ANZAR HIGH SCHOOL COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

After several years of democratic leadership, teachers at Anzar High School collaboratively developed these communication guidelines. Several years later, they still use the guidelines actively and rely on them for establishing norms and creating conditions conducive to hard decision-making. Staff members receive a copy of these guidelines at each weekly staff meeting; at the meeting's end, they rate the group and themselves, evaluating how well their communication met these standards.

GROUP GUIDELINES

- We are all part of the same team; we collectively own problems, and we collectively solve them.
- We discuss personal relationships in private only with those involved taking part in the conversation.
- We create space for all ideas.
- We help and support others.
- We try to "keep it light" and use humor when appropriate.
- We are polite to each other and use statements like "please" and "thank you."
- We allow conflict and differing ideas to exist, and we recognize that tension may be normal.
- We work on balancing cool feedback with warm feedback.
- We focus on solutions, not blame.
- We do not call people names.
- We have no side conversations during meetings.
- We always give feedback that is supported by data.

INDIVIDUAL GUIDELINES

- I commit to practice these guidelines.
- I listen to the message and not the messenger.
- I may use my colleagues to help practice these Communication Guidelines.
- I check out my assumptions, and I am not afraid to ask questions.
- I talk directly to any person with whom I have an issue in a timely manner.
- I am accountable for speaking my own ideas.
- I ask for what I need.
- I am personally accountable.
- I am honest.
- I foster a willingness to forgive, to learn and to move on.

New Jersey Coalition Schools: Compelled to Collaborate

What happens when schools are compelled by external district or state mandates to adopt a democratic leadership structure—as is happening in mandated reform efforts nationwide—rather than developing a collaborative decision-making model within the school community? In the last three years, nearly five dozen New Jersey schools have chosen to adopt the Coalition common principles. All were in districts affected by the New Jersey Supreme Court's 1998 Abbott vs. Burke decision, which aimed to reallocate funding for more equity and to produce rapid school reform in the state. Schools in the thirty Abbott districts needed to choose a whole school reform model, and fifty-eight schools chose CES by faculty vote.

Among the mandates of the Abbott decision is a stipulation that schools govern themselves through School Management Teams, referred to as SMTs. SMTs must include representatives from administrators, teachers, parents, community members, and, when appropriate, students. "The purpose of the SMT," according to The New Jersey Department of Education's description, "is to ensure participation of staff, parents and the community in the school level decision making and to develop a culture of cooperation, accountability and commitment, all with a focus on improving student achievement." The SMT's responsibilities are broad, including aligning the school's curriculum with the state standards, reviewing state assessment results, overseeing professional development, and implementing the school's technology plan. SMTs may also make recommendations on budgetary and personnel matters.



Ellen Levari, Joe Fitzpatrick, Mary Lundberg, and Carmen Spinnato prepare for a Vineland High School North School Management Team meeting

While it appears that the SMT would be a good fit with schools working toward incorporating Coalition principles, it's an awkward match for Vineland High School North, located in Vineland, near Philadelphia. Principal Ted Peters worries, "Forced democratic leadership is slowing down CES work. SMT issues tend to stay bogged down in the lower levels of Maslow's hierarchy. I find that we're focusing on garbage pick-up and air quality, on the basic stuff we can all relate to and agree on. It's not a place where we can really decide the big stuff. It reminds me of the 'less is more' CES principle. If we could take some issues off the table, we'd do a better job with what remains. Management teams tend to become a catch-all; the central office passes more and more on to the schools and we find ourselves with twenty agenda items and only two hours to do the work."

Claudia Burzichelli, Director of the New Jersey Coalition of Essential Schools Center, empathizes with the Vineland High School North staff and community, observing that determining focus is tremendously difficult for SMTs statewide. Burzichelli says, "Finding the right composition and the right work for SMTs is a real challenge. Some of the first cohort schools are seeing that maybe they don't want to focus on personnel issues, for example, a realization they could only make through experience. Different schools are finding different ways to deal with the decisions they make and issues they explore."

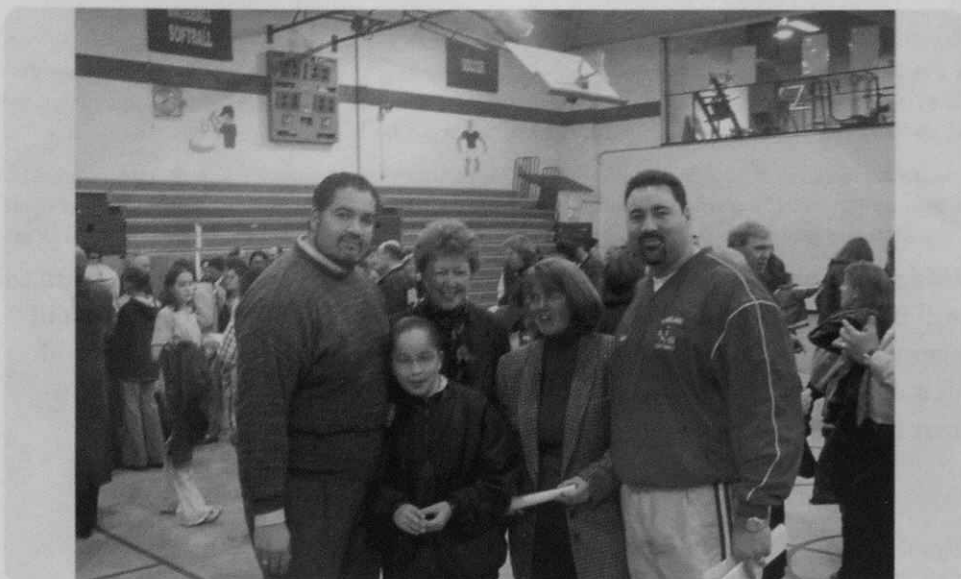
Peters believes that the mandated overlay of the SMT fragmented the communication and decision-making structures that had previously been established to work towards creating faculty consensus. Peters recalls, "I thought we were working toward a democratic leadership style using a homegrown method that relied on the existing departmental structure. Our departments had strong leadership and an open meeting style. When the state came up with the SMT edict, they wanted us to break down the existing structures that were working well for us. Some teachers accepted this and some didn't, and it's led to a situation where we feel stymied more than helped." While Peters still does his work by getting to all corners of his school and listening well, he and Vineland High School North's CES Facilitator Mary Lundberg note that the two-hour, once-a-month SMT isn't powerful enough to be the lever of change many in the Vineland High School North Community would like. "The SMT feels more like a rubber stamp committee rather than an action committee. So I go back and use my department chairs, the active decision-makers," Peters says.

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One of the factors that prevents the SMT from being a source of real, democratic power and substantive work is that it operates school-wide, attempting to coordinate the affairs of 1,350 ninth and tenth graders and 140 teachers and other professional staff (juniors and seniors attend Vineland High School South, a Coalition school on the same campus). Vineland North is considering the idea of creating small learning communities within its walls. Lundberg explains, "Because our students move from one building to the next halfway through high school, they experience a lack of continuity and lose bonds with staff. In an attempt to have a ninth through twelfth grade high school, we wrote a U.S. Department of Education grant to explore what small learning communities could be in our setting, how to set them up, and to visit other schools." Lundberg and Peters know that leadership structures like SMTs are most effective within such smaller learning communities. Gordon A. Donaldson concurs in his writing, observing that in a big school "the human dynamics are simply too complex for safety, trust and affirmation to grow among most adults."

Correspondingly, Vineland's IMPACT Program, a CES-affiliated preschool, is having much easier time of implementing the SMT; without a previous structure with which to compete and in a much smaller setting, IMPACT's site management team actually does succeed in eliciting effective, participatory decision-making. Marie Cancilleri, IMPACT's Staff Development Facilitator and its SMT coordinator, feels that the SMT effectively represents the school's families, thirteen teachers and twenty-five teaching assistants. "It feels powerful. It's a privilege that we have an opportunity to have a voice. I think it's how a school should be managed. Teachers never have a problem telling you what they need."

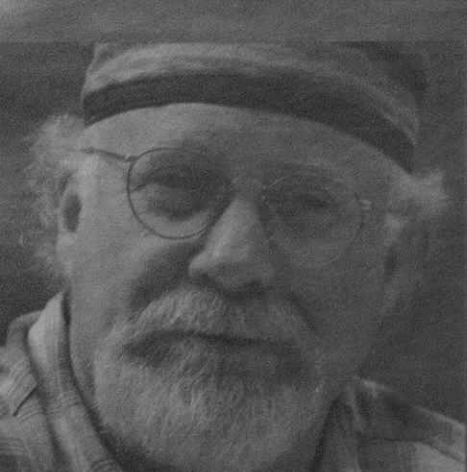
Despite the obstacles at the high school, Peters is clear that the SMT has been useful. "Any opportunity for communication and discussion helps, and we have gotten some work done this year." But he worries that the state's current budget crises will reduce resources, removing professional development monies and other funds on which the SMT depends. Peters is concerned that these tenuous circumstances keep Vineland High School North's staff and community from engaging and committing to the SMT process. "People are cynical, and their cynicism is realistic. Why invest in this if it's going change? It feels like another this-too-will-pass that schools are constantly being handed. People who have seen so many other things come and go just want to ride this out."



Vineland Board of Education members, parents, staff and students at eighth-grade parent-student night

While based on the considerable research that advocates use of collaborative decision-making in schools, the mandated nature of the reform—and the demand to show immediate improvement in student achievement—creates an obstacle from the start. As Holly Perry, principal of Philadelphia's Academy for the Middle Years Northwest argues, democratic leadership requires some wisdom that only time and practice can create. "Leadership involves all of the people who are part of the community. Let's define leadership as the opportunity and capacity to make decisions and exert influence. In order for people to do that, they need language, experience, coaching, and the opportunity to try and fail, try and improve. It can't be high stakes all the time."

In *Horace's Hope*, Ted Sizer writes, "The more democratically—meaning common agreement on the process for decision-making—the unit behaves, the better." Joe FitzPatrick, the CES Coach working with the Vineland schools, agrees, noting, "The difference between New Jersey Abbott schools and schools that voluntarily have become CES schools is the difference between being a volunteer and being compelled to do something. If I am a volunteer, I will want to do it; if it is a mandate, I won't have the momentum needed." But FitzPatrick compliments the work in the district, commenting, "The effort in Vineland has been considerable—they've looked at what an SMT is and at some of the important parts of personnel, budget and process, though the pressure to do a lot fast is tremendous." It seems as if Vineland, under Peter's



dear readers



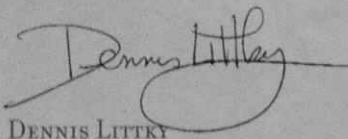
If you have a strong commitment to Coalition principles and have shown leadership in your school, if you are passionate and ready to take your skills to the next level, then I would love it if you would consider being a school principal. If you have moral courage, you have what it takes.

We need new leaders. We need more women, we need more people of color. We need more visionaries ready to share their ideas and influence. We need school leaders who understand that being a strong principal means everyone else in the school has a voice. You can be a strong principal and have teachers feel they are leading the school and make your parents' needs and interests major decision-making factors.

Unfortunately, most good teachers have a pretty bad image of the role of the principal. I want people to begin to understand that, especially in small, personalized, democratic schools, the principalship is a fantastic job that allows your great ideas and strong philosophy to help lead people in the right direction. The excitement of a whole school moving together is invigorating. A good principal is a part of a great team.

We are ready for a new generation of principals to lead our current Coalition schools when their principals move on, and we need a whole new slew of great leaders to start new Coalition schools. We are ready to expand, and we need people trained through their direct work in Coalition schools to be the leaders who spread the ideas.

Be bold. Take a step out. Put all your experience and knowledge to good use. Get your principal certificate! Take over a school! Start a school! Lead, lead, lead! It is one of the greatest jobs in the world.


DENNIS LITTKY

The Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center and the Big Picture Company, Co-Director

Alternately optimistic and grudging on a Sunday afternoon, I prepared for the teaching week ahead. "A Prairie Home Companion" played on National Public Radio, and I half-listened to Garrison Keillor's snapshot of Lake Wobegon's small-town politics. In the midst of my late-weekend drift, one sentence of his monologue hit me hard and I never forgot it. "The thing about democracy," Keillor observed, "is that it's made for people with lots of time on their hands."

School people tend not have a lot of time on their hands, of course. Traditionally, teachers spend most of their time in the classroom with their students. Rather than tilting against intractable bureaucracies and sorting out differences with colleagues, teachers make themselves comfortable in the universe behind the shut classroom door. Principals and administrators make decisions, teachers teach, everyone avoids conflict, and the wheels keep turning.

But this picture is no longer the only picture. Schools nationwide are adopting leadership and management methods that include teachers, students and families. Principals and other school administrators are reshaping their roles. For years, educators in CES schools have been working together in critical friends groups, in interdisciplinary teams, in site councils. These experiences have both nurtured the skills necessary to create more democratic leadership structures and have also demonstrated the incredible power of putting heads together in democratic forums. The good news is that—with the right choices about where to spend group time and energy—democracy can work, even among people with not quite enough time on their hands.


JILL S. DAVIDSON

JILL DAVIDSON
Horace Editor

leadership and that of the others involved in the site management team, will find a way to make the SMTs work for the school. But one cannot avoid seeing the irony of a situation where democracy—or a very specific kind of democratic practice—has been mandated from above. As a profession, we may need to clarify which issues require collaborative decision making.

References Cited (see Horace's Where to Go for More, page 19, for additional resources):

Donaldson, Gordon A. *Cultivating Leadership in Schools: Connecting People, Purpose and Practice* (Teacher College Press, 2001)

New Jersey Department of Education, "Urban Education Reform Regulations in the Abbott Districts," www.state.nj.us/njded/code/title6a/chap24/index.html

Sizer, Theodore R. *Horace's Hope* (Houghton Mifflin, 1996)

Continue the learning at
CES University. Attend a session
this spring or summer.



Developing Your Leadership Capacity to Support Whole School Change

This session will address the following questions: Where do schools begin to start the change process? How do we stay focused on the task when distractions and interruptions force our attentions elsewhere? How will we know when the process is working to help us reach our goal? Whose voice(s) do we need to hear?

Communication Strategies for Democratic Schooling

The Communications for Democratic Schooling session is based on the idea that effective communication skills greatly enhance the ability to work beyond conflicts and to engage all members of the school community in collaborative work.

For more information about these and other CES University sessions being offered this summer, please visit

www.essentialschools.org

LEADERSHIP PARADOXES COMMON IN NEW AND SMALL SCHOOLS

by Nancy Mohr & Alan Dichter

In their work with school leaders, Nancy Mohr and Alan Dichter focus not on problems but on paradoxes, such as need to have rules and, in opposition, the need to have the flexibility to evaluate situations on their own merits. Paradoxes ask leaders to balance priorities and resources between conflicting and necessary ideas and goals.

Mohr and Dichter describe leaders' work as addressing the "need to create and internalize systems which help attend to relationship-building—critical friends groups, advisor groups, conflict resolution skills, etc.," and suggest that leaders regard themselves as fulcrums at the center of these paradoxes, seeking balance and preventing collapse.

Mohr and Dichter suggest several common paradoxes as springboards for discussion, flip-sides on which reasonable educators might passionately disagree:

COMPETING NEEDS THAT LEADERS MUST BALANCE

<i>Needing to spend time developing governance structures and systems—wanting to get the conditions right first</i>	<i>Not postponing the focus on transforming teaching and learning</i>
<i>Wanting the advantage of smallness to create the intense relationships that lead to powerful learning</i>	<i>Not having time to deal with intense interpersonal problems—need to focus on the intellectual life of the school</i>
<i>Wanting to provide choice/variety for adults and students</i>	<i>Having to make hard decisions about what can be provided and what cannot</i>
<i>Needing to provide security by having rules which are known to all and applied to all</i>	<i>Needing to build in the habit of good judgment—looking at situations and problems individually</i>
<i>Knowing the importance of teachers spending time together developing curriculum and instructional strategies</i>	<i>Knowing the importance of not overloading staff</i>
<i>Needing to have a clear plan to share with the community</i>	<i>Knowing the importance of getting parents and community involved in the conversation early</i>
<i>Honoring a belief that a democratic organization is essential</i>	<i>Believing that strong leadership is essential to maintaining the mission and vision of school</i>
<i>Wanting to honor the varied subject matter areas required/represented and wanting to respond to student interest</i>	<i>Knowing that less is more</i>
<i>Believing that equity of outcomes is the bottom line</i>	<i>Wanting to honor the individual learning styles and pacing of students</i>

Nancy Mohr is a full-time consultant frequently—but not exclusively—working with leaders, with a special interest in their professional development. She was previously the principal of University Heights High School in New York City. She can be reached at nanmohr@rcn.com.

Alan Dichter is the Assistant Superintendent for Executive Leadership Development at the New York City Board of Education and was previously the principal of Satellite Academy in New York City. He can be reached via email at adichte@nycboe.net.

Where to Go for More

Resources for Exploring Collaborative Leadership

Alan Dichter recommends several resources that the Satellite Academy staff read together to deepen their collaborative leadership skills:

- *The Skilled Facilitator: Practical Wisdom for Developing Effective Groups* by Roger M. Schwarz (Jossey-Bass Inc., 1994)
Chapter 12, "Serving as a Facilitator in Your Own Organization" and Chapter 13, "The Facilitative Leader" help groups learn to communicate effectively and move through conflict. Information about the skilled facilitator approach is also available on the web at www.schwarzassociates.com.
- *The Human Side of School Change* by Robert Evans (Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1996)
Chapter 9, "The Authentic Leader" and Chapter 11, "Participation—Without Paralysis" spur leaders and all decision makers to clarify their roles.
- *The Leadership Paradox: Balancing Logic and Artistry in Schools*, by Terrence E. Deal and Kent D. Peterson (Jossey-Bass, 1994)
Deal and Peterson help school leaders reconcile the apparent clash between rational/technical management and passionate/artistic leadership.
- "What You Don't Know About Making Decisions" by David A. Garvin and Michael A. Roberto, Harvard Business Review, September 2001
Garvin and Roberto are eloquent on the role of inquiry, the utility of conflict in team decision-making. See www.hbsp.harvard.edu/products/hbr/sep01/R0108G.html to order a reprint, available in hard copy or electronically for \$6.00.

INTERSTATE SCHOOL LEADERS LICENSURE CONSORTIUM

Based on the conviction that school leaders' work must be grounded in the knowledge and understanding of teaching and learning, the Council of Chief State School Officers established the widely influential Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) in 1994. The ISLLC is a large-scale cooperative effort to build an education policy framework for school leadership, aiming to help states to develop and implement standards, assessments, professional development, and licensing procedures for school leaders.

web site: www.ccsso.org/isllc.html

for more information: contact Nancy Sanders, Consultant, ISLLC, phone: 303/484-8475, email: nancys@ccsso.org, or Joseph Murphy, Chair, ISLLC, at the Ohio Principals Leadership Academy, phone: 614/247-7130, email murphy.532@osu.edu

THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP IN SUSTAINING SCHOOL REFORM: VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Written by Adel Nadeau and Mary S. Leighton for the U.S. Department of Education, this report, available only on the web, synthesizes the responses of school leaders (principals, teachers, parents) from nine United States cities to these questions: "What do long-term school reform leaders view as their essential professional competencies? What do they see as their role in sustaining reform? How do they engage teachers, families, and communities in partnerships that build programs to help children meet challenging standards? How do such leaders know when they are doing a good job?" Rich with stories and quotations, *The Role of Leadership in Sustaining School Reform* extrapolates qualities of leaders who sustain reform and focuses closely on self-assessment, providing a range of tools and rubrics for leaders to evaluate their strengths, skills and challenges.

web site: www.ed.gov/pubs/Leadership/

LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

This compilation of resources, presented by the Center for School and Community Development at the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, provides information and tools particularly useful to leadership in participatory decision-making settings. *Leadership for Learning's* resources are designed for small schools working on reforms that improve achievement equity and include commitment to school-community partnerships.

web site: www.ncrel.org/cscd/

BIG PICTURE COMPANY PRINCIPAL RESIDENCY NETWORK

The Big Picture Company's Principal Residency Network helps aspiring principals develop their leadership skills through full-time internships in Rhode Island, New Hampshire and Vermont, and the greater Boston area. The Principal Residency Network reflects the Big Picture Company philosophy of creating and sustaining small, innovative, personalized schools. Aspiring principals work closely with mentor principals, creating their own individualized learning plans, visiting multiple schools, meeting with other principals-in-training and mentors, demonstrating their work through portfolios and exhibitions, and more.

web site: www.bigpicture.org/PRNprincipalResidencyNetwork.htm

email: principalresidency@bigpicture.org

telephone: 401/456-0600

fax: 401/456-0606

mailing address: Principal Residency Network, The Big Picture Company, 275 Westminster Street, Suite 500, Providence, RI 02903

COALITION OF ESSENTIAL SCHOOLS FIELDBOOK—LEADERSHIP

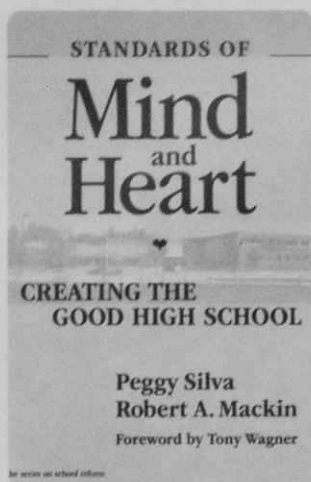
The building consensus and teacher leadership sections include examples of CES research and practice that illuminate democratic school leadership.

web site: www.essentialschools.org/fieldbook/leadership/index.html

❁ Book Reviews ❁

STANDARDS OF THE HEART AND MIND: CREATING THE GOOD HIGH SCHOOL

by Peggy Clohessy Silva and Robert A. Mackin (Teachers College Press, 176 pages \$18.95)



Talking to school people all over the country is a sweet and thrilling aspect of my work as *Horace's* editor. I ask Coalition educators what inspired them to structure their schools differently, and quite frequently, Souhegan High School comes up. "We got the idea to design our schedule from what they're doing at Souhegan. Have you been there? You should go check it out."

How did Souhegan High School, opened in 1992 in suburban Amherst, New Hampshire, become a nationally known example of personalized learning, democratic governance and rigorous standards for all? In *Standards of Mind and Heart*, Peggy Silva, charter teacher, and Bob Mackin, Souhegan's founding principal, tell the story of Souhegan's beginnings, history and current milieu.

Through the school's twelve-year creation process, community members met, gathering political will, assessing their beliefs, hopes, dreams and fears for Souhegan and planning its future. Led by Superintendent Richard Lalley, "a man of quiet fortitude and stoic vision," an image of a personalized, democratic school materialized. Along with describing Lally's essential role, Silva and Mackin capture the character and dynamics of the two towns that feed students into the school, reinforcing the book's aim to tell Souhegan's particular, idiosyncratic story rather than make generic recommendations.

Mackin joined the effort a year before the school opened, and his recollections capture the ways in which good principals infuse a thousand decisions with commitment to their schools' goals and beliefs. The details are riveting, with descriptions of what Mackin was thinking as he reviewed resumes, recruited candidates and chose the group that would execute Souhegan's vision and mission. The story of the charter faculty's work in the year before the first student walked into the school is particularly engaging, portraying the intertwined excitement and difficulties of starting a school: setting community expectations, building credibility, earning trust, easing students into a new environment and educating them about different expectations.

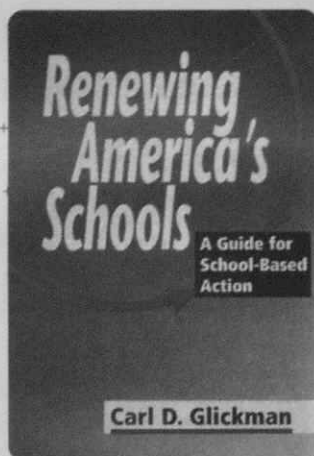
Of course, Souhegan did more than plan. It opened its doors to five hundred students (and now educates a thousand) and launched full force into its mission, watching its long-laid plans bloom. Silva and Mackin describe the structures that together make Souhegan able to attain its expectations for individual and collective achievement, detailing the student-majority Community Council governing body, advisories, team teaching and heterogeneous grouping. They devote a chapter, "Beyond Seat Time," to exhibitions and senior projects, conveying vividly how students, parents and staff are think and feel as they work on exhibitions and how those exhibitions demonstrate student growth. This chapter makes particularly good use of students' voices; throughout the book, Silva and Mackin know intimately whom to ask for more insight and they do so often, including long narratives from Souhegan teachers, parents, and students and Amherst community members. *Standards of Mind and Heart* also addresses troubling challenges and shortcomings, discussing how increased student population seems to be preventing teachers from spending enough time on senior project work with students. Reflecting on this example, Silva and Mackin challenge the school community to adhere to its mission. "If the Senior Project is critical, if it is a culmination of a process that results in a Souhegan diploma, then we need to honor the time required to do the work."

Silva and Mackin discuss how Souhegan built and maintains a strong professional culture using critical friends groups, shared planning time, partnerships with networks like CES and shared rituals and ceremonies. *Standards of Mind and Heart* concludes with the story of leadership transition to current principal Ted Hall, and thoughts on the constancy of change. Ten years ago, Souhegan embarked on the open road, its future ahead uncompromised. It now has the benefits and regrets of time, inevitable challenges—particularly student population growth—and no desire to be complacent.

At the very end, Silva and Mackin list "The Lessons of Souhegan High School," which I've pinned to the wall over my desk as a concise, insightful, powerful reminder of how schools successfully keep their standards high, their teachers invigorated and their focus on student learning and growth. Teaching us what it takes to create and sustain a truly student-centered, rigorous school, *Standards of Mind and Heart* provides inspiration to communities committed to starting new schools or reshaping current ones.

reviewed by Jill Davidson

RENEWING AMERICA'S SCHOOLS:
A GUIDE FOR SCHOOL-BASED ACTION
by Carl Glickman (Jossey-Bass, 187 pages, \$23.00)



Renewing America's Schools helped our school's Governance Council, comprised of faculty and parents, clarify our beliefs and our decision-making processes and capture them in a public document. Examining schools' covenants, charters, and critical study processes, Glickman combines the philosophy and principles of schooling with the day-to-day practices that undergird a democratic school.

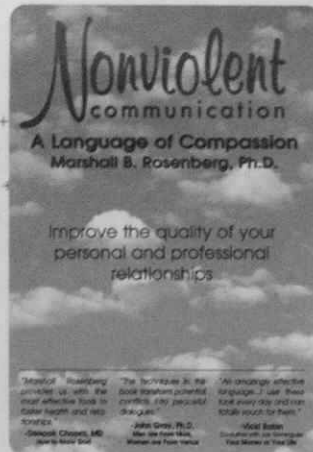
Glickman describes a covenant as "the core beliefs [that] help a group fulfill its mission." Because Glickman believes that the connection between public education and democracy is the central goal of American public schools, our school's community found a direct link between his book and the CES Common Principles. The charter is "an understanding of how decisions are to be made." This was the most challenging part for us, but in the long run it focused our Governance Council on instructional matters and gave us insight into how and when to use consensual decision-making. The "critical study process" has guided us in raising questions about the impact and effectiveness of our school efforts and continues to help us set priorities. We continue to identify and use new data sources from within our school to reflect on practice and improve student learning.

Renewing America's Schools includes a section on tough questions and common dilemmas in the school renewal process and provides examples of charter and governance documents. We often turned to these chapters to gauge our progress in developing our Governance Council document. Ten years later, I continue to return to Glickman's book for guidance and reassurance as we strive to maintain a democratic school.

reviewed by Holly Perry, Principal of Academy for the Middle Years Northwest, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION:
A LANGUAGE OF COMPASSION

by Marshall B. Rosenberg (Puddledancer Press, 207 pages, \$17.95)



This eye-opening and inspiring book is absolutely a core text for anyone interested in conflict resolution or violence prevention—and much more broadly, for anyone interested in school reform and social change.

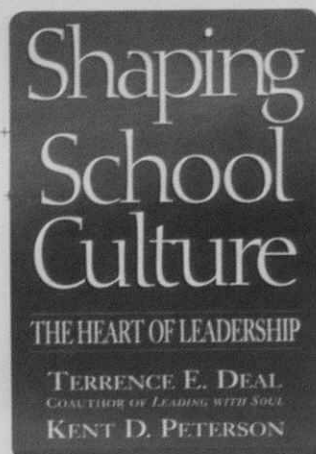
Like other conflict resolution programs, this book explains a fairly simple communication process, involving a few straightforward steps. Yet I have not seen another program that seems as deep and transformative as this one. In its attention to the ways in which we speak and listen to one another, the Nonviolent Communication process has the potential to help us see the humanity even in those for whom we have lost respect, to suspend judgment, to speak honestly and listen fully, and to transform alienation into a powerful sense of mutual understanding and connection.

Rosenberg is a lifelong peace activist who has brought NVC to some of the most troubled places on the globe—including Rwanda, Palestine and Israel, gangs in East Saint Louis, high security prisons in the U.S. His stories of reconciliation—of former enemies finding compassion for one another—are amazing. Just as moving are the stories from more mundane daily life—parents and children coming to understand one another, teachers and students building trust across lines of color and class. NVC seems to me to be a perfect—perhaps essential—complement to our work in CES, giving us the practical tools we need to create a “tone of decency” and to build the equitable, democratic schools for which we yearn.

*reviewed by Kathy Simon, Director of Research at CES National and author of
Moral Questions in the Classroom, Yale University Press, 2001.*

SHAPING SCHOOL CULTURE:
THE HEART OF LEADERSHIP

by Terrence E. Deal and Kent Peterson (Jossey Bass, 224 pages, \$30)



Riveting stories of school transformation often hinge on how dedicated individuals improve a school by changing the school's culture, the expectations and assumptions that teach the school community about itself. School culture matters deeply, influencing outcomes and the degree to which a school helps students learn and grow. *Shaping School Culture* sheds light on the elements that constitute school culture: ceremonies and rituals, traditions and stories, roots and history, architecture and artifacts. Deal and Peterson intersperse gleanings from educational, sociological and business literature with vivid examples from successful student-centered schools—and, in the chapter titled "Transforming Toxic Cultures"—a frightening example of a destructive school which provides an illuminating contrast that can help schools see what they might be doing right (or, disturbingly, wrong).

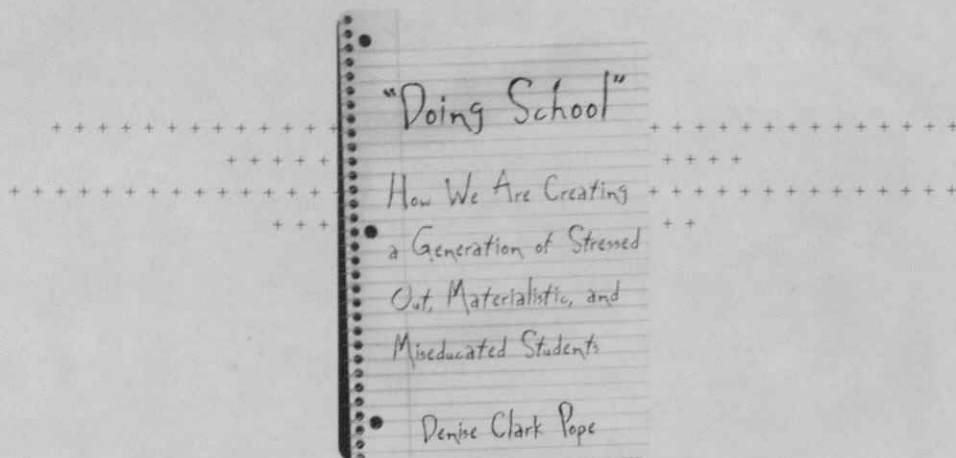
The second half of the book focuses on how leaders—teacher leaders and principals—influence school culture, emphasizing the roles that leaders can inhabit (historian, anthropological sleuth, visionary, symbol, potter, actor, poet, healer). This invitation to take different approaches allows people with varied leadership styles to feel they have an opportunity to promote cultural change, and it creates multiple leadership opportunities among a school's staff members.

By examining the gestalt of schools and capturing the fuzzy idea of culture through specific examples of good practice, Deal and Peterson offer an invigorating approach to school change and inspiring ways for leaders across a school community to rise above the daily fog and make change happen.

reviewed by Jill Davidson

DOING SCHOOL:
HOW WE ARE CREATING A GENERATION OF STRESSED OUT,
MATERIALISTIC, AND MISEDUCATED STUDENTS

by Denise Clark Pope (Yale University Press, 212 pages, \$24.95)



Denise Clark Pope has done what few of us would have the stamina to do—she's shadowed five students, morning to evening, throughout one year of their hectic high school lives. She earns their trust and confidence, and she shares their very sobering stories. These hard-working students—from various tracks and social groups, but all defined by their school as among the most successful—show Pope how they have learned to “do school,” to manipulate the system to get good grades.

So what's the problem with kids working hard to get good grades? If they are getting high marks, they must be learning something, right? Through the students' own words and drawing on their day to day experiences, *Doing School* makes clear how little getting good grades has to do with learning. In fact, the kids see genuine engagement, passion, curiosity, and even personal integrity as distractions from their drive for grades.

Pope, a former English teacher, writes like a dream. If I were a middle or high school teacher or administrator, I'd use this as a text with my students to prompt an exploration of life at school and with colleagues to talk about creating a different kind of school culture. I'd send it home for parents to read. I know this book will not only shake up feelings of complacency, but will also help us move toward creating schools which do much better by our kids' hearts and minds.

reviewed by Kathy Simon, Director of Research at CES National and author of
Moral Questions in the Classroom, Yale University Press, 2001.

leadership

Horace, the quarterly journal of the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES), is published by CES National, located in Oakland, California. CES is a national network of schools and centers that are redesigning schools and teaching practices to improve learning and to create more nurturing and humane school communities. Schools are invited to participate in this network by affiliating with CES National. More information about the schools in the network, the CES Common Principles, and affiliation is available on the CES National web site at www.essentialschools.org

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HORACE

wants to hear about your experiences with democratic leadership.

Go to www.essentialschools.com and join CES Interactive for a follow-up discussion. Or email Horace's editor, Jill Davidson, at jdavidson@essentialschools.org; we'll be collecting your comments and adding them to the online version of Horace (coming soon!).

DEMOCRACIES ARE RARE

Cornel West

*An excerpt from the keynote address, Coalition of Essential Schools[®]
Fall Forum 2000, Providence, Rhode Island*



Democracies are rare in human history, they are fragile, and historically they tend not to last that long. Oligarchic, plutocratic, pigmentocratic, patriarchal forces suffocate so easily democratic forces. And America

has been so privileged because there has always been a prophetic slice across race, region, and class, and gender, and sexual orientation, a progressive slice that says we are not going to give up on this fragile democratic project, it is incomplete and unfinished, but we are not going to give up on it, even against the grain of so much of human history.

school design

How do we design schools so that all students can learn to use their minds well? Topics include: structures for space and time, teacher collaboration, and data collection and analysis.

classroom practice

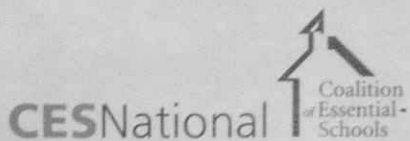
*How do we bring Coalition ideas like *less is more*, *teacher as coach*, and *demonstration of mastery* to life in the classroom? Topics include: curriculum and instruction, assessment, and classroom culture.*

leadership

What kinds of leadership are necessary to transform schools into more humane and intellectually rigorous environments? How can the change process be sustained? Topics include: governance, distributed leadership, and managing the change process.

community connections

How can schools most powerfully engage the community as advocates and partners in the education of its students? Topics include: parental involvement, service learning and internships, and using community members as resources.



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leadership

Democratic Leadership in Coalition Schools

❁ Democratic Leadership ❁
in Coalition Schools:
Why It's Necessary, How It Works

No individual has all the skills—and certainly not the time—to carry out all the complex tasks of contemporary leadership. —John Gardner, On Leadership

Coalition principles assert that teaching and learning should be personalized to the maximum feasible extent and that “to capitalize on this personalization, decisions about the details of the course of study, the use of students’ and teachers’ time and the choice of teaching materials and specific pedagogies must be unreservedly placed in the hands of the principal and staff.” Such collaborative decision-making about curriculum takes many forms in CES schools. Picture a faculty meeting, for example, where teachers decide how to document learning based on schoolwide essential questions at their small high school. They talk as a whole group and then work in smaller clusters—teachers concerned with reading skills comfortable on couches, math faculty gathered at the sunny end of the room, science teachers typing and revising at the computer.

Another scene: elementary school faculty members, knowing that the reading test scores of their English language learners don’t reflect their capabilities, study classroom assessment data in a team of bilingual teachers, English teachers, special education teachers, the principal, school psychologist and a paraprofessional. After intensive analysis, they identify ways to improve students’ reading comprehension skills and create performance-based assessments to track progress.

In addition to the notion that it’s imperative for the people closest to the students to have the authority to make decisions about curriculum and instruction, Coalition principles state that the school itself “should model democratic practices that involve all who are directly affected by the school.” Schools have a crucial role in preparing citizens for a participatory democracy—and such participation takes practice. Along with that, students, teachers, and parents have insights and contributions that are essential to the development of a healthy school culture. Such participatory decision-making might take place in many spheres, for example: students in an eleventh and twelfth grade advisory spend a month discussing how to recruit more students of color to their public school of choice. They bring their proposals to the faculty

and to the parents' council and facilitate a community meeting to evaluate solutions. The school chooses by consensus to reach out to community groups, to include explicit anti-racism goals and strategies in its curriculum, and to require for graduation that each student exhibit work toward creating a more just and equitable community.

This issue of *Horace* explores some of the ways particular schools have strived to put into practice the notions of collaborative decision-making and modeling democratic practice. The road hasn't always been smooth, but CES educators remain committed to these goals as they experiment with different strategies.

TEACHER LEADERSHIP: THE HEAD TEACHER MODEL

Throughout its thirty-year history, San Francisco Community School, a K-8 public school in San Francisco's Excelsior district, has asked a head teacher to lead its seventeen professional staff members and three hundred students. Kristin Bijur, incoming head teacher, describes the head teacher as the school's instructional leader. "Closing the achievement gap is the center of our work and inquiry. Each teacher is figuring out how to do it, and the head teacher's role is to lead and coach that inquiry." The head teacher role rotates among willing teachers—chosen by faculty consensus—on a three-year basis, and head teachers commit to return to the school's teaching faculty when their terms conclude.



San Francisco Community School teachers plan curriculum at staff retreat

There are a variety of benefits to this system: most practically, the school saves money on salary and can reallocate these resources to achieve more favorable student-teacher ratios. Perhaps more important to Community School faculty, having a head teacher rather than a "principal" creates an atmosphere where teachers-as-decision-makers is the norm.

Jean Bell has been at San Francisco Community School from the start. Originally a parent at the school, she began working as a paraprofessional while her child was in school and stayed on. Reflecting on the history of the school's shared decision making, she says, "The people who founded the school were parents and teachers who shared a philosophy that they could make the right decisions." Bell described the school's search for the right term length for teacher leaders, recalling that over the years, the school had head teachers serve for a single year, then two, and finally three. San Francisco Community School initially required that all teachers cycle through the teacher leader role, but the community came to realize, as outgoing head teacher Tanya Friedman notes, that the requirement was "ultimately limiting to the school"—that is, some people want to be in the classroom full-time, and the teachers felt that they needed to honor participation in all ways.

Several additional leadership structures extend throughout the school community, allowing the head teacher to keep her focus on her role as a critical friend to other teachers. Developmental level teams decide matters relating to curriculum and student progress. The school's leadership team, with a representative from each developmental level team, provides a forum for thinking about how best to make a decision. For example, staff members wanted to find ways to reduce the noise on the first floor hallway before school and during recess and lunch, so the leadership team decided the matter was best solved by the developmental level teams. Developmental level team representatives discussed the problem at their weekly meetings and reported back to the lead team on the resulting decisions. "Between the developmental level teams and the leadership teams, everyone here knows that each teacher has authority and power," says Friedman. The school also relies on a professional development team, a Parents Action Committee—which discusses school policy issues and plans fundraisers and special events for the school—and a school site council, a state-legislated body common to all California schools responsible for reviewing schools' budgets and evaluating programs.

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+ + + + +

Having a temporary head teacher rather than a traditional principal serves San Francisco Community School's goals. The school benefits from a remarkably low turnover rate; it seems that once teachers have had a feel for being at Community, they are loath to leave. The system provides ways of developing leadership in all teachers, so that the loss of one or two does not represent a huge loss of leadership or knowledge. While the notion of term limits has demonstrated liabilities when applied to elected political leaders, San Francisco Community School has built a stable and vibrant culture around revolving and collaborative leadership.



Charlene McKowen and Marc Javurek at an Anzar High School faculty meeting

FROM TEAM OF LEADERS TO INDIVIDUAL LEADER

Like San Francisco Community School, Anzar High School, a public ninth-through twelfth-grade school in rural San Juan Bautista, California, south of San Jose, has built itself around group leadership since it opened in 1994. Charlene McKowen, Anzar's Director and part of the founding teacher team, recalls the freedom of Anzar's conception. "We had pressure not to duplicate unnecessary paradigms, and it was an amazing luxury not to recreate what frustrated us. The first year was great—we cleaned the bathrooms, wrote curriculum, hired teachers. We did everything." The founding teachers, with community support, decided to open the school without a principal. The school was so small, with sixty students and four teachers, that teachers felt that having a principal would only add cost and an extra bureaucratic layer. Anzar's staff committed itself wholeheartedly to decision-making by consensus.

As it added a grade per year until it reached its current proportions—three hundred and fifty-nine students and twenty-six teachers—Anzar maintained a three-person leadership team, with a new person rotating in to replace a departing member each year. The staff felt success and a sense of sustainability. But after several years, personnel changes caused the leadership team to erode and the school board, in McKowen's words, "freaked out." Anzar's staff persuaded the school board to accept a two-person team, but the faculty didn't have two members willing to assume the leadership mantle. "It was horrible," McKowen recalled, "to convince the board and then to go to one person." And McKowen was, and currently is, the one. At the start of this school year, the school board requested that Anzar move away from its rotating lead teacher model and keep one person, McKowen, as the permanent Director.

Though the Anzar staff felt acute disappointment that their original leadership vision was changing, they realized unanticipated benefits. "The community feels freed up now that there's one person in charge," says McKowen. "To some extent, they never knew who to turn to before when we had a three-person leadership team, who was really doing what, and a lot of small and big issues fell right through the cracks. As an example, since I've been here," she says, looking around her office, "parent representatives requested that we create visitor parking spaces. We did it, of course. It was easy. But I heard that they perceived that in the past it would have been difficult to ask for this and make it happen. They didn't know which one of us to talk with before." McKowen also notes a subtle but distinct change in communication with parents, the school board, and district personnel, almost as if Anzar finally has a "real" principal. Still adjusting to this leadership change, which transpired at the start of the 2001-2002 school year, the Anzar faculty remains committed to collaborative decision-making regarding teaching and learning, devoting faculty meetings and professional development time to discussing student progress, curriculum, and assessment.

While McKowen is ambivalent about having lost the team leadership structure, Anzar's experience may be instructive in thinking about the purposes and design of democracy in a school. If the topic is parking spaces or bus schedules, it may well be best to have one person in charge. What's crucial is that for substantive issues of teaching and learning, those who know the students best—teachers, students, and parents—work together.

PRINCIPALS AS BEACONS AND FULCRUMS

Anzar's experience demonstrates how successful CES schools tend to rely on a leader who can create structures for collaboration where collaboration is needed and who can quickly resolve administrative issues. Head teacher, director, principal—the title varies, but the model of one person as conductor predominates. Alan Dichter, former principal of Satellite Academy in New York City and now Assistant Superintendent for Executive Leadership Development at New York City's Board of Education, and Nancy Mohr, educational leadership consultant and past principal of University Heights High School in New York City, write about how consensus-based decision-making functions most effectively with clear leadership by a signal individual. "Leadership can vary and move around, but when it comes down to it, no matter how much decision making is shared, there does have to be someone who is in charge—and we have to know who that is." Writing in the *Harvard Business Review*, David A. Garvin and Michael A. Roberto agree with Mohr and Dichter. "The reality is that the leader will make the ultimate decision, but the people participating in the process must believe that their views were considered and that they had a genuine opportunity to influence the final decision."

Holly Perry, the principal of Academy for the Middle Years Northwest, an alternative public middle school in Philadelphia with two hundred and fifty students and eighteen teachers, concurs with the need for a defined leader, saying, "A school does need a single leader. Day to day schooling is so complex and quixotic. The things that teachers need to pay attention to are so compelling and diverse that you need one person to say, 'This is what we're all rallying around.' It allows teachers an easier way to stay involved." At AMY (NW), staff and parents run their school collaboratively through participation on a Governance Council, which decides the overall direction of the school, focusing on matters such as the school's instructional priorities. Perry remains aware of how AMY (NW)'s decision-making process affects how the school community views her leadership role. "I remember sitting at governance council meetings and people looked at me, wanting quick resolutions. I ran those meetings with my head down, literally." Perry didn't want to be perceived as having more power than others on the Governance Council "by dint of title—since we were trying to operate by consensus and dialogue, I found that if they couldn't make eye contact with me, they (and I) were less apt to fall into the old patterns. After a while people got the hang of talking to each other without my mediating or commenting on every remark—and so did I."