# LEADING THE FUTURE

## A Project of the Directors of Education in Southwest Ontario

## FINAL REPORT

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*January 2010*

# CONTENT

# INTRODUCTION

## Purposes

Funded by the Institute for Education Leadership (IEL), the purposes for this project, as outlined in the proposal, were to:

a.  further develop the leadership capacities of directors of education in Southwest Ontario, and
b.  develop a set of detailed recommendations for the refinement of IEL's system leadership framework (System Practices and Procedures).

These purposes were to be reflected in three outcomes or project deliverables.

1.  Clarification of the key dimensions of system level learning and development for district leaders consistent with the best available evidence and specifically suited to the Ontario context
2.  A design for a professional learning network for system leaders and evidence arising from the initial field test of the design
3.  Models of strategic system organization and planning for student achievement that are contextually relevant

## Project Initiatives

The pivotal initiative for accomplishing project outcomes was a series of six day-long meetings or workshops in which a large majority of Southwest directors participated. Each of these days tabled new research results, examined artifacts of each director's work, provided opportunities for directors to learn from one another, fostered dialogue and discussion about central project goals, and debated the most productive next steps for the project. Of course, considerable work was carried out in preparation for, and following up on, each of the day-long sessions.

## Outcomes

Results of the project demonstrate a relatively high level of success in accomplishing both of its overall purposes and two of the three (#s 1 and 2 above) deliverables anticipated in the original proposal.

Efforts to develop models of strategic system organization and planning for student achievement (deliverable #3) were productive but not exactly as anticipated. First, our efforts indicated that there is almost no systematic empirical research on which to draw in developing effective models of system organization and planning. Second, the evidence that is available about system-level organizations is purely descriptive and we were able to locate only small amounts of case-based evidence collected in an Ontario, or Ontario-like, context. Third, it seems unlikely that there is one best model for effective system organization and planning. There may be a few best models depending, for example, on organizational size. But more research of a different type is needed to determine whether this is likely.

The most useful outcome of our deliberations about this matter, at this point, is a set of criteria against which to judge the value of any organizational model in relation to the context in which it is found and the challenges the system is attempting to address. The project did generate a provisional set of criteria for this purpose.

## The Report

The remainder of this report consists of four sections. *Section 1* is a description of each of the six-day sessions around which project work revolved. *Section 2* is a draft of a new set of proposed System Practices and Procedures aimed at replacing those currently included in the *Ontario Leadership Framework* (after suitable vetting among stakeholders in the province).

*Section 3* is a series of recommendations for the professional development of a subsequent group of directors of education, building on what was learned from this project.

*Section 4* is a statement of disbursements up to January 4, 2010 and a recommendation for the use of unspent budget to that point.

# SECTION 1

A Description of the Six-day Professional Development Program for Directors of Education

## INTRODUCTION

### Objectives

Educational leaders at school, district, and provincial levels are accountable for achieving a remarkably ambitious set of goals in environments saturated with social, financial and political challenges. Some dimensions of successful leadership are remarkably similar across organizational sectors and levels. But the specific nature of the goals for which Ontario's educational leaders are accountable, and the unique character of the challenges faced by those leaders at each of the education system's three levels, call for as-yet not well-understood forms of leadership unique to both sector and level.

*Leading the Future*, the program summarized here, aimed to clarify and further develop the capacities required for successful system-level leaders, especially directors of education. Relatively limited opportunities for domain-specific and role-specific professional development have been available to Ontario's directors of education in the past. Yet the influence of directors on how provincial policy initiatives are interpreted and implemented in schools is substantial, as is their influence on how and with what success schools pursue additional local improvement priorities.

At present, school systems find themselves much more directly accountable for their students' achievement than has been the case in the past. Provincial achievement tests, specific achievement targets, new resources tied to outcomes, and results-oriented forms of performance appraisal, among other initiatives, all conspire to focus educators unambiguously on improving the learning of their students. Furthermore, the wide-spread commitment to equity in the province has been a "game changer" in what this unambiguous focus entails: not only improving the learning of all children, but closing gaps in achievement between those groups of students who have always done well and those groups who have not.

In an accountability context of this sort, educational leaders at all levels need to engage in practices that are demonstrably linked to improvements in the learning of all students. Since evidence about such practices on the part of senior school system leaders is quite thin, one objective for this program was to answer, at least in a provisional way, two questions:
- What capacities do directors of education need in order to have a demonstrable influence on the learning of their students?
- How can those capacities best be developed?

Our assumption was that a combination of group inquiry, action research, reviews of empirical evidence, dialogue and discussion would:
a. begin to surface answers to these two questions and, at the same time;
b. increase the capacities of participants to enact whatever the answers turned out to be, the second objective for the program.

Directors participating in the program, therefore, were both learners and key members of the design team as the program unfolded over six day-long sessions devoted to exploring what came to called (for want of a better term) the instructional leadership role of directors of education.

# SESSION ONE

## Objectives

Directors participating in Session 1 will:
1. Become more knowledgeable about the results of empirical research on the characteristics of school systems in which students performed significantly beyond expectation;
2. Compare the Ontario Leadership Framework's (OLF) System Practices and Procedures with this empirical research, as a way of beginning to identify implications for further refining those dimensions of the OLF relevant to system leadership;
3. Examine their own practices in relation to the results of both the empirical research and the System Practices and Procedures and clarify areas for further professional growth; and
4. Help identify the next steps to be taken in development of the *Leading the Future* program.

## Contents

- Characteristics of high performing school districts
- The Ontario Leadership Framework: System Practices and Procedures
- How the two frameworks are similar and different
- What this means for participants' own work
- Focus of Session Two

## Processes

- Participants read the paper *Characteristics of High Performing Districts* in advance of the day
- An overview of the program's objectives, as included in the original proposal to IEL was provided and some discussion took place about both the goals and some of the ways the goals might be achieved.
- A summary presentation of the *Characteristics* paper was provided and the group as a whole considered the applicability of its results to their own contexts.
- Using a template which was provided, the directors also compared those features of high performing districts and senior leadership with the OLF's *System Practices and Procedures*. Similarities and differences were discussed and provisional recommendations were made about possible revisions to system-specific aspects of the OLF.
- In preparation for the next session, directors agreed to write a story about how each of their boards used one dimension of district practice described in the *Characteristics* paper (District and school growth planning). Directors were asked to describe the ways their boards monitored plans and the expectations their boards had for growth planning activities. These stories were to be brought to Session Two.

## Readings

Leithwood, K. (2008). Characteristics of high-performing school districts: A review of empirical evidence. Paper prepared for the College of Alberta School Superintendents.
Ontario Leadership Framework: System Practices and Procedures

# SESSION TWO

(see Appendix, Tab 3)

## Objectives

Directors participating in Session 2 will:

1. Refine their own practices and procedures by listening to and discussing colleagues' stories about their approaches to district leadership;
2. Learn about a survey for assessing the current status of one's district based on the *Characteristics of High Performing Districts;*
3. Analyze the possible advantages and disadvantage of collecting evidence in their own systems using this survey, or a modification of it;
4. Expand their conceptions of effective senior leadership by considering Robert Sternberg's WISC leadership model; and
5. Examine evidence about some of the most promising ways in which school-level leadership positively influences student learning and how senior system leaders can help increase that influence.

## Contents

- Characteristics of high performing school systems
- A survey for assessing the extent to which a district has the characteristics associated with high performing systems
- The stories of school system leadership and system work that each director was asked to bring to this session
- A model of effective leadership especially suited for those in senior leadership roles

## Processes

- The session began by revisiting and further refining the intended outcomes of the program.
- Using a template provided, directors worked in small groups to share the stories they had been asked to bring to this session and to compare their stories with the characteristics of high performing districts. This discussion was influenced by the Sternberg reading even though explicit discussion of that reading did not occur until later in the day.
- These discussions illuminated some commonly-shared views of directors' responsibilities and prompted both an examination and an evaluation of many practices and procedures being used in each of the districts.
- Sternberg's conception of leadership as a special case of storytelling was then discussed. The criteria proposed in the paper for judging the quality of a good story were used to reflect on the quality of the stories the directors had brought with them to this session.
- Many of the directors concluded that their stories were not nearly as compelling as they could and should be and considerable discussion ensued about how their work could be framed as a more influential and compelling story.

## Readings

Sternberg, R. (2008). The WICS approach to leadership: Stories of leadership and the structures and processes that support them, *The Leadership Quarterly*, 19, 360-371.

Leithwood, K. (2008). Becoming a high performing school district: A survey for principals and district office staff. Survey prepared for the Alberta College of School Superintendents.

# SESSION THREE

(see Appendix, Tab 4)

## Objectives

Directors participating in Session 3 will:
1. Further refine the program's goals and how they might best be accomplished;
2. Review and further reflect on what was learned in Session 2;
3. Identify very specifically what it means for an Ontario director of education to be an instructional leader; and
4. Clarify promising district strategies for fostering greater and more productive parent engagement in school improvement.

## Contents

- Empirical evidence about how districts can help schools engage parents more productively in schools and in the education of their children
- A range of initiatives taken by directors to improve the instruction in their system's schools
- A copy of each board's agenda for the last board meeting brought to the session by each director
- A description of what directors do when they visit schools

## Processes

- As in the case of previous sessions, the purposes for the program were reintroduced and discussion of how best to accomplish those purposes ensued.
- The majority of the morning session was devoted to both small and large group discussions about what it means for a director to be an instructional leader.
- These discussions were in response to the three artifacts brought to the session by each director (senior team structure, a board agenda, and a description of what the director does on school visits).
- The discussion suggested: (a) very few board agendas provided evidence of a priority on improving teaching and learning, and (b) directors had invented some quite useful practices and procedures for ensuring that school visits were oriented to improving teaching and learning.
- A considerable amount of idea borrowing, especially about school visits, occurred during this session and these ideas were discussed at some length in subsequent sessions.

## Readings

Leithwood, K. (2009). Four key policy questions about parent engagement: Recommendations from the evidence. In R. Deslandes (Ed.). *International perspectives on Family-School Engagement*. New York: Routledge.

Gordon, M., Louis, K. (in press). Linking parent and community involvement with student achievement: Comparing principal and teacher perceptions of stakeholder influence, *American Journal of Education*.

# SESSION FOUR
(see Appendix, Tab 5)

## Objectives

Directors participating in Session 4 will:
1. Identify the range of alternative senior team administrative structures that are described in the literature and that are used by school systems in the project;
2. Identify criteria relevant to judging the value of senior team administrative structures;
3. Assess the senior team administrative structures of school systems participating in the program;
4. Describe the characteristics of a future professional development module suitable for other directors of education; and
5. Develop a framework for the group's next session which will be tri-level, including director, superintendent, principal teams from all systems in the Southwest Region, as well as Ministry of Education participants.

## Contents

- Alternative senior team administrative structures
- Criteria for judging the value of senior team administrative structures
- The survey of characteristics of high performing school systems

## Processes

- Participants had read the two papers concerned with district structures in advance and brought a written description of their own structures.
- The readings and the descriptions of their own structures were used as stimuli for some small group work followed by a large group session in which participants identified the criteria that should be used in judging the value of any senior team structure.
- Each director then engaged with several colleagues in assessing their own structures using these criteria and considering changes that might be made to their own structures.
- Further conversation occurred about why, when, and how to best use evidence collected through the high performing district survey.
- A substantial period of time in the afternoon was spent reflecting on experiences in the program to this point as a basis for beginning to outline the main features of a follow-up professional development module for other directors of education.
- The last session of the day was spent on planning for the next tri-level meeting, which was to take the form of a workshop.

## Readings

Hentschke, G., Nayfack, M., Wohlstetter, P. (2009). Exploring superintendent leadership in smaller urban districts: Does district size influence superintendent behavior, *Education and Urban Society*, 41, 3, 317-337.
Dunaway, D., Ausband, L. (2008). An analysis of the organizational patterns of North Carolina school districts, *Academic Leadership*

# SESSION FIVE
(see Appendix, Tab 6)

## Objectives

Directors participating in Session 5 will:
1. Become aware of a wide range of strategies and leadership practices which, evidence suggests, are useful in closing the achievement gap;
2. Increase their understanding of the *Ontario Leadership Strategy*, as well as how it might be useful to them in their own gap-closing work;
3. Learn more about how those in similar roles go about solving gap-closing problems similar to their own; and
4. Identify possible improvements that could be made in their own school system's approaches to school improvement and school turnaround.

## Contents

- Strategies for closing the achievement gap
- The Ontario Leadership Strategy
- Role-alike case problem solving
- Cross-role case implications
- Preliminary board survey results

## Processes

- This session brought together approximately 16 school board teams, each consisting of a director, one or more superintendents, and several elementary and secondary principals. Also included were Ministry of Education personnel from both the regional office and the Leadership Development Branch.
- The day began with an overview of both the southwest directors' project and the agenda for the day.
- This was followed with a presentation about leadership for closing the achievement gaps using evidence from the Leadership Development Branch's first Principal Congress, along with the results of a recent study of turnaround school leadership carried out in Ontario.
- Members of the Leadership Development Branch provided an update on the *Ontario Leadership Strategy.*
- Participants were then organized into small, role-alike groups and assigned a case study about closing the achievement gap in either an elementary or secondary school. Both cases were based on work in two schools among those represented by the participants.
- Each group was asked to diagnose the most important causes of the achievement gap in the case school and to identify what could be done to close the gap.
- Selected reporting of small role-alike groups was followed by system team discussions about the implications for district gap closing work (i.e., how their systems might better support gap-closing efforts in their schools).
- A preliminary summary of board survey results was reported as a means of sharing, with this larger tri-level group, the characteristics of high performing districts that had framed many of the discussions by program participants in their previous sessions.
- The session ended with a request that participants complete a brief evaluation form, the results of which are described in Tab 8 of the Appendix. The form asked participants to rate the usefulness of the day on three dimensions, as well as to provide written comments.
- Overall ratings of the day's usefulness, on a 7 point scale, averaged 5.1 for directors, 6.1 for superintendents and 5.8 for principals. Virtually all written comments on the substance of the day were very positive.

## Readings

Elementary and Secondary school case study
Leithwood, K. (2009). *What successful principals know and do about closing achievement gaps: Summary and conclusions.* Report prepared for the Leadership Development Branch, Ontario Ministry of Education, September.
Leadership Development Branch. (2009). Five capacities of effective leaders, *Ideas into action.* Bulletin #1.
Leadership Development Branch. (2009/10). Ontario Leadership Strategy. *Quick Facts.*

# SESSION SIX

(see Appendix, Tab 7)

## Objectives

Directors participating in Session 6 will:
1. Acquire new strategies for effectively involving principals and other key stakeholders in their system's gap closing and school improvement initiatives;
2. Extend their knowledge about the characteristics of systems that are exceptionally effective in closing the achievement gap; and
3. Identify potentially productive ways of further engaging senior Ministry officials as partners in their efforts to improve the achievement of students in their systems.

## Contents

- Deadlines and reporting expectations for the project
- Results of the evaluation of the previous session (5)
- Feedback about the overall project and its usefulness to participants
- Additional review of evidence about the characteristics of districts that are successful with their equity goals

## Processes

- Review of project goals and deadlines.
- Suggestions about how best to prepare the project's deliverables.
- Report and discussion of the results of the evaluation of Session 5.
- Extended discussion among participants about how they go about involving principals and other key partners in system-level decisions about school improvement and gap closing.
- A significant amount of this discussion focused on how to engage Ministry partners in the most effective manner, in particular how to engage senior Ministry officials in collaborative efforts to address local district/ school achievement challenges. Relations with trustees also consumed some of this time.
- A brief discussion of the paper on districts as *institutional actors* - an extension of evidence about how to achieve more equitable outcomes with students in one's school system.
- This session ended with consideration of possible next stages of the project and how best to proceed.

## Readings

Rorrer, A., Skrla, L., Scheurich, J. (2008). Districts as institutional actors in educational reform, *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 44, 307-358.

# SECTION 2

A Revised Set of *System Practices and Procedures* for the Ontario Leadership Framework

## INTRODUCTION

The leadership practices and competences included in the *Ontario Leadership Framework* (OLF) are based on both a robust body of empirical research and the practical experience of many of the province's educational leaders . However, the OLF's *System Practices and Procedures* are primarily experience based. This proposed revision of the *System Practices and Procedures* adds the research foundation missing from the original formulation. Adding this foundation does not mean eliminating all of the original practices and procedures, however, because the research evidence does support many of those found in the original set. Although organized differently, this proposed revision has significant overlaps with the original formulation.

This proposed revision includes ten sets of practices and procedures, each of which is briefly described below. A more detailed account of the research evidence on which each is based will be developed in the next several months. Each set of practices and procedures is considered to be a system responsibility in recognition of the distributed responsibility all those exercising leadership outside the school have for enacting these practices and procedures.

1. **Create and Sustain a Board-wide Focus on Student Learning and Welfare**

   - Develop a widely-shared set of beliefs and vision about student learning and well being.
   - Include in this vision a focus on "closing achievement gaps", "raising the achievement bar", and nurturing student well being.

2. **Implement Rich Curricula and Engaging Forms of Instruction for All Students**

   - Support schools' efforts to implement curricula that foster students' deep understandings about big ideas, as well as to develop the basic skills students need to acquire such understandings.
   - Work with schools to provide all students with engaging forms of instruction.
   - Establish student achievement targets with schools.
   - Align all elements of the technical core (e.g., curriculum, instruction, assessment, human, and material resources).

3. **Require School and Board Staffs to use Systematically-collected Evidence for Planning, Problem-solving and Accountability**

   - Develop efficient board information management systems including, but not limited to, evidence provided through EQAO testing.
   - Provide schools with data relevant to the decisions they face and assist them in using that data effectively.
   - Create collaborative structures and opportunities for the interpretation of data, including the use of external expertise when needed.
   - Encourage use, by school and board staffs, of existing research in their planning and decision making.
   - Help school and board staffs become increasingly sophisticated consumers and users of relevant empirical research.
   - Insist on the use of systematically collected data by school and board staffs for accountability purposes.

4. **Build and Maintain Productive Working Relationships with All Members of the Local Community**

- Establish productive working relationships and a sense of community among staff in the central office.
- Establish collaborative and congenial working relations with school administrators and teachers.
- Build close ties with external community groups.
- Strongly encourage ongoing professional learning among school staffs by supporting networks and learning communities within and across schools.
- Encourage and reward schools' development of productive working relationships with parents.

5. **Encourage Reciprocal Working Relationships with the Ministry of Education**

- Communicate regularly with the Ministry, both formally and informally, about board goals and directions.
- Clarify with the Ministry how it can be of most help to the system.
- Encourage Ministry collaboration in achieving board goals and directions.
- Provide feedback to the Ministry about the relevance of its initiatives to board goals and directions.

6. **Ensure an Ongoing Supply of High-quality Leadership to the Board and its Schools**

- Put in place well-designed and carefully implemented procedures for identifying, recruiting, selecting, and appraising both school and board (academic and business) leaders.
- Implement procedures for transferring school leaders within the board that do no harm and, whenever possible, add value to improvement efforts underway in schools.
- Ensure that the most skilled leaders in the system are placed where they are most needed.

7. **Invest in the Development and Maintenance of High-quality Leadership Among Educators within the Board**

- Expect the instructional leadership of senior staff and school-level leaders to reflect the practices and competences identified in the Ontario Leadership Framework, as well as such other practices as might be deemed critical for local board purposes.
- Build and maintain a board-wide sense of efficacy among teachers, administrators, and other support staff.
- Hold school leaders accountable for the quality of teaching and learning in their schools.
- Encourage school leaders, when useful, to supplement their own capacities with system expertise.
- Encourage coordinated forms of leadership distribution throughout the board and its schools.
- Provide opportunities in the board for school leaders to further develop their leadership practices and competences.
- Use external expertise, when useful, to help develop high quality leadership throughout the board.

8. **Adopt Targeted and Phased Approaches to Board-wide and School-level Improvement**

- Pursue only a small number of improvement goals at the same time.
- Proceed in manageable stages and use the early stages as learning opportunities.
- Build coherent approaches to board and school improvement processes (e.g., avoid initiative overload).
- Integrate changes in the board with existing policies and procedures, and communicate those changes as being evolutionary rather than revolutionary.
- Build the internal school improvement capacities of schools.
- Include safeguards against fatal errors (e.g., overlooking the needs of underserved students, adopting programs or practices for which evidence of value is negative or weak, selecting staff unable or unwilling to further the board's or schools' improvement goals).

9. **Provide Sufficient Board-wide, Job-embedded Professional Learning for Leaders and Teachers to Prepare Them for the Challenges They Face**

- Refocus routine institutional practices (e.g., administrative meetings) in the service of professional learning.
- Align the focus of professional learning with board and school improvement initiatives.
- Differentiate professional learning opportunities to reflect the needs of individual schools, administrators, and teachers.
- Use contemporary learning theory as the foundation for designing methods for professional development.

10. **Engage Strategically with the Government's Agenda for Change and Associated Resources**

- Adopt a "conditional" approach to government initiatives which carefully weighs their purposes and potential against board strategic goals and directions.
- Depending on the outcome of such weighing, remain open to either:
  a. complying with government initiatives and implementing them well;
  b. supplementing government initiatives in order to increase their local impact; or
  c. leveraging government initiatives in the interests of the board's priorities.

11. **Realign the Board's Infrastructure as Directions, Priorities and Challenges Change**

- Allocate financial resources to reflect the strategic goals of the board and its schools.
- Maintain personnel policies, procedures and organizational structures that reflect the strategic goals of the board and schools.
- Ensure that the time and money allocated to professional development reflects the board's expectation for what is to be accomplished.

# SECTION 3

Recommendations for a Professional Development Program for Directors of Education

## INTRODUCTION

This section is one of the deliverables for which the project was responsible, a series of recommendations that could be used to guide the development of a subsequent professional development program for another group of Ontario directors of education. The eighteen recommendations outlined in this section do not add up to the design of such a program, but they should be clearly reflected in the design.

These recommendations arise from four sources: our experience with the program described in Section 1, evaluations of the program by those who participated in it, and selected research-based features of professional development useful for most professional groups. These research-based features were the core components of effective professional development proposed in a review of research about effective teacher professional development by Desimone[1]. Applying this evidence to the director's role suggests that the following features should be reflected in the design of their professional development experiences.

- **Content focus**
  Professional development should be primarily concerned with the nature of their job and what it is they can do to nurture the capacities of others in their organizations.
- **Active learning**
  Professional development should provide opportunities for directors to be actively engaged in their learning through the use of problems, cases, observations, and the like.
- **Coherence**
  Professional development should be related to directors' understandings and beliefs, and should address the issues and policies they face in their own work lives.
- **Duration**
  Professional development should be of significant duration, as well as spread over a significant enough period of time to allow for thoughtful reflection and experimentation with new ideas and practices;
- **Collective participation**
  Professional development should allow for groups of directors to interact about their work as well as their understandings and opinions about newly encountered ideas.

A focus group session conducted with directors of education, as part of Session 4 of the program, was organized around the core components identified by Desimone. This discussion, summarized in the Appendix (Tab 5), was consistent with the guidelines provided by Desimone. The recommendations arising from that discussion significantly extended and deepened our understanding of effective professional learning for directors.

Our 18 recommendations are about the objectives of a subsequent program, its contents, instructional processes, readings, and program staff.

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[1]Desimone, L. (2009). Improving impact studies of teachers' professional development toward better conceptualization and measurement, *Educational Researcher*, 38, 3, 181-199.

## Objectives for the program:

1. Should be derived, in large part, from evidence about the characteristics of successful school systems in Ontario or Ontario-like contexts. Many of these characteristics are summarized in the revised *System Practices and Procedures* soon to be a part of the Ontario Leadership Framework (see Section 2 for a draft);
2. Should include attention to the specific leadership capacities needed by senior system leaders to improve the achievement and well-being of students in their systems;
3. Should model a network learning community by bringing data and problems to the directors' network for discussion and problem-solving;
4. Should "deprivatize" the culture for directors' professional learning; and
5. Should encourage participants to make explicit the current nature of their leadership, as well as the practices and procedures used by their systems for improving student learning.

## Contents to be included in the program:

6. Since much of the content included in the original program was viewed as particularly relevant by the participating directors, the following selection from that content is worth considering for inclusion in a subsequent program:
   - Characteristics of high performing school districts;
   - The Ontario Leadership Framework: System Practices and Procedures;
   - Method and instruments for diagnosing the extent to which the characteristics associated with high performing systems are developed in a district;
   - Stories of school system leadership and system work that directors bring to the program;
   - Models of effective leadership especially suited for those in senior leadership roles;
   - Evidence about how districts can help schools engage parents more productively in schools and in the education of their children;
   - The range of initiatives taken by directors to improve the instruction in their system's schools;
   - Board meeting agendas;
   - Descriptions of what directors do when they visit schools;
   - Alternative senior team administrative structures;
   - Criteria for judging the value of senior team administrative structures;
   - Strategies for closing the achievement gap; and
   - Case problems of school and district improvement.
7. The most meaningful organization of content such as this will be in relation to each of the dimensions of the revised *System Practices and Procedures.*

## Processes to be used in the program:

8. Request directors to bring concrete artifacts of their work (e.g., policies, procedures, agendas, etc.) to professional development sessions for discussion with their colleagues;
9. Foster considerable amounts of practice-sharing time among participants, in combination with guidelines, frameworks, and criteria for offering constructively critical commentary about the practices of one's fellow directors;
10. Engage participants in the ongoing design and refinement of the program in which they are participating. In particular, make time for critical reflection on, and evaluation of, each professional development session and use this feedback to help design subsequent sessions;
11. Introduce the results of empirical research into discussions of successful practices and procedures whenever suitable evidence can be found;
12. Expect participants to do significant reading in advance of each program session;
13. Papers participants are asked to read should be methodologically sophisticated reviews of original research or particularly salient original research papers, rather than distilled treatments of such research or opinion and advocacy pieces. We found that the Southwest directors enjoyed reading original research reports or high quality syntheses of such research and were not concerned about the technical nature of some components of these readings. Papers should be selected with great care to ensure both topical relevance and refreshing insights;

14. Discussion of the readings should typically require participants to evaluate their own practices and procedures in comparison with practices and procedures described in the readings; and

15. Although not formally part of the original program, participants strongly supported the inclusion of senior leadership team day-long visits to other school systems as part of a subsequent program. Participants in a subsequent program might be asked, as a condition of participation, to host two such team visits during the period of the program.

## Readings

16. The following readings included in the original professional development program were considered by participants to be very useful and so might be considered for a subsequent program:

Dunaway, D., Ausband, L. (2008). An analysis of the organizational patterns of North Carolina school districts, *Academic Leadership*;

Gordon, M., Louis, K. (in press). Linking parent and community involvement with student achievement: Comparing principal and teacher perceptions of stakeholder influence, *American Journal of Education*;

Hentschke, G., Nayfack, M., Wohlstetter, P. (2009). Exploring superintendent leadership in smaller urban districts: Does district size influence superintendent behavior, *Education and Urban Society*, 41, 3, 317-337;

Leithwood, K. (2008). Characteristics of high-performing school districts: A review of empirical evidence. Paper prepared for the College of Alberta School Superintendents;

Leithwood, K. (2009). Four key policy questions about parent engagement: Recommendations from the evidence. In R. Deslandes (Ed.). *International perspectives on Family-School Engagement*. New York: Routledge;

Leithwood, K. (2009). *What successful principals know and do about closing achievement gaps: Summary and conclusions*. Report prepared for the Leadership Development Branch, Ontario Ministry of Education, September;

Leadership Development Branch. (2009). Five capacities of effective leaders, *Ideas into action*. Bulletin #1; Ontario Leadership Framework: System Practices and Procedures;

Rorrer, A., Skrla, L., Scheurich, J. (2008). Districts as institutional actors in educational reform, *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 44, 307-358; and

Sternberg, R. (2008). The WICS approach to leadership: Stories of leadership and the structures and processes that support them, *The Leadership Quarterly*, 19, 360-371.

## Program Staff

The program described in Section 1 had a minimal staff of three people, each working only part time for the duration of the program. This seemed sufficient. One member of staff was a sitting director of education, the second a recently retired but still professionally active director and the third member was a university professor. Our experience as a team leads us to recommend this staffing model for a subsequent program for directors of education:

17. Include as members of staff one or more well-respected current and/or recent directors of education who are actively immersed in the issues of the day, and who actively work to shape the program and to enlist participation in the program; and

18. Include as a member of staff a researcher who is well-grounded in evidence about leadership and organization and who is skilled at connecting that evidence to the practical challenges faced by directors of education.