

Empowering Teacher Leadership: The Salina Intermediate Shared

Leadership Philosophy

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With today's rigorous standards and educational mandates, shared leadership has become vital to a school's success. However, shared leadership is not a program or a model; it is a condition that can be enabled and administrators play a critical role in fostering those conditions. With that in mind, collective leadership does not happen due to administrative directives, phenomenal speakers or professional development plans, nor is it about moving teachers out of the classroom to allow them to take on administrative roles to assist the principal. Rather, it is about extending the reach of exemplary teachers by empowering them to lead change from where they stand. Doing so connects teachers and administrators in a shared vision tied to student achievement.

Promoting a Shared Leadership Philosophy: Principal Glenn Maleyko's Story

When I became the principal of Salina Intermediate almost six years ago, I knew that I wanted to establish something special in our school with the ability to implement a shared leadership model for the benefit of our students. In fact, if I was going to make a difference for my student population which includes 95% economically disadvantaged students, over 60% English Language Learners, and a 23% mobility rate with a large immigrant population, it was essential for Salina Intermediate school to become an innovative leader with the implementation of scientific teaching strategies. The purpose for innovation would be to ensure that our students receive an outstanding education program delivered by a highly trained and motivated staff that goes above and beyond the call of duty to support student learning.

After reading Stephen Covey's book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* and other leadership books, I came to understand that people are the critical piece of the success of any

organization. As a result, a shared leadership philosophy where staff would become empowered to take risks was critical for implementing a successful program. I further studied the research by Dufour, Dufour, and Eaker (2002) on their Professional Learning Community (PLC) Model and decided that this model would be a perfect philosophical framework for a shared leadership model that could be implemented at Salina Intermediate School. During the summer of 2004, I took a team of five faculty members to the PLC institute in Lincolnshire, Illinois. Attendance at the PLC institute helped to develop a core leadership team and the beginnings of the shared leadership process in my school. As a result, teachers took on the role of providing professional development during faculty meetings, during district professional development days, and assembly or substitute release time on a routine basis.

Another important move was to place the right people in leadership positions who would work hard and support the vision of the school. The most important factor in placing staff in leadership roles was to get the support of highly motivated staff members who were willing to take risks. I began to assemble my leadership team by moving motivated and dedicated individuals into positions of influence within the school which included literacy coaching positions, resource positions, and leadership positions within the different grade levels, content departments, and curriculum committees (Collins, 2001).

However, just moving people into the right positions and moving the wrong people out of the leadership positions are not enough. Many great teachers do not tend to take on leadership tasks or responsibilities until they are encouraged to do so by supportive administrators or mentors. Thus, administrators need to develop and utilize their most prominent assets within their schools. Recognizing potential and creating roles with individuals' strengths in mind is essential to building relationships that lead to purposeful commitment and relentless

improvement. Doing so allows teacher leadership to be embedded into the school culture, ultimately establishing systemic educational change at the school level.

There must be a committed effort on the part of the building administration to build relationships with staff and to put them into positions to take leadership initiatives. As a result, we built the school year calendar by blocking leadership meeting with the following teams that we have initiated and implemented in the building: School Improvement Plan (SIP) team, Literacy Team, Student Support Team (deals with affective domain areas), Special Education Team, and two Intervention Teams one for the middle school grades six to eight and one for the fourth and fifth grade program. Setting the calendar has allowed the leaders within the building to have regular scheduled access to administration to discuss important initiatives and promote debates, discussion, and dialogue regarding program implementation in the school. The teacher leaders also take on the role of assessing the pulse and climate of the rest of the faculty as new initiatives or models are implemented in the school. The people who are on the leadership teams need to know that they will be supported by administration when they take risks with innovative programs or models in the school and when they make mistakes it is important to support them through the process so that the team members learn from each other.

Capacity Building and Professional Learning

At Salina Intermediate, we have promoted the development of not only the capacity of our faculty to implement high effective lessons (Fullan, 2008), but also the development of an internal accountability system (Elmore, 2004) where faculty have taken on the role to become accountable to one another for the success of our students. We frequently provide presentations at District, State and National Conferences in teams in order to develop capacity and leadership ability. Research findings by Marzano, McNulty, and Waters (2005) are aligned with Fullan's (2008) philosophy on capacity building and professional

learning. These findings include the importance for leaders to become optimizers, have expertise in curriculum instruction and assessment, provide intellectual stimulation for their faculty and ensure that resources of professional learning are implemented.

Another successful practice for developing and enhancing the capacity of faculty to take a leadership role is through our implementation of conferences in the areas of technology, literacy, interventions, and co-teaching. Over the past eight years, we have hosted nine conferences and provided professional development training to over 1,300 teachers in Dearborn and across the state of Michigan. At the last conference, we had more than twenty Salina faculty who took part in the conferences as either a presenter or by allowing teachers to observe them provide instruction in their classroom. Although the conferences have promoted scientific research based strategies throughout the educational profession, the greatest benefit is that as Salina staff members prepare for their presentations they begin to internalize why some of their strategies have been so effective, which helps to develop a better understanding of the elements of effective instruction. The teachers who participate in the conferences are not getting additional compensation even though they put in a great deal of additional work in order to prepare their classroom observations and presentation. However, by participating in these conferences they begin to connect with the purpose of our school improvement plan and they have a greater understanding of our school vision and mission. (Fullan, 2008). The excitement at Salina allows the for the retention of the right teachers and it motivates them to work at a high level because as Reeves (2006) puts it, "Effective leadership helps individuals understand that they are part of the larger world". The conferences and programs at Salina Intermediate do this despite the fact that there are numerous challenges in our school due to the demographic circumstances of our student population. To acquire more information on the conferences that we provide at Salina Intermediate, visit <http://salina-int.dearbornschools.org/>

Professional Learning

While it has been an important learning experience to attend conferences and workshops to learn about effective teaching strategies, teachers learn more about effective instruction when they present before their peers. Ulrich, Brockbank, Johnson, and Younger (2007) note that “good talent without a supporting organization will not be sustained, and a good organization will not deliver results without talented individuals with the right competencies in critical roles”. The administration and building leaders of Salina Intermediate help to cultivate and sustain the talent of our staff by empowering staff members with opportunities to share their expertise and experience during our own building conferences and workshops. The staff works together as a professional learning community to share our best practices and improve upon our existing knowledge base of effective instructional strategies.

Since the implementation of this staff development model, the staff has diversified and expanded its areas of expertise to focus on technology integration, intervention strategies for struggling learners, co-teaching strategies with special education classes, and literacy models with English Language Learners. As new staff members become more familiar with these models and methods, they value the opportunity to increase their own knowledge base and understand how the models and methods are aligned with the school vision and fit into the school improvement plan. Over time, more staff members have seen the value to sharing their knowledge and expertise and have taken active leadership in developing and implementing conferences and workshops aligned with our school vision.

Building and Sharing Expertise: Science Teacher Bob Attee’s Story

Over the years, the focus of several committees in our school has changed. For example, in the area of technology, originally a few staff members who were interested in learning about how using technology met to help find ways to use the available technology resources with our

students more effectively. The technology committee attended conferences and workshops and learned about some of the best practices with technology integration. As time passed, the committee expanded and refined its role within the building. While the committee still examines ways to better use technology resources to improve instruction, another emphasis of the committee has been to build on the knowledge base of our staff so that all staff members feel comfortable using technology in the classroom and use effective instructional practices that meet the needs of our student population. Some members of the committee expressed an interest in using digital video technology, so a sub-committee was developed to study how this type of technology could best be used with our students. The group learned how to use the technology and then shared their findings with the Salina faculty regarding how it could be most effectively used in the classroom. The technology committee members became the building leaders in using software applications and multi-media by implementing a building network to ensure that all faculty received the appropriate training and support to integrate technology throughout the curriculum. Over time, the technology committee members have diversified their expertise and learned how to use different types of software and integration strategies from other staff members who have built up their areas of expertise. We have a similar model with the implementation of our other curriculum committees.

Teacher Leadership Story by Literacy Coach Nadra Shami

Eight years ago, I was excited to start my teaching career at Salina Intermediate and sought to improve instructional practices in this high needs school by striving to be a leading educator, but I had yet to envision myself as a *teacher leader* taking on various leadership roles in and out of the classroom. In fact, I was initially hesitant to take on such roles. Today,

however, as I examine my experience as a teacher leader, I realize how the opportunity to collaboratively learn and grow has redefined my skills, my knowledge and my leadership practices. I have built lasting relationships and an ever-lasting commitment to educational change. At present, my role as an instructional leader is to be a partner in the change process, to stretch myself to keep learning and to give enough so that others are able to change. As I reflect back on my leadership journey, I realize how a school culture grounded in relationships and purposeful community supported my ambition and empowered me to grow and learn as a leader. It complimented my experience in the Galileo Teacher Leadership Consortium where my learning and skills continued to expand in the past two years. Additionally, I have gained great interest in shared leadership and have been vigilant as to how it has been successfully enabled at Salina Intermediate. From where I stand, the following practices have been essential to building and sustaining leadership capacity.

Leading from Within

Despite the challenges, Salina Intermediate is thriving in meeting student needs and accelerating achievement through unwavering commitment and shared leadership. Ongoing communication and collaboration among teams have proven to be a key factor in guiding Salina Intermediate towards reaching the school's goals and creating a culture that expects *nothing less* from every teacher and student. Through knowledge, practice, and leadership, there has been much effort into creating a school culture where "*failure is not an option.*" Principals cannot do it alone, but using relational skills to mobilize people in order to lead change and improve student achievement has made all the difference. This shared approach to helping students

achieve has established collective efficacy and will ultimately sustain leadership within the school.

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