



CONNECTICUT'S COMMON CORE OF LEADING

A GUIDE FOR PROFESSIONAL GROWTH
Connecticut State Department of Education — 2009

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FOREWORD

The most dangerous leadership myth is that leaders are born — that there is a genetic factor to leadership. This myth asserts that people simply either have certain charismatic qualities or not. That's nonsense; in fact, the opposite is true. Leaders are made rather than born.

— Warren G. Bennis

The visible signs of artful leadership are expressed, ultimately, in its practice.

— Max DePree

One of our most pervasive cultural myths about leadership is that leaders are born with certain mysterious qualities, qualities that somehow make them, more so than others, brilliant leaders. This myth is known in leadership studies as the “Trait Theory” of leadership. While widely criticized for decades by scholars and theorists, this theory lives strong in the beliefs and assumptions of educators and in the culture of schooling. Trait Theory is a limiting paradigm, as it suggests that there is little we can do to grow the necessary leadership — in ourselves or others — to create powerful schools for kids. Accepting Trait Theory as a given inclines us to long for charismatic heroes who will suddenly show up on the scene and somehow lead us into a brighter educational future. As romantic as this notion is, it blinds us to the fact that “leaders are made” and organizational leadership can be nurtured and developed.

What follows is the work of a team of Connecticut practitioners, leaders and scholars who recognize that effective leaders and leadership can be developed. The talented and thoughtful members of this team struggled together to make explicit what we had individually learned — through practice and scholarship — about effective leadership and school improvement. It was our ambition to pool our collective learnings to paint a vivid and complex image of what effective educational leadership entails. It is our hope that this image can inform efforts to develop leadership by shining a light on the work most critical for school improvement and by describing what this work looks like in practice.

continued

So, what is new in this document? What separates it from many leadership descriptions available throughout public education? Most simply, it is the attention to the practice of leadership. What you will not find is a list of traits effective educational leaders must possess in order to effect change. Such lists exist, and such lists add little value to developing future and current leaders. What you will also not find in this document is another set of leader “to do’s,” a reductionistic set of actions that, if done in the proper order, will somehow produce miracles. The world of education is not so simple, and there is no blueprint of action steps that will remedy our most challenging educational dilemmas. Instead, what follows is an effort to highlight those aspects of leadership that must be interwoven, over time, into a disciplined, reflective and artful practice of leading.

At its essence, this document is about the ongoing development of leadership practice, and is, at best, a tool. The ultimate power of this work does not reside in what is written, but in what can and will be done with the words within. If the practices outlined remain tethered to the physical page, then the efforts of the team members who prepared this document will be wasted. The real power of this work will be realized when the ideas herein begin to shape the development of educational leadership in Connecticut in districts attending to the growth of building leaders, in colleges and universities credentialing new principals and superintendents, at RESCs that are coaching and supporting the ongoing development of veteran leaders, and in Department of Education-sponsored programs designed to build leadership capacity statewide.

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INTRODUCTION

Connecticut's Common Core of Leading (CCLeading) is designed to guide the professional development and training of school leaders to focus their growth on practices that yield the greatest impact on student achievement. In the hands of teacher leaders, school leadership teams, building principals, central office staff members, professional development organizers, or university leader preparation programs, the CCLeading should be used for:

- informing leader preparation programs;
- reflecting upon individual and team leadership capacities for the purpose of professional growth;
- planning for professional growth for aspirants, new and experienced leaders; and
- planning for individual, local-level and statewide professional development.

The CCLeading is not designed as a means to evaluate the performance of educational leaders but rather as a prompt and guide for reflective practice, professional development, self-assessment and/or goal setting.

The CCLeading presents **systems thinking** as the overarching and unifying concept of four leadership domains: **vision, teaching and learning, human relationships** and **culture for learning**. A system can be defined as interacting parts that operate together to achieve an objective or purpose. Leaders who are systems thinkers will use multiple leverage points from the four leadership domains. These leaders understand the complex interactions of systems that influence the organization, identify those factors that have the greatest leverage for enhancing student achievement, and promote actions that produce the greatest benefit to the organization.

Although the four domains stand separately in this document, they are interrelated and should not be viewed in isolation. Further, the domains and behaviors demonstrate the complexity of leadership. They are not hierarchical or mutually exclusive. When viewed together, systems thinking and the leadership behaviors expressed in the four domains form a profile of leadership characteristics, skills and actions designed to support academic success for all learners. No one leader is expected to possess the skills, knowledge and dispositions necessary to effect change singularly; rather, leadership in this document is considered to be made up of all those persons with formal and informal leadership roles in the educational setting. The most effective leadership team brings complementary strengths to the organization and each member contributes his or her talents within the domains.

The primary goal of all educational leadership is to promote high levels of achievement for all students. The leadership actions identified in the CCLeading serve as springboards for personal and team-based examination and reflection about leadership practice. By organizing the complex web of leadership behaviors into manageable domains, the CCLeading allows aspiring and experienced leaders to focus on specific and related behaviors and their outcomes. Used

properly, the CCLeading also adds structure to the often poorly defined process of individual reflection. Learning in professional fields occurs through a reciprocating process of experience, reflection, goal setting and further reflection (Sheckley, 2006). Meaningful experiences built around the four domains will better prepare aspiring leaders to have a positive effect on student success. Individual leaders will continue to strengthen and develop effective behaviors through the use of this document for self-assessment and reflection. Used regularly, this tool will guide and inform leadership teams in the practices that improve learning for all students. Organizers of professional development may use the CCLeading to structure learning experiences and design opportunities for new and experienced school leaders with deliberate practice within the four domains in order to effect positive change and growth in schools and districts.

Connecticut's Common Core of Leading was developed with input from a broad spectrum of educators, including school and district leaders, professional developers, university professors, and consultants for the support and development of school leadership. Indeed, a growing body of evidence highlights the importance of effective leadership as a necessary condition for successful schools. According to Leithwood (2004), leadership not only matters but is second only to teaching among school-related factors in its impact on student learning. In the words of Jackson and Davis (2000), "High-achieving schools have strong, consistent leaders." CCLeading is consistent with the *Connecticut Standards for School Leaders* (1999), and further defines in behavioral terms what educational leaders should do and the desired outcomes. Different from other standards documents, the CCLeading goes a step beyond to include effective leadership behaviors as well as the outcomes that would, therefore, be evidenced in the educational organization. With Connecticut's commitment to ensure that every child is a successful learner, the importance of having a high-quality leader in every school and district is greater than ever.

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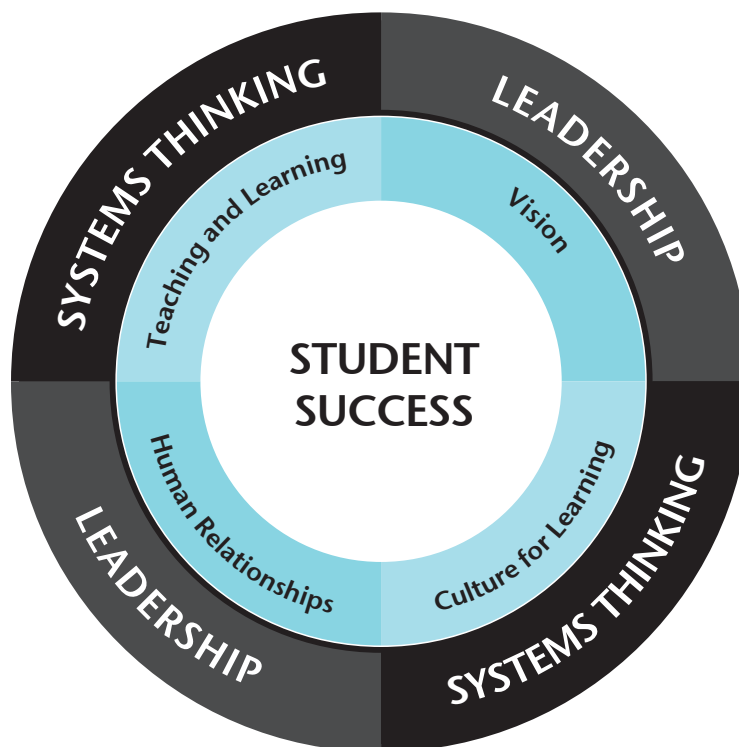
SYSTEMS THINKING

As illustrated by the accompanying graphic, systems thinking serves as the unifying force for the four domains of leadership behaviors.

At its essence, the educational leader who thinks systemically will understand the complex interactions that influence the organization and will use multiple leverage points from the leadership domains to produce the greatest benefit.

Such leaders:

- Understand the school and district as a connected whole made up of interrelated elements;
- Develop a set of organizational structures, practices and policies that complement and enhance each other in support of the goals of the schools and district for student achievement; and
- Ensure that teaching and learning, professional development, improvement plans, facilities use and budgeting are linked and form a coherent whole.



I. VISION

A shared vision for student learning creates meaning for the people in the organization and infuses purpose into the strategies and standards for actions linked to that vision.

Leaders and Leadership Teams will:

- Engage their stakeholders in the development of a shared vision of success for all students;
- Use multiple sources of quantitative and qualitative data about student success to craft, focus and refine the strategies used to attain the vision;
- Connect the vision to the core mission of teaching and learning and communicate it in a clear, vivid and compelling way;
- Leverage and marshal resources needed to attain the vision; and
- Monitor organizational behaviors to ensure fidelity to the vision.

So that:

- Stakeholders are able to describe and support the school's values and actions;
- Progress toward achieving the vision is monitored and strategies are adjusted based on student performance data;
- Faculty and staff members are able to describe how their practices are aligned with the vision;
- Faculty and staff members make overt connections with the students between their learning and the vision of the school;
- Students are able to express what is important in the school;
- Information about the school's progress is published and readily available through a variety of media;
- The school informs parents and the greater community about their roles in helping the school achieve its vision; and
- Resources (time, staff, attention, focus) are aligned with the vision and support school improvement priorities.

Leaders understand the complex interactions of systems that influence the organization, identify those factors that have the greatest leverage for enhancing student achievement and promote those actions that produce the greatest benefit to the organization.

II. TEACHING AND LEARNING

Leaders promote an instructional program, built on high expectations for all learners and conducive to student learning and professional growth, thereby developing a school culture of success for all learners.

Leaders and Leadership Teams will:

- Establish an expectation for self and staff to engage in conversations about teaching, learning and assessment practices;
- Use adult learning theories and practices to differentiate professional growth opportunities for self and staff;
- Align personal and staff professional development opportunities to the learning needs of students, the curriculum and the school's goals;
- Engage in a community of practice that is bound by a common vision for student performance and a shared definition of instruction;
- Set high expectations for all learners;
- Analyze multiple forms of performance data about students schoolwide, as individuals and in sub-groups, to guide decisions for improving instruction;
- Allocate their time with a primary emphasis on instructional leadership;
- Monitor instructional and assessment practices to assess their effectiveness within the school context and alignment with current research;
- Apply knowledge about current research in pedagogy through practices that are effective within the school context; and
- Maximize the use of resources (staffing, schedules, curriculum) to improve student performance.

So that:

- Learners achieve at high levels;
- Administrators, teachers and parents share responsibility for student achievement;
- Teachers use a common curriculum to guide instructional decisions;
- Instruction is differentiated and personalized so that each student is challenged to achieve at high academic levels;
- A system of common, formative and summative assessments is in place to measure academic progress over time for individual students and groups of students;
- Teachers have opportunities to share in leadership roles;
- Professional learning for administrators and faculty and staff members is aligned to school goals, student needs and the curriculum; and
- Professional development and support are differentiated to meet individual staff needs.

III. HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

Leaders establish positive learning environments by developing trust and credibility through meaningful relationships.

Leaders and Leadership Teams will:

- Involve stakeholders from the school community and elicit their participation in the decision-making process;
- Create a sense of urgency around a mission without causing despair, but instead model a hopeful view of things and expect the best outcomes;
- Draw on the diversity of the community to enrich and strengthen the culture of the school;
- Build trust and confidence by acting professionally and being visible and accessible;
- Use skills of consensus-building and negotiation;
- Advance the common goals of the group and inspire others to act;
- Listen without prejudice and express empathy toward others;
- Acknowledge the difficulty of the change process and its impact on others; and
- Know themselves and how others perceive them and use this information to strengthen their relationships.

So that:

- Stakeholders are empowered through shared leadership;
- An environment exists to promote capacity building;
- School staff members engage in reflective discourse, share ideas and provide support for one another;
- Staff members and students feel they are part of a community and are recognized and appreciated;
- The needs of various stakeholders are understood;
- A collective commitment exists and engages people to accomplish the mission;
- Risk taking is part of an environment of trust and confidence;
- Staff members, students and members of the school community feel supported;
- Input from the public is reflected in school practices; and
- Public support for the goals of the school is strengthened.

IV. CULTURE FOR LEARNING

Leaders establish a culture that is open and inclusive, through modeling and expecting ethical and moral behaviors from all.

Leaders and Leadership Teams will:

- Organize the school with fairness, equity and high expectations for all learners;
- Promote the professional growth of self and of all staff members to improve student learning;
- Establish a culture where everyone is accountable for student learning;
- Develop and engage in behaviors that support a culture of continuous learning;
- Ensure the recruitment and assignment of staff members to best meet the needs of all students and foster retention of those staff members;
- Maintain a learning environment that is safe, positive, respectful and supportive;
- Advocate in protecting the rights of all students;
- Model a personal code of ethics of integrity, justice and reflection; and
- Acknowledge the cultures and beliefs of individuals and families.

So that:

- Students are known and cared for and the learning environment is personalized;
- Disciplinary practices are equitable, appropriate and supportive of student growth;
- Stakeholders have a positive view of how the leader and the organization “behaves” and believe that the school supports the learning needs of their students;
- Supervision and evaluation processes are fair, equitably implemented, and designed to support the learning and growth of teachers to improve student learning;
- Teachers are willing to take risks in the exploration and implementation of new practices based on reflection and research;
- Students have access to resources necessary to support continuous growth in achievement;
- Student grouping patterns reflect the diversity of the whole student body;
- Teachers and students treat everyone with respect and dignity;
- Members of the school community feel known and welcomed by the school organization;
- Established structures and processes for resolving conflicts between and among members of the school community protect the rights of everyone involved; and
- The school community participates in direct and frequent communication about cultural norms, values and beliefs.

Connecticut's Common Core of Leading aligns with the content of the Connecticut Standards for School Leaders. The Common Core of Leading seeks to apply these standards through the identification of key leadership behaviors and their expected outcomes.

	SYSTEMS THINKING	VISION	TEACHING & LEARNING	HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS	CULTURE FOR LEARNING
I. The Educated Person	✓	✓		✓	
II. The Learning Process			✓		✓
III. The Teaching Process	✓		✓	✓	✓
IV. Diverse Perspectives		✓	✓	✓	✓
V. School Goals	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
VI. School Culture	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
VII. Student Standards and Assessment	✓	✓	✓		
VIII. School Improvement	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
IX. Professional Development		✓	✓	✓	
X. Staff and Professional Development, School Improvement	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
XI. Organization, Resources, School Policies	✓	✓	✓	✓	
XII. School-Community Relations	✓			✓	✓

Development and construction of Connecticut's Common Core of Leading was guided by research from the resources listed on pages 9-11.

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Heifetz, R.A. and Linsky, M. <i>Leading with an Open Heart</i> . New York: Leader to Leader Institute, 2002.	✓	✓		✓	✓
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