Addressing the Challenge of Postpandemic District Leadership

PACE Annual Conference
January 25, 2024
Session 1b | 10:15am-11:45am
Session objectives

● Gain a better understanding of the challenges facing district leaders in the wake of the pandemic,
● Learn about promising approaches to bring coherence to district approaches to navigating through some of these challenges, and
● Identify practices to support district leaders to succeed.
Panelists

Moderator: Julie Marsh, Professor of Education Policy University of Southern California

Panelists:

- Carl Cohn, Professor Emeritus, Claremont Graduate University School of Educational Studies
- Jennifer Perry Cheatham, Senior Lecturer and Co-chair of the Public Education Leadership Project, Harvard Graduate School of Education
- Rachel White, Assistant Professor, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, University of Tennessee
Table Introductions

- Name
- Organization
- Why you chose to come to this breakout session
Carl Cohn

Professor Emeritus, Claremont Graduate University School of Educational Studies
New Political Challenges Facing Superintendents

• “All Politics” Is No Longer Local
• Church-State Separation Issues
• Rethinking Allies and Coalitions
• Sticking to Neutrality When Confronted with Immoral and Illegal Policies
Jennifer Perry Cheatham

Senior Lecturer and Co-chair of the Public Education Leadership Project, Harvard Graduate School of Education
Public Education Leadership Project (PELP)

Improve the **management and leadership competencies** of public school leaders in order to drive greater educational outcomes.

Harvard Business School (HBS) + Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE)
Sample District Problems of Practice

- Lack of access to high quality facilities
- Barriers to enrollment in effective schools/programs
- Inequitable school discipline practices
- Inconsistent access to culturally sustaining instruction
- Lack of instructional coherence
- Ineffective early literacy instruction

(Photo credit: HGSE)
PELP Coherence Framework

Defining and measuring success

Leveraging all dimensions with a focus on equity

Influencing the environment

Tushman and O’Reilly’s Congruence Model, 2002
# Knowledge, Skills, Dispositions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typical Skills (PELP)</th>
<th>New Skills (CPLS*)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Problem identification</td>
<td>- Personal reflection</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Theory and related strategy development</td>
<td>- Visioning</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Implementation planning</td>
<td>- Political mapping</td>
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<td>- Continuous improvement</td>
<td>- Movement building</td>
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<td>- Team development</td>
<td>- Partnership building</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Coherence making</td>
<td>- Communication</td>
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<td>- Union and board relations</td>
<td>- Advocacy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Policy interpretation and implementation</td>
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*Collaborative on Political Leadership in the Superintendency*
What can policy-makers do?

- **Keep stability in mind** as a driving principle - district leaders need stability to make positive change

- **Incent local collaboration** - improving schools requires a community effort

- **Promote productive and authentic parent partnership** - community schools, children's cabinets, etc.
Rachel White
Assistant Professor, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, University of Tennessee
Superintendents are positioned to create a vision for equity and social justice, and guide policy and practice to see vision through.

**Stability**

Takes time to build relationships, trust, understand needs of community.

Stability of high quality district leaders is essential to healthy and equitable education systems.

**Diversity**

Policy decisions for an increasingly diverse student population.

Among the most visible public figures in a community, lack of diversity in these leadership positions can convey values not favorable to inclusivity and diversity.

**Working Conditions**

What are effective leadership strategies and workplace environments that support the retention of high-quality, diverse superintendents?
Superintendent Attrition: National vs. California

2019-20 to 2023-24

National vs. California

2019-20

2021-22

2022-23

2022-23

0.0%  2.0%  4.0%  6.0%  8.0%  10.0%  12.0%  14.0%  16.0%  18.0%  20.0%

Chart: R.S. White (2024) • Source: NLSD (2024) • Created with Datawrapper
Context of district leadership

Type of attrition (resign, retire, fired, etc.)
https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/16534562/

Nature of attrition (ostensibly amicable vs. contentious)
https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/16534553/

Nature of attrition by gender
https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/16535383/
Context of district leadership

National supt mobility by nature of attrition (amicable v contentious):

• Regular: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/16529455/
• Heatmap: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/16533958/
Why This Matters for Addressing Challenges of Post-pandemic District Leadership

- Increasing churn
  - getting to know the needs of & developing trust with community
  - new relationships with state and local policy makers

- Increasingly contentious churn
  - leading for equity & taking risks
  - speaking up and out

- Gender inequities: how to recognize privilege & provide support?
Table talk prompts

- What questions or observations came up for you?
- What are ideas or action items you can take back to your organization?
- What statewide policies, structures, or supports are needed at this time?
Panelist Q&A