

LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

ACCELERATE *into* HIGH SPEED



By Dori Novak, Marceta Reilly, and Diana Williams

What professional development will help you grow the skills you need as a central office leader?

Here's how central office staff in Howard County,

Md., answered that question three years ago:

1. Provide professional development for us that addresses our unique needs.
2. Help us learn to go beyond delegating tasks as the primary means to encourage growth of aspiring leaders and support succession planning.
3. Teach us to differentiate our supervision practices to meet the needs of staff with different levels of leadership skills and experiences.
4. Teach us to give specific, constructive feedback that will lead to desired changes and growth in employees.

Up to this time, central office leaders and school-based principals were treated pretty much the same in terms of performance evaluations and staff development support even though their job responsibilities, day-to-day challenges, and client groups differed greatly.

Both groups were held accountable for a set of standards that aligned with the ISLLC (Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium) standards and indicators. Their supervision was based on the same traditional, clinical model used with teachers and school-based principals. It had not changed significantly in more than 30 years.

A VISION FOR CHANGE

In fall 2006, the deputy superintendent asked a small leadership team to rethink leadership support for cen-

tral office leaders and to come up with an aligned three-point plan that would meet their unique needs. The leadership support system needed to take into account:

1. Leadership standards and indicators of success that reflect the actual job of central office leaders;
2. A performance evaluation system that fosters continuous learning; and
3. Professional development opportunities that align with the standards.

The team was excited to take on the challenge.

LEADERSHIP COACHING: A SURPRISE COMPONENT

For a couple of years, first-year principals in the district had been granted the support of a leadership coach for one year. The coaches were provided by an outside agency, Coaching for Results. The coaches were certified by the International Coach Federation. Principals who received coaching raved about their experience. They wanted to learn how to use coaching skills to offer the same support and nonjudgmental feedback that they had received from their coaches. Administrators at all levels were interested in coaching as a potential leadership skill to bring out the best in others through day-to-day conversations and performance evaluation.

Administrators clearly wanted to move beyond traditional workshops, courses, and conferences. Several leaders had experienced career-changing support from external leadership coaches. The concept intrigued others who not only wanted to experience individual coaching support but also wanted to learn coaching skills to provide those benefits to their employees.

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A COACHING PILOT

The district wanted leaders to be collaborative in working with staff and to empower staff to be self-directed and fully engaged in making significant changes. The specific leadership model that emerged in Howard County stressed the use of coach-like behaviors as a key component in accomplishing these objectives. The district hired Coaching for Results to provide training with follow-up to central office leaders using International Coach Federation and NSDC frameworks to build a culture of coaching in the district.

The district model of coach-like leadership that evolved included coaching skills that adhere to competencies established by International Coach Federation.

In offering leadership training, the district also wanted the model to be consistent with high-quality professional learning as outlined in NSDC's Standards for Staff Development.

A COACHING MODEL

The figure at right shows the relationship between coaching competencies and high-quality professional learning in context, process, and content.

The context

The first component of the learning set the foundation and context for the coaching as a district-supported leadership model.

In this component, leaders learned ways to develop powerful relationships with colleagues based on trust and being fully present. They learned the importance of setting ethical guidelines, establishing a co-creative presence, and setting agreements when interacting with colleagues. This component is based on one of the core coaching beliefs: The leader is not the problem solver or the primary idea-generator. The leader is the keeper of the vision and the one who helps build the capacity in others to successfully solve their own prob-



lems and generate multiple ideas and solutions.

The process

The processes used to teach leadership content included experiences that provided participants with a deeper understanding of their role in communicating effectively. Initially, many educators remarked that they had already received training in listening and giving feedback. However, after these coaching experiences, they agreed that listening with a coaching ear is different and effective. They used the strategies immediately and gave inspiring testimonies. These components included refining skills such as:

- **Committed listening:** Fully listening, avoiding judgments and negative criticism;
- **Powerful questioning:** Asking questions that reveal key information needed to maximize the coaching relationship;
- **Giving constructive feedback:** Matching feedback to a client's stage of readiness for learning; and
- **Differentiating** use of mentoring, advising, telling, and coaching based on a client's need.

The content

Content was the core of the learning and included coaching competencies that facilitate learning and results. The content helped leaders make significant and positive changes in their communications with others.

Leaders accomplished the following:

- Built awareness of their purpose and intentions to change;
 - Brainstormed actions and options;
 - Identified goals and strategies for implementing significant changes; and
 - Monitored progress and accountability for getting the desired results.
- The professional development model provided time and space for reflection on current practices, practicing new approaches, and sharing insights.

LEADERSHIP PRACTICES CONTINUUM

Supervising zone		Mentoring zone			Coaching zone co-creating the relationship, effective communication			
Give advice Give the answer	Give advice by asking loaded questions	Teach	Offer options	Create awareness	Design actions	Plan and set goals	Monitor progress	Celebrate success

SUPERVISING ZONE

- The leader gives advice, tells people what to do, solves people’s problems, or asks loaded questions like, “Have you thought about ... ?”
- The leader is directing by taking control of the situation and deciding the course of action or giving strong suggestions about best solutions.
- The leader is the expert and knows what to do.

MENTORING ZONE:

- This is a softer form of directing.
- The thinking is that if I teach others what I know, they will handle situations as well as I do.
- At its best, this approach teaches necessary skills and insights to people who are new to their roles or positions.

At its worst, this approach creates a clone of the mentor so that the other person will act the way the mentor wants.

- Mentor-leaders spend time teaching others and offering options.
- Mentors take on the role of “wise ones” who guide others to know what to do, based on the mentor’s thinking and experiences.
- This is appropriate for working with novices and is not the best way to work with experienced and/or highly motivated staff.

COACHING ZONE

- The leader gives up the mantle of being the expert or wise one and becomes an equal partner and collaborator with others involved in problem solving.

- The leader uses effective communication, such as listening for underlying themes or assumptions, asking questions, posing possibilities, and pushing thinking so that clear and creative ideas emerge. Decisions are therefore created by the group, not by any one individual, as they openly share information and thinking.
- The coaching zone should be the first option leaders use when they work with others. Only after they find that a person is a novice or lacks experience should they move back to the mentoring zone. The supervisory zone should be reserved for those few staff members who challenge authority or blatantly disregard policy.

Source: Marceta Reilly and Diana Williams, 2008.

Participants reported personal growth in relationships for themselves and those whom they supervised. For the first time, leaders reported that they understood how to differentiate their supervision practices to fit the needs of new employees versus troubled employees as well as keeping veteran employees fresh and inspired.

LEADERSHIP COACHING VERSUS TYPICAL LEADER PRACTICES

The model of leadership practices above emerged from the concept that leadership develops over time and typically follows a continuum of practice. In the training, leaders learned to differentiate their leadership based on the varying needs of the people with whom they work.

Leaders are often selected for leadership roles based on their individual success in problem solving and organizing. Yet as they

move up the career ladder, they need to learn new skills to build the capacity of others.

LESSONS LEARNED

This training component coupled with the district’s desired leadership model has enabled the Howard County Public School System to broaden its concept of performance evaluation. The district’s performance document now includes observable coach-like behaviors. (See pp. 36-37 for the complete standards.)

Consequently, the district is gradually moving away from traditional one-size-fits-all supervision practices to a more rigorous differentiated approach where goals are aligned to leadership standards and clear measures of success.

Leaders are eager to build their skills so they can bring out the best in others and supervise staff with strategies that match individual needs.

LEADERSHIP STANDARDS AND PERFORMANCE BEHAVIORS

Standard 1

VISION

The central office leader promotes the success of all students and staff by facilitating and supporting the development, articulation, and implementation of the school system's strategic plan.

OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS:

- a. Facilitates development of a shared vision regarding how his or her office or program contributes to the school system's mission.
- b. Ensures that the school system's strategic plan and vision are regularly communicated to staff and stakeholders.
- c. Keeps the school system's vision and goals at the forefront of decision making.
- d. Ensures that the short- and long-term plans for his or her office or program align with the school system's strategic plan.
- e. Develops the professional capacity of staff and stakeholders and ensures that staff members have opportunities to serve as leaders.
- f. Facilitates a process to monitor, evaluate, and revise programs and procedures to support the vision.
- g. Provides resources for continuous progress toward the realization of the vision.

Standard 2

STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

The central office leader promotes the success of all students and staff by creating and sustaining a culture of professional growth and high expectations that supports the school system's strategic plan.

OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS:

- a. Takes responsibility for creating a positive work culture that promotes respect for diversity and commonality.
- b. Uses a variety of data to develop action plans aligned with the district's master plan.
- c. Uses and promotes technology to make data-driven decisions and provides staff the assistance they need for improvement.
- d. Provides leadership for the design, implementation, and evaluation of effective professional development that addresses the needs of all employee groups.
- e. Ensures that office goals are achieved with a high level of customer/client satisfaction for both internal and external customers.
- f. Engages in succession planning by identifying and developing potential.
- g. Implements an ongoing program of performance evaluation based on individual development plans that ensure continuous growth and satisfaction of all staff.

Standard 3

MANAGEMENT

The central office leader promotes the success of all students and staff by ensuring the effective and efficient management of his or her office or program.

OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS:

- a. Demonstrates efficient management knowledge and skills necessary for his or her position.
- b. Manages resources to cultivate a safe and healthy work environment.
- c. Develops and supervises efficient management practices that produce quality services.
- d. Involves stakeholders in developing and managing a budget that supports the office or program goals and is aligned with the school system's strategic plan.
- e. Promotes the development of staff management skills as required for their job roles.
- f. Regularly utilizes the plan, do, study, act cycle to ensure continuous improvement of the office based on data.
- g. Ensures that the office produces the results outlined in the office plan.

Standard 4

COLLABORATION

The central office leader collaborates effectively with stakeholder groups, including staff, schools, community members, business partners, and community agencies, to promote the success of all students and staff.

Coaching provides skills leaders need to enhance growth in this performance evaluation process.

FUTURE IMPLICATIONS FOR A CULTURE OF COACHING

Requests for coach training continue to emerge throughout the district. To meet this need, Coaching for Results consultants have become sponsors and mentors of a district team of certified coaches. As a result of this partnership:

- The district has developed an in-house summer coaching

academy that will meet support staff needs.

- Principals have applied coaching to the work of their team leaders, department heads, and resource personnel.
- Staff members have made the connection between their coach-like behaviors and using these behaviors in the classroom to inspire students and build their capacity for higher performance.
- The district has made great inroads in creating a systemic approach to professional learning, application, and follow-up.

OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS:

- a. Ensures collaboration by modeling and promoting a high-functioning, professional learning community.
- b. Establishes, nurtures, and maintains good relationships with all stakeholders.
- c. Communicates frequently and effectively with all stakeholders.
- d. Addresses staff, parent, and community concerns in a timely and effective manner.
- e. Uses public information and research-based knowledge of issues and trends to collaboratively work with all stakeholders.
- f. Recognizes and values the diversity of all stakeholders and treats them in an equitable manner.
- g. Seeks regular feedback on success of collaboration from multiple sources for continuous improvement and alignment of programs and services.

Standard 5**INTEGRITY AND PROFESSIONALISM**

The central office leader promotes the success of all students and staff by acting with integrity, fairness, and by modeling professionalism and continuous learning to create a positive work environment.

OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS:

- a. Establishes trust and demonstrates openness and respect in all relationships and decision-making processes.
- b. Seeks and uses data and feedback regularly from multiple sources to understand and improve leadership and its impact on others.

We believe that leadership coaching provides ongoing, just-in-time professional support for staff. It acknowledges people's strengths, encourages professional stretch, and supports all colleagues in achieving their goals for teaching and learning throughout their careers.

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- c. Demonstrates commitment to continuous improvement for self and others.
- d. Establishes and maintains procedures to protect the confidentiality and rights of students and staff.
- e. Establishes collaborative processes with diverse groups to develop and accomplish common goals.
- f. Demonstrates sensitivity and cultural proficiency when interacting with all stakeholders.
- g. Performs job duties with honesty and explains decisions based on ethical and legal considerations.

Standard 6**GREATER POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT**

The central office leader promotes the success of all students and staff by understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, economic, legal, and cultural contexts of the school system.

OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS:

- a. Advocates for policies and programs that promote equitable learning opportunities for all students, regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender, or disability.
- b. Participates in the development of policies, programs, budgets, and initiatives that reflect an understanding of the economic and cultural factors shaping the community.
- c. Implements policies and procedures of the Howard County Public School System.
- d. Represents the interests of the office and school system when engaging

with local, state, national, and governmental groups and agencies.

- e. Stays abreast of the external factors (political, economic, and social) in the community that impact the school system.
- f. Expands knowledge, skills, and attitudes to respond to changing conditions.
- g. Ensures that system programs and procedures comply with local, state, and federal regulations and policies.

Standard 7**COMMUNICATION**

The central office leader promotes the success of all students and staff by using effective and efficient listening, speaking, writing, and nonverbal communication skills.

OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS:

- a. Practices active listening by focusing on the speaker's verbal and nonverbal communication.
- b. Chooses words that are professional, purposeful, and appropriate to the audience.
- c. Provides feedback that is respectful, honest, nonjudgmental, and promotes continuous improvement.
- d. Uses effective conflict resolution strategies.
- e. Values others and exemplifies customer service through communication.
- f. Engages the broader community by marketing the Howard County Public School System and its programs.
- g. Produces written communication that is clear, correct, and appropriate to the audience.

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