The husbandry of resources

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A colleague shared with me an interesting dilemma. Her district was committed to using meager state funding to target classrooms, yet the result was a system of sparse out-of-classroom support to aid teachers and principals as they worked to adopt new classroom and leadership practices.

Many superintendents may need to develop new skills to navigate the political currents within their districts and gain resources for professional learning that they can apply strategically where those resources will have the greatest benefits, especially in the face of funding cuts.

System leaders must learn to focus sparse resources on high-priority goals. Educators often are very busy with activities intended to pursue *all* strategic goals, and yet little actually changes. In fact, one study found that the size of a planning document is inversely related to the extent and quality of implementation (Fullan, 2006, p. 59).

The superintendent and district leadership need to focus improvement efforts on a small number of high-priority goals that can be accomplished with available resources (Roy & Hord, 2003, p. 174).

Leaders need to involve the school board, principals, and teachers in a consensus process to identify a coherent set of goals based on sound educational research rather than opinion or pet projects. Researchers recommend that leaders identify a *limited* number of improvement goals (Fullan, 2006; West, 1998; Schmoker, 2006). A limited number means two or three priority goals (West, 1998). When there are myriad goals, the impact of any single goal is minimized as resources are stretched across all the initiatives.

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) researchers identified available resources as time, money, personnel, and materials. The study authors found that "there is a substantial and positive relationship between district-level leadership and student achievement when the superintendent, district office staff, and school board members do the 'right work' in the 'right way' " (Waters & Marzano, 2006, p. 20).

One way the superintendent and district office staff do the *right* work in the *right* way is to "use resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction" (Waters & Marzano, 2006, p. 16). When resources are dedicated and used for teacher and principal professional development in order to achieve district goals, students benefit. The research also found that improving achievement and instruction might mean cutting back or eliminating initiatives that are no longer aligned with district goals.

System leaders must make near-heroic efforts to be sure limited resources are used wisely to accomplish high-leverage goals. Leaders can focus resources — and must, if they are to reap the benefit of school improvement efforts and professional development.

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NSDC STANDARD

Resources: Staff development that improves the learning of all students requires resources to support adult learning and collaboration.