



Begin with the central office to transform schools into learning organizations that serve all students

School improvement that makes schools better places for all kids to learn and succeed is the goal of urban, suburban, and rural school districts. Many stakeholders share this goal — school boards, principals, parents, teachers, agencies at the federal, state, and local levels, educator unions and associations, university schools of education, philanthropic organizations, and policymakers. One step in the right direction is to structure central offices in a way to support each school's ability to effectively advance learning.

Like schools, central offices can advance when they have strong professional learning communities. Professional learning for all educators is the best chance we have to improve the skills of our workforce. Michael Fullan explains in his book, *Six Secrets of Change* (Jossey-Bass, 2008), that if we love our employees, and connect peers with purpose in ways that can best build their and their colleagues' capacity, the organization becomes a learning organization. Knowledge flows as people pursue and continuously learn what works best. The result is a district that provides better opportunities for every principal, teacher, and student to learn and grow.

Central offices play a key role in

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helping schools and districts become learning organizations.

Two ways in which central offices can advance this purpose are to:

1. Re-create the central office as a professional learning community; and
2. Model and support the development of schools as professional learning communities.

Alignment and coherence of purpose and work are important factors in helping school districts progress. Central office employees tend to work in silos, based on their department or function. Very often, departments in central offices are working on different aspects of the same problem, but they don't come together to align their work or to realize solutions to problems. Often, the result is duplication of efforts, inefficient use of time and people resources, and a lack of alignment and coherence in the work of the district.

When central office administrators organize themselves into professional learning communities, they, their schools, and their students derive many benefits. The central office professional learning community:

- Creates a common forum for district administrator learning and dialogue around common issues and concerns

in the schools;

- Builds a culture of universal responsibility and accountability for students and their success;
- Helps to create alignment and coherence in the district;
- Uses data to shine a spotlight on issues that need to be addressed; and
- Breaks down the silo effect and creates a community of practice.

Professional learning communities at the central office level can provide stronger leadership and support for the work that must be done by school leaders and

teachers in the district's schools. The professional learning community takes advantage of the strengths that each administrator brings to his or her work and amasses that knowledge in ways that better serve the schools and improve opportunities for all students to learn and succeed.

REFERENCE:

Fullan, M. (2008). *Six secrets of change: What the best leaders do to help their organizations survive and thrive.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. ■

