

Story of Impact

Bryan Leadership Development Initiative (BLDI)

Supporting Student Achievement Through a New Model of Leadership

Industry:
Education

CCL Solutions:
360-degree Assessment
Custom Solutions
Evaluation
Coaching



Center for
Creative
Leadership

NORTH AMERICA EUROPE ASIA

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THE CHALLENGE

In 1996, North Carolina mandated a new approach to improving student achievement by transferring significant decision-making authority from central administration to individual schools. This governance practice, site-based management (SBM), had been widely adopted across the country, though with varying results. Often, the programs ignored the school climate and the personal development of educational leaders, focusing instead on the structures of schooling. As the Guilford County Schools began implementing the SBM mandate, the challenge was to establish a leadership development process that would bring together administrators, principals, teachers and parents as an energized learning community built on empowerment, trust and respect.

THE SOLUTION

The Joseph M. Bryan Foundation and the Center For Creative Leadership (CCL®) joined with the Guilford County Schools in 1997 to sponsor a long-term leadership development experience for more than 300 individuals. The Bryan Foundation pledged \$5 million for the project and CCL contributed matching funds in the form of reduced tuitions and fees. Designed to take place over five years in order to maximize the opportunity for real change, the Bryan Leadership Development Initiative (BLDI) launched its first program in 1998.

At the time, the school district comprised 95 schools with 65,000 students and an employee base of 8,000. The goal of the BLDI curriculum was to create a learning process at each school and throughout the district and community that could support continuous growth of leadership at all levels.

Twenty-one school leadership teams (15 members a piece) were established, made up of principals, teachers, staff, parents and community members. Other groups consisted of the district superintendent, his executive cabinet and school principals.

The curriculum was based on best practices from leadership development research, CCL experience, and educational curriculum practice. Each participant took part in 10 formal programs at CCL. The first year, they attended as individuals so the focus could truly be on personal development rather than team dynamics and school issues. During the next four years, however, teams attended all sessions intact. The school teams also worked with CCL coaches called “transition guides” to implement what they were learning in the program at their schools. The guides offered support for the duration of the initiative, during the formal program and through coaching sessions at school sites each year.

While the school district continued its work to enhance the knowledge base of teachers regarding research-based teaching and learning practices, CCL concentrated on the

essentials of effective leadership with an emphasis on forming good working relationships, solving problems as a group and communicating more effectively.

The learning dimensions provided guidance at different levels during the five years. In the first year, for example, “leading with purpose” was addressed by helping participants understand their role in sharing the school’s vision and mission with others in the school community. In year five, this dimension supported school teams as they led the other faculty and staff in their emerging role as leaders in the community.

To meet the evolving nature of the intended outcomes, the curriculum featured a broad array of content modules, experiential activities, assessments, coaching and feedback, and active reflection. In the first year, personality assessments and 360-degree feedback were used to develop awareness and practice in areas such as leadership values, ethics and conflict management.

In the final year, most time spent in face-to-face programs was customized to meet a team’s particular needs. The design typically included a day or more in which team members (coached by their transition guide) discussed issues they faced in school-community collaboration efforts, created action plans, and started the work of putting those plans into effect.

There were nine learning dimensions for the school teams:

- Leading with purpose
- Awareness into action
- Change agents
- Teaming up
- Systemic thinking
- Handling stress
- Handling conflict
- Valuing diversity
- Taking ownership

OUTCOMES

Specific outcomes from the Bryan Leadership Development Initiative varied by school, depending on whether the school team’s primary focus for its leadership development efforts was improved parental involvement, improved safety and climate of the school, improved academic achievement of students, or some combination of these three overall district goals. A survey taken from the

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(BLDI)

first cohort of school leadership teams revealed 10 to 15 percent increases in target learning areas.

In terms of improvement in school safety and climate, principals reported having more confidence in their staffs' leadership capacity, allowing these employees to take on new responsibilities. Teachers adopted new leadership roles in the schools, including roles related to accreditation, tutoring, space planning and performance evaluation processes. Staff turnover and absenteeism rates dropped in many BLDI schools. Student discipline and absenteeism rates also dropped. New teachers were being integrated into the school community more quickly, increasing the potential for reduced teacher turnover.

Academic achievement improved, evidenced by improved standardized test scores. Sixty percent of the BLDI schools (as compared with 50 percent of all district schools) met all of their annual school improvement goals in 2003, the year the initiative ended. These goals are set based on the make-up of the student population and vary by school; each school has multiple achievement-related goals each year intended to help them focus on all segments of their school population.

Two BLDI schools were recognized by the State of North Carolina in 1994 as Honor Schools of Excellence, an award denoting that 90 to 100 percent of the student body made expected academic progress and that the school met its annual school improvement goals. Four BLDI schools were recognized as Schools of Distinction, indicating that 80 to 89 percent of students made expected academic progress and the school met its annual school improvement goals. Overall, 13 BLDI schools met annual student improvement goals.

Parent involvement and school-wide communication increased. At one elementary school, a team was able to meet with parents who lived in subsidized housing communities and worked at night by holding the meetings in the housing communities themselves. At another school, a team held cross-grade level meetings to identify gaps and create programs and agendas for parents to help their children catch up. Volunteer hours increased at nine schools, indicating a stronger connection between the school and its community.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the Bryan Leadership Development Initiative, which concluded in 2003, helped the Guilford County Schools improve efficiency, morale and academic achievement. CCL's strategy for school improvement did not involve adding "one more thing" to the school restructuring agenda. Instead, it revealed that leadership was the essential missing piece.

Four BLDI schools were recognized as Schools of Distinction, indicating that 80 to 89 percent of students made expected academic progress and the school met its annual school improvement goals.

The initiative – a unique partnership among members of CCL's local community – had a lasting impact due to the involvement of all stakeholders: superintendents, principals, teachers, parents, students and CCL faculty. As a whole, educators and community members found the motivation and skills needed to move them from being a group of individuals performing their own designated roles to one of leadership teams creating significant and lasting change at their schools.

OBJECTIVES

- Develop the capacity as an individual to take responsibility for "the whole" and to make commitments to shared team activities and goals
- Demonstrate an openness to ideas, values and perspectives that are different from one's own
- Work productively with other individuals, groups and the community despite differences of opinion or during times of conflict
- Respect and make use of differing values and perspectives among co-workers or others in the schools and community
- Understand and relate to a school's place and role in relation to overall activities, goals and values in the school district

OUTCOMES

The following outcomes were noted by schools at the end of their participation in the initiative in 2003:

- Sixty percent of participating schools met all of their annual "Adequate Yearly Progress" goals in 2003 compared with 50 percent of schools in the district overall
- Six schools received formal recognition for academic excellence, as determined by a statewide set of criteria
- Staff turnover and absenteeism decreased in four schools
- Students' standard achievement scores showed gains in five schools
- Student attendance and discipline improved in four schools
- Volunteers donated a greater number of hours in nine schools
- Curriculum improvements were made in six schools
- School climate was judged to have improved, along with staff cohesion, in 20 schools



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GET STARTED WITH CCL

If building organizational leadership capacity is a concern for you, the Center can offer creative and customized solutions for addressing your leadership needs. Whether your goal is to improve the effectiveness of the executive team, to systematically develop your high-potential managers, expand your organization's ability to work globally or to create a shared leadership culture at all levels of the organization, we can help. To get started, visit www.ccl.org/custom or contact us at the CCL location most convenient to you.

ABOUT THE CENTER FOR CREATIVE LEADERSHIP

The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL[®]) is a top-ranked, global provider of executive education that develops better leaders through its exclusive focus on leadership education and research. Founded in 1970 as a nonprofit, educational institution, CCL helps clients worldwide cultivate creative leadership – the capacity to achieve more than imagined by thinking and acting beyond boundaries – through an array of programs, products and other services.