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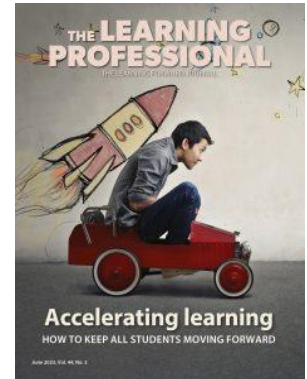
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### Current Journal

## How school leadership teams lead to success

Jun 27, 2023 | Jody Spiro (/author/jody-spiro) and Douglas Fisher (/author/douglas-fisher) | Collaboration (<https://lfstage.xyz/category/collaboration/>)



(<https://learningforward.org/journal/accelerating-learning/>)

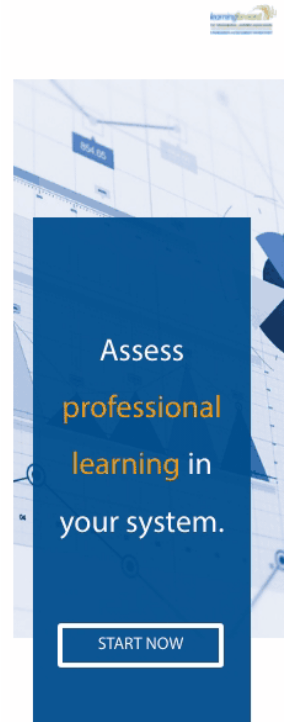
School leaders have a major impact on student achievement and schoolwide improvement, but they can't achieve success by acting alone. Excellent results require a team effort. High-functioning leadership teams are built intentionally and are, on average, five times more productive than average teams (Keller, 2017).

Even when leaders recognize the importance of a team, most need opportunities to deepen their skills in developing and supporting the team. This is true not only in education: A study by the Center for Creative Leadership (Cahill, 2020) found that only 18% of senior executives rated their teams as very effective, even though 97% agreed that increasing the leadership teams' effectiveness would improve results.

The need to develop leadership teams is especially important in education, considering the current context of high turnover among school leaders. They can serve to increase the collective efficacy of the district and school community, improving both the results and everyone's sense of belonging.

This is why we're starting a new blog series, Leading in Teams, that addresses the importance of school leadership teams and the skillsets required to effectively lead the teams to high performance.

In this series, we will share tools that you can use to build your team and extend your impact. In addition, we will focus on the conditions necessary for teams to be successful. Later columns will address such topics as: criteria for selecting team members; facilitating professional learning that is aligned to the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2022) and that benefits all team members; and how to ensure that all team members are contributing effectively to the leadership team. Each column will provide reflection questions for those who want to put the concepts to use in their own situations.



(<https://services.learningforward.org/services/standards-assessment-inventory/>)

To kick off this series, we offer three reasons that schools benefit from leadership teams, which typically include the administrators on the school site (such as principals and assistant principals) as well as teacher leaders who support the learning of other adults (such as coaches). We also provide some reflection questions to help guide your thinking about whether and why to develop or strengthen a leadership team in your school or organization.

### 3 reasons leadership teams matter



#### 1. Leadership teams create a consistent vision and alignment.

On leadership teams, members are not just responsible for their own work, but for the collective work of achieving the schoolwide vision. Teams offer valuable opportunities to develop and cohere around this vision. Without agreement on a vision, various members of the community may be pursuing different goals – possibly even at odds with one another – so the messages will be mixed and misaligned and there can be no common set of strategies. Of course, even with a leadership team in place, some decisions ultimately rest with a single site leader, but the team provides a place to seek advice, find common ground, and take collective steps forward.

For example, imagine an initiative to address the use of cell phones in class, one of teachers' major complaints that impede learning. If the leadership team does not have a cohesive message, there will be less consistent implementation of the effort because various people are choosing the perspective that fits with what they already believe. As another example, districts and schools that did best during the recent pandemic were those where instruction was "the North Star," and consistently underpinned all the work. In other words, they focused on quality instruction, and student engagement the learning, as their primary focus and the lens through which they made decisions.

#### 2. Leadership teams bring multiple perspectives to the table.

We all have experiences and perspectives that influence how we think about our work. These are influenced by our identities and experiences. When leaders work in isolation, their perspectives are limited to their own. But when we are part of a team that has strong relational trust, we can help each other consider other perspectives and ultimately make better decisions. Teams make important contributions when members leave meetings with ideas that hadn't occurred to them before.

#### 3. Leadership teams divide up the sheer volume of work that leaders must accomplish.

The tasks facing school leaders each week are enormous and varied, from responding to emails to campus supervision to leading learning. As a result, research suggests that, on average, only 13% of leaders' time is spent focused on the school leaders' most important job: leading the instructional program (Grissom, Loeb, & Master, 2013). After all, it's hard to spend significant time in the classroom with so many demands, and it's hard to move instruction forward without being in classrooms. With a strong leadership team in place, there are more people to share the many responsibilities of running a school. If each member of the leadership team devotes 13% (or more) of their time to classroom instruction, in a cohesive way, then together they can support teacher growth through feedback and coaching.

### Who should be on the team?

There are several types of teams in a given district or school. Sometimes there is a leadership team that negotiates a shared vision and improvement goals. Larger teams work in alignment with the school leadership team to dive deeply into specific instructional strategies. They usually consist of a group of educators that are representative of the faculty. Either way, team members should make a conscious choice to join the team and make a commitment of time to ensure progress in teaching, learning, school climate, and other essential outcomes. What is important is that the goals for each team are clear and specific and that teams take advantage of the unique skills and expertise of each member.

### Reflection questions

We urge leaders to think about the current state of the school leadership teams in their organizations and think about ways to improve the teams' performance. Here are some questions to consider:

- For what purposes do we currently use leadership teams in our organization?

- Do people readily volunteer for participation in teams? If not, what could we do to make participation more attractive?
- What skills should we help team members develop further?
- What professional learning opportunities do team members have – independently and collectively – to grow their leadership?
- To what degree is the team effective? How might we support it to be more effective?

As you consider these questions, we hope that you will deepen your understanding of and curiosity about leadership teams. We invite you to share your questions and specific topics you'd like us to address in future columns by emailing Jody Spiro at [jodyspiro50@gmail.com](mailto:jodyspiro50@gmail.com). We also welcome your comments and feedback.

References:

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