



AASA Center for System Leadership Framework

Background

The American Association of School Administrators, a professional association of school system leaders, has established the AASA Center for System Leadership as a vehicle that develops and supports school system leaders who seek to lead the transformation of public education. The AASA Center for System Leadership, therefore, is not a place to which leaders come to receive services. Instead, the Center addresses the leadership needs of school leaders through partnerships with AASA state affiliates and established national and regional networks. In this role, the Center is a catalyst for the revision of administrator preparation programs and for the offering of in-service programs so that both present and future school system leaders will have the knowledge and skills necessary to lead the transformation of public education.

Almost from the time of its inception in the mid-19th century, American public education's key mission has been to provide access to quality educational opportunity for all children. For over 100 years, the leaders of American public education pursued this goal. The major accomplishments of this effort were the extension of access to equal educational opportunities to minority children, to women and to the physically, psychologically and cognitively handicapped. By and large, public education met this goal of access and equity.

No sooner had the achievement of this goal been recognized and applauded than a new goal was set for American public education. No longer is it good enough to provide everyone access to a quality educational opportunity. Public education must ensure that each and every child — regardless of any racial, ethnic, economic, physical, mental or cognitive condition — learn to the same relatively high standard. This is known as universal success. The setting of this expectation of universal success is driven by social and economic considerations, and the new expectation found public education ill prepared to address it.

Public education was, and largely still is, designed to meet the goal of universal equity and access. The ongoing education of school leaders has focused on how to lead education so that it meets the goal of universal access and not universal success.

AASA, therefore, has concluded that unless the public education system is re-designed to achieve universal success, this goal will never be fully reached. Furthermore, the system will never be adequately re-designed unless those who lead the system know how to re-design a system. Finally,



these leaders will never fully understand how to re-design a system unless they are able to think and act in terms of a systems approach.

AASA, therefore, has launched a major effort designed to produce school system leaders who know how to use a systems approach for the re-design of public education. This effort, the AASA Center for System Leadership, will address both the education of those who aspire to be school system leaders and the re-education of those who are already serving in those positions. Both practicing and aspiring school leaders must have the knowledge and skills necessary to lead American public education to the goal of universal success.

Core Beliefs

Consistent with its purpose, the AASA Center for System Leadership is founded on the following core beliefs:

- **Public education must be re-designed to meet the expectation of universal success.** The American public education system, as it is designed and functioning today, provides equal educational access and opportunity for each and every child. It is not designed to promote the new expectation of universal success. Universal success is defined as the expectation that each and every child, regardless of any racial, ethnic, economic, physical, mental or cognitive condition, will learn to the same relatively high standard. In order to achieve the result of universal success, the system of public education must be transformed to meet the new expectations.
- **A society of highly competent workers and responsible citizens needs a strong public education system.** Today, the United States of America functions in a very complex and competitive global political and economic environment. Our children must not only compete domestically for jobs but also internationally to maintain this country's international standing and standard of living. This requires a strong, vibrant and flexible educational system to ensure the development of highly competent workers and citizens.
- **Strong social support systems are necessary for the healthy growth and development of children.** The family structure, the basis for the care and nurturing of each and every child, must be reinforced and fostered by the American citizenry. The sources of support for children must be delivered on an equitable and consistent basis.
- **Educators must believe in and exhibit behaviors that support the concept of universal success for each and every child.** The foundation of these behaviors is the twin belief that each and every child has sufficient learning ability to become academically proficient and that school systems are responsible for educating each and every child so that each can meet high standards.
- **To positively impact the growth and development of each and every child, public school systems must operate effectively within networks of systems.**

The public education system must integrate services to children and raise community expectations both for the education system and for the other systems that offer services to children and their families.

- **Educational leadership programs must engage participants in systems thinking so that education leaders have the knowledge and skills necessary to lead systemic change.** Traditional educational leadership programs must focus on systems thinking. It will take nothing less than new thinking and action to transform public education to meet the goal of universal success.
- **Systemic change requires extensive public engagement and understanding of the reasons for change.** Systemic change in education cannot take place in isolation from the public. The public needs to be integrally involved and needs to know why changes must be made. The public and school system leaders must support rhetorically and financially the strategies that will produce change.
- **Effective leadership is essential for building the capacity for systemic change resulting in universal success.** Systemic change and systemic thinking is not easy. Change does not take place without building and nurturing sufficient capacity for change. Effective leadership is possible through the acquisition of the knowledge and skills that are necessary.

Characteristics of a Transformed Public Education System

Central to the AASA Center for System Leadership's core beliefs is the conviction that American public education must be transformed if the expectation of universal success is to be met. The characteristics of a transformed system include the following:

- **The system continually reflects and improves upon its policies and practices.** A transformed school system is not risk evasive but instead is a place where failure is viewed as another step on the road to success. Policies and practices must be reviewed, modified and/or improved on an ongoing basis.
- **The system makes standards a constant and time variable.** The system is a gateway to success for each and every child instead of a gatekeeper that prevents many children from achieving success. Individual students, therefore, are given the time they need to meet high standards of learning and the afforded time differs from student to student.
- **The system fosters among children both critical thinking skills and a sense of community.** Within the transformed public education system, each and every child is appropriately prepared to be a responsible and productive citizen within our democracy. The public education system is a place where appropriate critical thinking skills and values are caught and not just taught.
- **The system has a performance-based accountability subsystem that drives sustainable change through the entire system.** All individuals within the

system, from students through teachers and other elected and appointed school leaders, are held accountable for meeting high performance standards. Additionally, the system itself has a mechanism by which it holds itself accountable for results. This is the only way to drive sustainable change throughout the system.

- **The system actively uses the possibilities that technology affords for transforming teaching and learning.** With the use of technology, the limitations imposed by time and space are eliminated. Each and every child and school leader can learn whenever and wherever they are ready to learn. Formal learning takes place at times other than within the school calendar and school day.
- **The system is closely interconnected with other community systems.** There is a relational trust and an interconnected need between the public education system and the other community systems. The transformed education system raises the expectations both for the education system and for the other community systems.
- **The system has a clear set of priorities for attaining universal success and allocates resources to match those priorities.** Internal alignment of school system resources and priorities is essential for achievement and the attainment of universal success.
- **The system actively engages parents.** There is a commitment to the proposition that parents are true partners in the effort to educate their children. The system must reach out to parents of all communities and clearly articulate goals, priorities and strategies. The transformed system must not only inform but must also engage parents as partners.
- **The system actively engages the general public.** There is a commitment to the proposition that the understanding and support of the general public is essential. It is especially critical in soliciting and sustaining the support of other community systems.

The Role of the Superintendent in a Transformed Education System

In a transformed public education system, the role of the superintendent of schools is significantly altered in the following ways.

- **The superintendent is a superintendent of education.** The superintendent does not view his/her leadership responsibilities as restricted only to the school system itself. The superintendent is a community leader as well as the leader of the school system and the chief education advocate.
- **Within the school system framework, the superintendent is a moral and intellectual leader who is the chief learner and who is a composer and conductor instead of a commander.** In this capacity, the superintendent:

- Possesses, articulates and lives by a strong set of moral and ethical values that emphasize personal integrity and service to others above personal gain.
- Thinks in systems terms about the redesign of the public education system. This requires the ability to re-imagine the system as a comprehensive learning community. The superintendent must have the ability not only to articulate the vision internally and externally but must also be able to convince others of the critical value of a transformed system.
- Builds the capacities of the system's subsystems to relate to each other with a focus on the shared vision. Capacity building has to be viewed as a process that takes people from where they are to where they need to be in order to think and act in systems terms.
- **Within the community, the superintendent is the person who leads the effort to connect interdependently the education system with the other community systems that either serve children and/or have an impact on the delivery of services to children. In this capacity, the superintendent:**
 - Is the chief advocate for children within the community.
 - Interacts with, learns from and leverages the leaders of other community systems.
 - Builds collaborative networks with other community systems. To do this, the superintendent re-designs the education system so that it forges connections with community systems.
 - Manages the education system but also influences the work of the community's political and economic systems so that they collectively serve the needs of all children.

Design of the AASA Center for System Leadership Programs

The AASA Center for System Leadership is designed to help education system leaders change the system in order to meet the expectation of universal success for each and every child. The Center will house the following Institutes.

AASA Institute for Leadership Development and Systems Thinking

Through the AASA Institute for Leadership Development, the Center will work in partnership with AASA's state affiliates and other learning organizations to provide programs focused on a systems approach to the transformation of public education.

The content of these programs will help participants:

- Know how to think and frame problems in systems terms.
- Understand that outcomes are changed by changing behaviors.

- Know how to build and sustain the capacity for change.
- Know how to re-imagine a system and then structure the system to meet desired outcomes.
- Know how to provide leadership in a multicultural context replete with an increasing number of state and federal requirements.
- Understand the culture of an organization and its impact upon the behaviors of those within the organization.
- Know how to bring about needed changes in the culture of a school system.
- Know how to develop vision for a school system that re-imagines the system.
- Understand the culture of the community that a school system serves.
- Know how to force themselves out of daily issues in order to focus on systems issues.
- Know how to work within the present system while leading a change process that will result in a new system.
- Know how to bring together leaders of other community systems.
- Understand their roles as community leaders.
- Understand that it is essential to re-design the education system by connecting it to other community systems.

The methods that will be used to convey this content will include:

- Appropriately place participants with respect to their state of readiness to be leaders of transformed education systems.
- Employ learning communities to help participants value what they do not know that they need to know and to help them become aware of what they know but do not realize that they do know (tacit knowledge).
- Provide ongoing, sustained, and meaningful experiences
- Provide process experiences that require participants to engage in reflection on their leadership practices. These processes should inculcate reflection into participants as a habit of their minds.
- Provide consistent and sustained individual support from coaches to help participants clarify their thinking, set goals and objectives, develop and implement plans to meet those goals and objectives and assess how well the goals and objectives were met.
- Provide consistent and sustained technical support.
- Provide opportunities to learn from successful systemic change leaders.

AASA Institute for New and Aspiring Superintendents

Through the AASA Institute for New and Aspiring Superintendents, the AASA Center for System Leadership will work in partnership with AASA's state affiliates and other learning organizations to provide programs focused on systems thinking.

The content of these programs will include what is specified for the AASA Institute for Leadership Development programs as well as content that is particularly relevant for new and aspiring superintendents. Examples of such issues include:

- How to establish and maintain a productive, positive and respectful relationship with the board of education;
- How to preserve one's own identity and self-respect in both positive and negative environments;
- How to manage interaction with the media and develop positive relationships; and
- How to organize staff to effect change.

The methods that will be employed to convey this content will be the same as are specified for the AASA Institute for Leadership Development. In addition, the AASA Institute for New and Aspiring Superintendents will publish both online and print-based, intellectual property focused on the needs of new and aspiring superintendents.

AASA Institute for Leadership Networks

Through the AASA Institute for Leadership Networks, the Center will become the hub for a network of learning organizations that share the same core beliefs and convictions regarding public education. The AASA Institute for Leadership Networks will schedule and facilitate regular meetings of the leaders of these organizations so that they can learn from one another. In addition, the AASA Institute for Leadership Networks will work in partnership with these organizations to provide programs focused programs on systems thinking.

AASA Institute for Professional Advocacy

Through the AASA Institute for Professional Advocacy, the AASA Center for System Leadership will advocate within the education community for the systemic transformation of public education. It will advocate within and through the national community.

Within the education community, the AASA Institute for Professional Advocacy will:

- Clearly define the characteristics of a systems approach to change.
- Strongly present the benefits of adopting a systems approach with special emphasis on the outcomes that will accrue from using a systems approach.
- Be the source of standards by which local education systems can transform themselves and be recognized as benchmark systems.
- Urge universities that prepare school system leaders to build upon their programs so that they include the knowledge and skills that are needed to lead systemic change.

In the national community at large, the AASA Institute for Professional Advocacy will:

- Specify the conditions that need to be in place for a systems approach to the transformation of public education to be successful.
- Be connected to national networks that include leaders of other community systems (mayors, school boards, the press, business representatives and others). It will promote sustained efforts that build trust with these leaders.

- Address school governance issues, especially the role of the board of education and the role of the superintendent. These roles and responsibilities must be clearly defined and understood for the transformation of the school system to be successful.

AASA Institute for Leadership Research and Design

Through the AASA Institute for Leadership Research and Design, the AASA Center for System Leadership will lead and encourage inquiries into various public education designs that might be appropriate as vehicles to transform public education. The AASA Institute for Leadership Research and Design will establish a Council of Scholars to identify relevant studies.

Summary Statement

The American Association of School Administrators has established the AASA Center for System Leadership, a learning organization that establishes and connects learning communities and develops and supports school system leaders who are leading the transformation of public education. The AASA Center for System Leadership addresses the leadership needs of school leaders to ensure they have the knowledge and skills necessary to lead the transformation of public education.