HIGH PERFORMANCE LEADERSHIP IN A UNDERPERFORMING SCHOOL

A Case Study

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Setting the Context

Communication, collaboration, critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, and innovation are some of the so-called twenty-first century skills needed to be successful now and in the future, not only for students but also for those who lead and teach these students. As administrators and teachers work to develop students' skills of reflection, insight, planning, flexibility, adaptability, and continual learning along with the technological skills needed to work in global environments, they find and use the literature that teaches them about how to foster the growth and develop high level thinking. They then discover quite quickly that these same skills can transform how leaders define leadership and how the roles and responsibilities of teachers can be expanded.

A leader in education today needs to move away from being just a reactive problem solver and the person who has the answers and move towards being reflective, emotionally intelligent, vulnerable leaders who build the capacity of others to address complex challenges of a global society.

Highly effective educational leaders wake up every morning with the love of being an educator and of learning, and are continually seeking new ways to enhance student learning. These leaders work to create high performing teams, where leadership is a collective effort. They work to develop critical thinking and high performing educator teams. They know that these educator teams are the supports that they need to prevent their own failures. However, the creation of collaborative, high performing cultures requires leaders to push the envelope and think outside of the box, skills that are often hard for leaders who have developed within a rubric driven, percentage based educational system.

The commitment to continuous learning and improvement begins when leaders acknowledge who they are as leaders. What are their strengths? What are their weaknesses? Yet, these skills are not ones that are the primary focus of most leadership development programs, and most leaders do not know exactly what traits contribute to their successes or their failures. Cultures of support and development for educational leaders have fallen by the wayside with the rigor of the expectations of standardized testing (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004). Yet, leaders do not intend to fail; they fail because, no matter how dedicated or talented they are, the systems do not support the development of their leadership skills for the betterment of the school district (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004). Therefore, the purpose of this case study is to provide educational

leaders with a set of competencies that define their leadership qualities as well as read about another leader who is committed to continuous improvement.

Characteristics of High Performing Leaders

"Education leaders want to accomplish goals that matter, inspire others to join them in working towards these goals, and leave a lasting legacy"
(Hargreaves & Fink, 2004)

High-performing leaders have a range of leadership skills, competencies, and personal attributes. These leaders ensure that students receive the highest quality educational services. They acknowledge that instructional services need to be flexible, adaptable, efficient, effective, and sustainable. While they know that a sense of urgency is needed to achieve short-term results, they acknowledge that for the sustainability of high quality educational services, the leadership must also be sustainable.

Sustainable leadership is not about improvement in standardized test scores (Glickman, 2002; Stoll, Fink & Earl, 2002 as cited in Hargreaves & Fink, 2004). In a study conducted by Hargreaves and Fink (2004) on the principles of sustainable leadership, the authors concluded that standardized testing has become the archenemy of sustainability. Successful sustainability of leadership comes from leaders who promote and perpetuate diverse approaches to reform rather than subscribing to the rigidity of prescriptive teaching and

standardized testing (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004). It is not about the autocratic, top down approach; rather, it is about a set of specified characteristics and accompanying competencies that allow both the school leader as well as the school district to show the sustainability that propagates success built on trust, shared ownership and leadership, and a commitment to growth.

Knowing one's leadership style is essential to developing high performing leaders

Leadership development is a collective effort. However, the culture of a given organization dictates the success of that leader. Great leaders will not be successful unless they are within an environment and culture that supports their development (Fullan, 2014). Great leaders, no matter how well intentioned, will eventually succumb to a culture that does not support their ideas and philosophies (Fullan, 2014). Developing pools of talent rather than pipelines, and giving principals the opportunities to collaborate and work together not only fosters their leadership skills but also changes the culture of what it means to be an effective leader (Hargreaves, 2013 as cited in Fullan, 2014). However, in order to develop a culture of leadership one must know and be able to assess their leadership skills (Fullan, 2014).

Educational leaders have to become self-aware and focus on learning how to be better leaders before they can navigate the treacherous waters in education today. If they know who they are, are open to critical feedback, and are committed to continuous improvement, they will be able to stay focused. Identification of leadership qualities and characteristics begins with the leader completing the Workplace Personality Inventory (WPI), and then connecting their results to the Seven Competencies of Highly Effective Leaders to develop a personalized leadership growth and development plan.

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The Connection of Culture, Teamwork, and Leadership to Sustainable Improvement in Student Achievement

Case Study: A New and Unconventional story of how a Principal and her leadership team led a turnaround of an underperforming school.

Introduction:

Our national focus on instructional leadership, accountability, and compliance will not create sustainable improvement cultures in our schools. This story of a new principal and her school's leadership team will clearly demonstrate that a broader focus on building the Principal's leadership skills and behaviors and creating a leadership team to build capacity for sustained improvement will trump our traditional approach to improving schools.

Through the vision of the district's Superintendent, the support and courage of the local District School Assistance Council (DSAC), the results of an underperforming (level 3) school improved to a (Level two) – high performing school in one year.

The Superintendent states: "For a new principal building relationships especially in a school not working as a team, is a key component for future success. The leadership coach who worked with our team at the school was a key component that led to success. His work with the building leaders increased their skill set in ways that helped them understand their leadership style and how to adjust it to the various personalities that needed to be puzzled into a team. His work and the hard work of the administrators and teachers led to success as was evidence on state tests and observations on the growth of a positive learning culture in the school."

The DSAC said: "The journey for the school began with a reflective principal who was open to working with a leadership coach to explore and develop the areas identified in her leadership inventory and the "seven competencies for school leadership". She continued her development with the instructional leadership team who became an effective team that could focus on the desired student outcomes. It was actually quite simple but very powerful - superintendent and district level support, leadership, culture and teamwork, a focus on a narrow set of strategies to improve outcomes for students, and support from the DSAC support facilitator to guide the thinking and progress and monitor the appropriateness, timeliness, and intensity of initiatives. "

The DSAC support facilitator, summarized this success story by adding that "the work on leadership and culture has resulted in a sustainable culture for student achievement that is becoming embedded in the culture and will live beyond changes in leadership."

This **unique** focus on leadership and culture provided the environment for results that was needed for the school to perform and insure that the excellent support of the DSAC on improving student achievement and professional development would make a difference for students. The results culture and positive environment allowed the teachers' talent for teaching and learning to gain traction for sustainable results.

The principal in this case study was following the directions set for her by the state to improve the performance of her school. Her background and training as an instructional coach led her to believe that if she increased her focus on instruction and demonstrated the best practices to her teachers, student achievement would improve. She hoped this rigorous focus would be enough to remove the label of an underperforming school. This narrow focus did not improve results.

She did not realize that instruction alone would not make her school successful. She was able to work with her leadership coach on improving her skills as a leader and build the capacity of her leadership team and teachers to form a broad based school-wide effort to improve performance.

In fact, this case study will show that her decrease on her focus on being the instructional leader allowed her to put the time and energy into empowering her staff to lead. She did not try new initiatives, programs, and instructional practices to become successful.

She learned that it was not what she did but how she did it that was the key to success. This new principal changed her approach from I am the leader and must figure out what to do to improve our school to I need to enlist my leadership team and staff in determining the road to success.

She began to try out her ideas with her team and ask for input on content and approach to work with faculty. She began to recognize teachers in faculty meetings who demonstrated successful strategies to engage students and improve student performance.

While this new faculty meeting practice spurred on some healthy competition it developed a sense of success, ownership, and pride for the school that they had the capability to succeed.

You will see how the principal showed measurable research based progress on the leadership traits and competencies of the highest performing principals. Her new confidence as a leader and her ability to be direct with teachers about areas for improvement paid off for students. She had desired to be liked by her teachers but now believes that their respect is even more important.

She also became more independent and less focused on rules and regulations set by others. Her confidence and ability to build the capacity of staff to lead has resulted in a sustainable culture of excellence; now she could tap into the innovative ideas of her staff. This new insight that innovation and ownership can create a fertile environment that leads to results for students is supported in Kirtman's research on high performing leaders.

How the story begins

This case study focuses on a young, new principal whose commitment to sustainable change began with her acknowledgement of the need for a shift in the culture of the school. The case study describes her completion of the Workplace Personality Inventory and her journey through Kirtman's Seven Competencies of Leadership to bring about sustainable change in an underperforming school. In an interview she stated, "I did not realize how broken the culture was in my school, and how that related to my school's achievement. When evaluating the changes that needed to occur to move the school forward, culture was not something that initially entered my mind. However, now I see the importance of ensuring that all staff is invested in changing an environment".

Many educational policymakers think that a new curriculum and evaluation system will be the key to results. Yes, we need good curriculum standards and ways of assessing them, but we also need more effective pedagogy. Developing changes in instructional practice or pedagogy requires changes in school and district culture. Culture will always trump any initiative and determine whether a new program will work or not. The principal's story is a clear illustration of how a leader's acknowledgement of her leadership style and the need to build a solid culture directly related to her school's test scores demonstrating dramatic growth.

About The School District and the Elementary School

The district is an urban district located in North East Massachusetts. The district has a total student population of 7,025. Fifty-four percent of the student population speaks a first language other than English, 37.3% are economically disadvantaged, and 14.7% receive special education services. Comprised of 6 buildings the district offers 1 Pre-K through 5th grade elementary school, 2 K through 5th grade schools, 1 Pre-K through 8 school, 1 middle school (grades 6-8), 1 high school (grades 9-12), one alternative middle school, and one alternative high school. The alternative middle and high schools are designed for students with significant emotional disabilities that cannot be successful in the general inclusive education setting.

The elementary school is the third largest elementary school in the district. It is a Pre-K through 5th grade school. There are 42 teachers at the school, 35 are general education teachers, 4 are special education teachers, and 3 are teachers of English Language Learners.

A School in Trouble

In 2011 the principal was appointed. She had served as a curriculum instruction coach in a smaller urban community. The principal had been in this district for over 10 years. She had transformed from a classroom teacher into a respected coach within the district, who had brought significant changes in curriculum and instruction. She had published a book on curriculum and instruction. Her resume highlighted an educator that had a strong instructional leadership base, a perfect candidate to bring change to a large urban district.

However, the results of the school's 2012 MCAS scores indicated a failing leader. The school's student population of 603 students, with 44% speaking a first language other than English, 20.9% receiving special education services, and 68% receiving free or reduced lunch had earned Level 3 Status by the Department of Education. Not something that a first year principal wanted to see, her school was in the top 20% of the lowest performing elementary schools in the state of Massachusetts. Keep in mind that the 2012 MCAS scores were the first set of scores to utilize student growth scores as a determinant of change. Prior to 2012, school districts utilized Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), a measure of the number of students reaching 100% proficiency in English Language Arts and Mathematics. The school's 2011 AYP data indicated a Level

2 school, in corrective action, with 86.9% of students meeting the AYP benchmark for English Language Arts, and 73.6% for mathematics.

Her school was in trouble, and she felt responsible for leading the improvement process. Despite the change in the scoring format the superintendent was not pleased with the school's scores. She was called to the superintendent's office that fall, and given a directive that change must occur. She explained that during the 2011-2012 school year, she had presented her faculty with every curriculum intervention and strategy that she knew would help student's grow. Her faculty did not show any investment. She could not facilitate them working in teams, taking initiative, or working collaboratively. She had a culture of isolation. Teachers did not interact to plan and develop; each teacher approached the curriculum differently. Faculty meetings were unproductive and filled with tension and resistance. Despite explaining her struggles to the superintendent he presented her with a shortened contract and a leadership coach. The expectation was to move the school out of Level 3 status, a daunting task for a new principal. While the principal's resume highlighted a strong instructional leader, her continued employment depended upon the elementary school showing exponential growth.

Workplace Personality Inventory (WPI)

To begin the principal's work she completed the Workplace Personality Inventory (WPI). This inventory was used by Lyle Kirtman to complete a research study with Pearson Publishing and ASCD to determine the behaviors of high performing principals.

The WPI was used to supplement the data base (600 educational leaders nationally) that Lyle Kirtman used to write his book Leadership and Teams: The Missing Piece of the Educational Reform Puzzle.

The Workplace Personality Inventory (WPI) assesses sixteen work styles, or work-related personality traits, shown to be important to job success in a wide

range of occupations. The work styles assessed by the WPI are based on the Work Styles personality taxonomy (Borman, Kubisiak, & Schneider, 1999) endorsed by the U.S. Department of Labor, and included in the Occupational Information Network (O*NET) online database. The Work Styles model was developed by considering the best features of several existing work-related personality taxonomies, with emphasis on traits that have been shown to correlate with important job behaviors or related criteria. The sixteen work styles, organized within six broader domains, are shown in the below. In addition to the sixteen work styles, the WPI contains an "Unlikely Virtues" scale designed to identify individuals who present an overly favorable image.
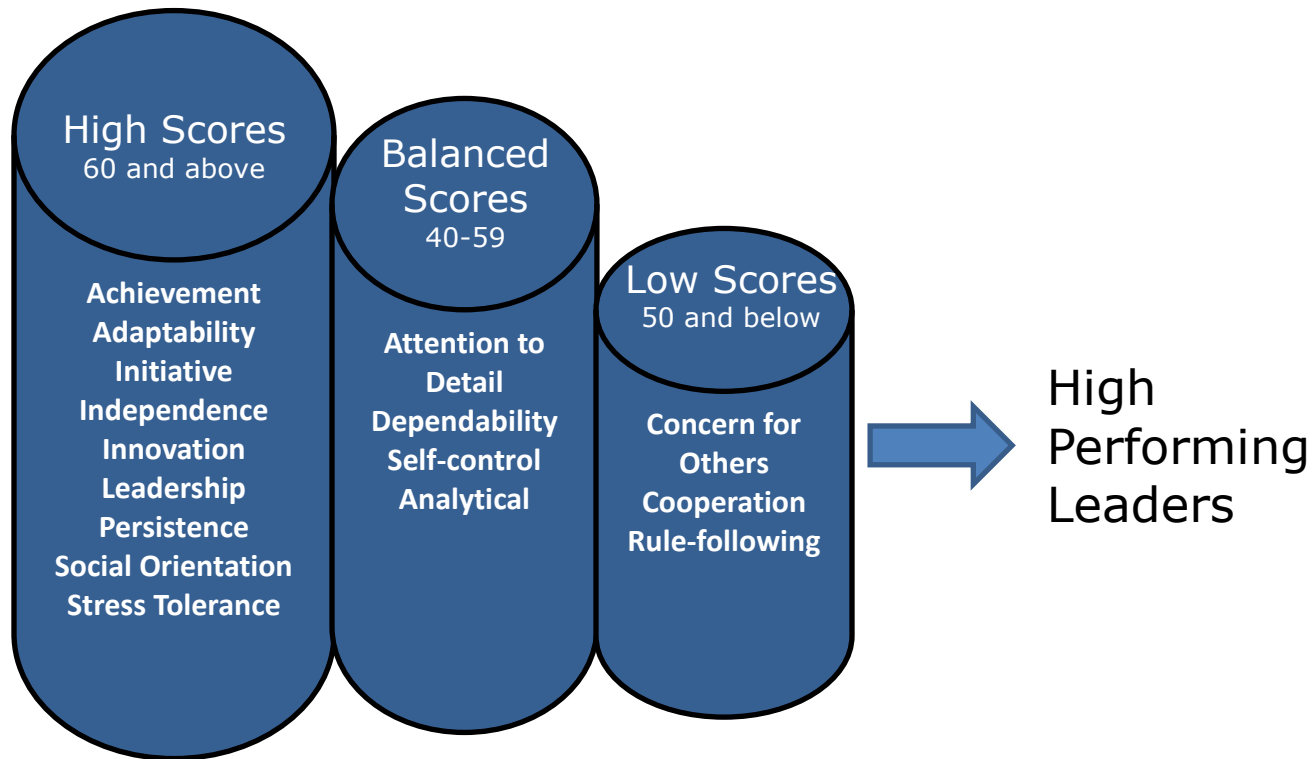
Scoring of the work styles is based on a 0-100 scale, with a score of 0 indicating a highly unlikely response to a particular set of behaviors and a score of 100 indicating a highly likely response to a particular set of behaviors. Participants' responses are then calculated based upon the norms determined for their individual professional roles. Norms for the WPI can be viewed on the Pearson website www.pearsoned.com. Dependent upon the identified norms of each style, the participant receives a score indicating their likelihood of demonstrating the behaviors consistent with a particular work style.

Style	Style Behaviors
Achievement	How likely is the individual to establish and maintain challenging goals, and how likely is the individual to exhibit effort to demonstrate mastery of a given task.
Persistence	How likely is the individual to work at a given task or assignment before conceding
Initiative	How likely is the individual to take on responsibilities without being asked, take on more challenging responsibilities, and/or volunteer for additional job responsibilities?
Leadership	How likely is the individual to act as a leader, attempt to take charge of situations or willingly offer opinions related to a particular task or discussion
Cooperation	How likely is the individual have a pleasant and outgoing personality, that facilitates collegiality, and a willingness to help others
Concern for others	How likely is the individual to be highly sensitive to the feelings of others and offer high levels of support?
Social Orientation	How likely is the individual to enjoy working with others and having colleagues as friends?
Independence	How likely is the individual to prefer the freedom to guide themselves and develop their own ways of doing things, and can deal effectively with ambiguity.
Self-Control	How likely is the individual to maintain composure, control, anger, and avoid aggressive behavior even in very difficult situations.
Stress Tolerance	How likely is the individual to accept criticism well, and remain calm even when facing high pressure or stress imposed by other people or circumstances
Adaptability	How much does this individual enjoy and look forward to change and variety in the workplace.

Dependability	How likely is the individual to consistently fulfill job and work obligations
Attention to Detail	How much does the individual enjoy and excel at tasks requiring a strong focus on detail and a need for thoroughness.
Rule Following	How likely is the individual to demonstrate strict adherence to rules and regulations, will "do things by the book"
Innovation	How much does this individual enjoy producing new or creative ideas for addressing work related issues or problems.
Analytical	How much does this individual enjoy analyzing complex issues in depth and using logic to address work related issues and problems.

Kirtman working with a research team from Pearson Publishing identified the preferred scoring range for high performing Principals. This is the only educational normed leadership assessment in education today.

The scoring ranges are used to help Principals and other educational leaders identify areas of strength and improvement for their leadership development. Kirtman's work with district and school leadership teams is also used for team development and leadership capacity building.

High Scores
60 and above

Achievement
Adaptability
Initiative
Independence
Innovation
Leadership
Persistence
Social Orientation
Stress Tolerance

Balanced Scores
40-59

Attention to Detail
Dependability
Self-control
Analytical

Low Scores
50 and below

Concern for Others
Cooperation
Rule-following

High Performing Leaders

Comparative research findings of the top 10% of Principals indicate the following traits on the WPI.

The research showed that High Performing Principals score 60 and above on several areas. No leader is excellent at everything and their circumstances

must be reviewed and analyzed to determine why certain score might be legitimately lower than desired. Scores in the balanced area need to be carefully analyzed for each person. Generally leaders need to be less focused on detail and more focused on strategic thinking. However, positions such as Assistant Principals and Special Education leaders may warrant higher scores.

The data on low scores is relatively definitive. Consistently, leaders who are lower on rule following perform higher than overly compliant leaders. It is also clear that educational leaders that are very high in cooperation and concern for others can struggle proving direct feedback on performance to staff, which often compromises results. Of course, if one scores very low on cooperation and concern for others in education where scores tend to be very high there can be a problem in building a team and strong relationship necessary for successful change efforts.

How the WPI scores relate to Kirtman's Seven Competencies

The term competence defines an individual's ability to perform, possess the knowledge about, and carry out a set of expectations and performances relating to a specific task or occupation (*Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Retrieved July 28, 2015, from Dictionary.com website: http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/competence). Often, the word competence is used interchangeably with the word competency. Competency defines a set of observable behaviors that support an individual's ability to complete a specified task (LeDeist & Winterton, 2005).

Kirtman's (2014) Seven Competencies are based upon his data from several leadership self-assessments, and his observations of leaders in action for over thirty years. The seven competencies delineate the traits, characteristics, values and behaviors of leaders who can focus on their own improvement, build capacity in others, and focus outwardly on the future trends in education. The seven competencies connections to the WPI indicators are as follows:

Competency	Description of Competency	Associated WPI Indicators
Challenges the Status Quo	A leader who delegates compliance tasks to others, who can challenge common practices and procedures if he or she feels it is impeding progress, who takes risks, who looks for innovative ideas to create sustainable change, and who is willing to break the rules and regulations if he or she feels that it will elicit positive results	Persistence Innovation Independence Low Detail Orientation Adaptability/Flexibility Initiative Low Rule Following
Builds Trust	A leader who is direct and honest	Stress Tolerance

through Clear Communications and Expectations	about what he or she expects for performance from employees, who follows through with their actions on all commitments, who ensures that their communication is clear both in written and verbal form, and who is comfortable dealing with conflict.	Leadership Dependability Concern for Others Initiative
Creates a Commonly Owned Plan for Success	A leader who creates written plans with input of all stakeholders, who ensures that there is plan buy-in, who monitors implementation of the plan, who adjusts the plan based on new data and clearly communicates the changes to the stakeholders, and who develops clear measurements for each goal of the plan.	Achievement Leadership Initiative
Focuses on Team over Self	A leader who hires the best people for the team, who commits the ongoing development of a high-performance leadership team, who builds a team environment, who seeks critical feedback, who empowers staff to make decisions and get results, and who supports the professional development of his or her staff.	Stress Tolerance Initiative Self-Control Achievement Concern for Others Analytical Thinking Cooperation Flexibility Innovation
Has a High Sense of Urgency for Change and Sustainable Results in Improving Student Achievement	A leader who quickly moves ahead with initiatives, who is decisive, who uses instructional data to support change, who builds a system to ensure sustainability, who sets a clear direction for the organization, and who can deal with and manage change.	Achievement Effort Persistence Initiative Leadership Cooperation Dependability
Commits to Continuous Improvement for Self	A leader who has a high sense of curiosity for new ways to achieve results, who is willing to change current practices for themselves and others, who listens to all team members input regarding change, who takes responsibility for their actions, and who has strong self-management and self-reflection skills.	Cooperation Social Orientation Concern for Others Stress Tolerance Initiative Leadership
Builds External Networks and Partnerships	A leader who sees his or her role outside the work environment and community walls, who understands that participation in external networks is essential for change and improvement, who engages in partnerships inside and outside an organization, and who understands the power of technology to expand and manage a resource network.	Social Orientation Achievement Leadership Initiative Concern for Others

A Journey of Self-Reflection, Growth, Development, and Change

The principal knew something had to change, the sense of urgency for results just doubled. She was extremely unsure of how this coaching process was going to help her change student test scores. How was her leadership style attached to the test scores? From a curriculum and instruction perspective this concept was not within her frame of reference, and it was not comfortable for her. Yet, she knew that she needed to at least try it, the superintendent required it. She began working to develop her leadership skills. She completed the Workplace Personality Inventory and her results scared her. Compared to other successful leaders her scores did not indicate a successful leader. The following graph indicates the principal's scores in comparison to Karen, a highly successful superintendent in a large urban district and Raymond a successful principal in an urban district similar to the principal's district.
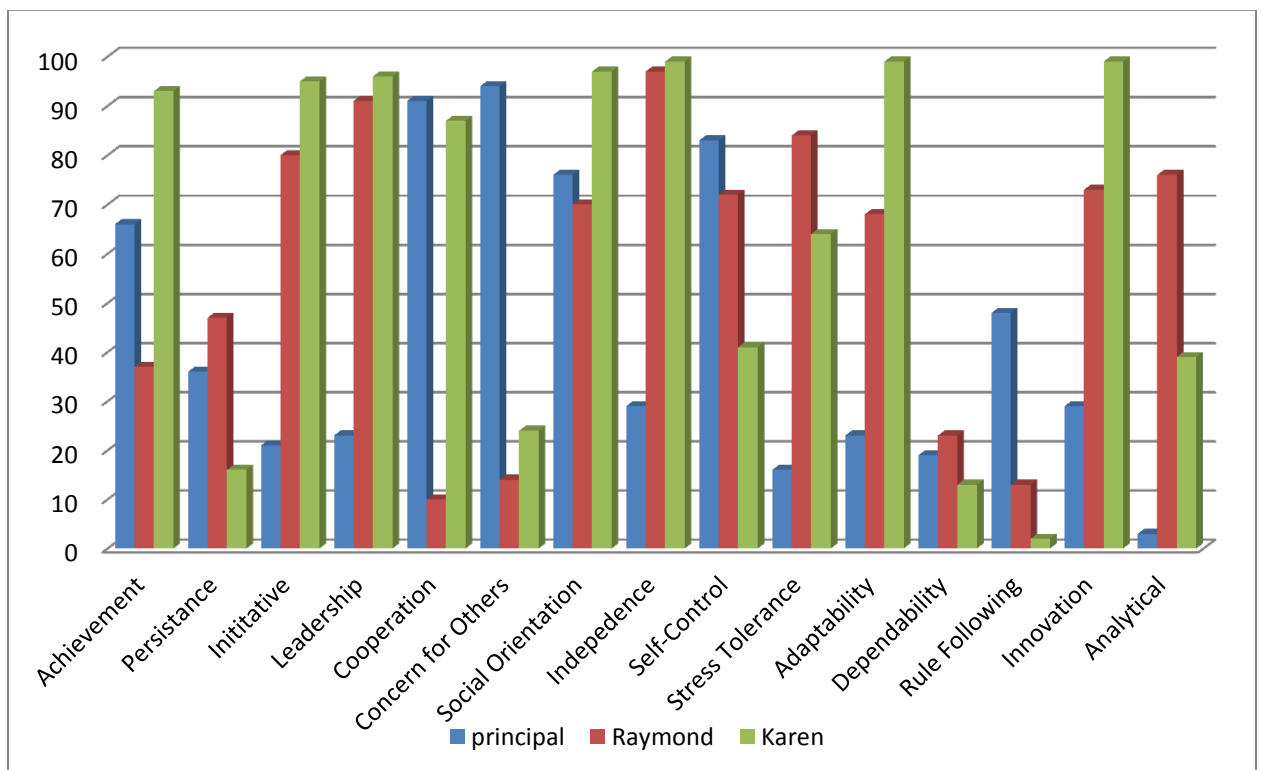
And so began her work. She began to work through identifying the traits that needed improvement on the WPI and the corresponding Seven Competencies to improve and develop her leadership style and create change. Over the course of the next year several things began to change for the principal. She worked with the superintendent to make significant staffing changes; the Department

of Education data highlighted a 33% change in staff. The principal reports that some of these staff changes were voluntary, while others were the result of her requesting that particular staff be removed from the building as they were seen as barriers to this process.

In the beginning of the 2012-2013 school year, the principal acknowledged to her staff her areas for improvement and her strengths. She demonstrated ownership of the previous year's failures, and became more transparent to staff on decision making and communications. She slowly worked through changing a culture of isolation into a culture of collaboration. She worked to empower teachers to make suggestions and participate more actively in planning. The principal recalls a particular teacher, who had initially been very resistant to any of the principal's initiatives and often sabotaged her plans, spoke up at a faculty meeting with a suggestion of how to get teachers to become more involved. This teacher had recently been with her daughter to a college fair where individuals could sign up to participate in different community activities. This teacher suggested that the principal set up sign-up sheets with team or committee descriptions and allow teachers to choose what teams or committees they wanted to participate in. She implemented this teacher's suggestion and teacher participation skyrocketed. Teachers were working as units, developing plans within their committees, and then presenting them to the principal. The teachers began to show that they wanted to be active participants in their school's success, the principal distributed her leadership to the leadership of her teachers and great changes occurred.

It is important to note, that while the Seven Competencies are numbered they are not meant to be followed in a linear manner. Certain competencies may be addressed before other competencies dependent upon an individual's desired change results. Additionally, some applications combine to address more than one competency at a time. The competencies are meant as a guideline for leaders to refer to as they work through the change process.

Competency 1: Challenges the Status Quo

This competency is addressed first to highlight the sense of urgency to create change quickly. Too often change can be a long and tedious process, but in a situation like hers there was minimal time. Change needed to happen quickly. Change is often impeded by leaders trying to make individuals comfortable with the change. This is not to say that leaders need to change things in the first days or weeks, but it is something that cannot wait. Knowing when to push and pull to create change is essential, and challenging the status quo needs to

be incorporated into any change process. Kirtman found that most leaders were highly compliant to state, federal, and local mandates and practices. However, the most successful leaders were not compliant. It does not mean that these leaders did not put the success of their students first, but rather they developed alternative and more effective means of creating change. Challenging the established norms of a community is essential in creating change. If a community's norms are preventing change then the leader needs to challenge these norms and work to create ones that are more effective.

This was the case with this school. The principal's predecessor was a longtime leader in this school and her current school community was not used to an individual with her leadership style. There had been minimal directive leadership prior to the principal, and the teachers did not know how to work together. The teachers did not show initiative or an investment in change. This was the principal's first task. She needed to challenge the status quo of the elementary school. She needed to become more transparent and speak up for what she needed.

The principal began to challenge the status quo by asserting herself in hiring to make sure that the teachers who were hired were the best for her school. She also insisted that her new Assistant Principal matched her style and that their teamwork was seamless.

She moved some staff around to different grades based on their strengths and the needs of the students. She also met with each teacher who did not participate on any committees to motivate them to invest in the school's new direction. The practice before was to just accept and not challenge teachers who chose not to participate.

Competency Two: Builds Trust through Clear Communication and Expectations

Change cannot occur unless the individuals involved in the change trust the change agent. Kirtman found that effective leaders score high on a sense of urgency for change. If a leader is clear in what she is saying and consistent in her actions, trust seems to thrive. Additionally, a key area for building trust is clarification of performance expectations for the staff before actions are required. When staff is clear about their expectations to be successful, trust

begins to build over time. When a leader presents expectations, fulfills commitments, meets stated deadlines, and demonstrates that staff can count on her then trust naturally builds.

As the principal created a sense of urgency for change and began to establish expectations with her staff she began to gain their trust. One concern for the teachers the previous school year was the closing time of the building. She had not realized that the building was always open for staff until 6pm. When she first arrived she would close the building when she was set to leave for the day. Sometimes this was after 6pm and sometimes it was before. Staff was not happy with this change. Thus, in her opening faculty meeting the principal stated that the building would remain open every day until 6pm. Staff did not acknowledge the change, according to the principal, but she stopped hearing the scuttle in the hallways. She acknowledgement of the previous year's mistakes, increased availability and transparency to her staff resulted in staff becoming more vocal with their ideas and concerns, and approached her more frequently.

Her commitment to talking about her areas for growth on the WPI and the competencies showed the staff that she was working on her leadership skills and modeled what she expected for the improvement of their teaching. She also has several forums in the school to ask for input from staff and any and all initiatives in the school.

Competency Three: Creates a Commonly Owned Plan for Success

Successful leaders are data driven. However, with the massive amounts of data that enter schools daily, successful leaders know how to take this data and break it into smaller components to create an organized plan. While individuals need something in writing to understand a plan, these plans do not have to be long exhaustive documents that people stop reading after page three. Kirtman recommends creating skinny plans (Fullan). Skinny, sticky plans are short (2-3 pages) plans that are living and evolving documents. They are close and connected to day to day actions, and most importantly are designed for the implementers not the planners

The school improvement plan that was state driven and required by law was originally long and laborious. The leadership team felt it was not their plan. After one year the teacher leaders felt pride in the plan and that it was about success for the students and for the faculty.

Now the planning is done within the team. Previously the principal would work with her Assistant Principal on the plan and then present it to staff. The plan is now much more innovative. She previously felt there was no room for innovation since her school was underperforming and had to do whatever the state directed.

An example of innovation is a new program on response to intervention (RTI) for math that the teachers try two times per week. This is only being done in her school and has already showed results.

Competency Four: Focuses on the Team over Self

Teams are a high leverage aspect of cultural change. Leaders are only as successful as the teams they build. Teams are groups of leaders with a common purpose and set of goals who work to implement them and achieve results. Putting a group of people together just because they are willing to work together does not constitute a team. As a leader develops her leadership team she needs to be willing to self-reflect, be open for honest feedback, and most importantly demonstrate vulnerability.

This area was a challenge for the principal. In 2011, she did not have any teams that functioned as true teams. In fact, her teachers' scores on the seven competencies were as concerning as the principal's. The teachers' data indicated that they were not demonstrating the behaviors to work collaboratively and be a true team. (See table on page 19)

One key change that the principal made was to establish the leadership team as the central group that managed all other teams in the school. The leadership team reviewed the purpose of each team and made sure that they were tied to their school improvement plan. This focus decreased the number of meetings and decreased duplication because there was a process to monitor success. This central role empowered her leadership team to feel they were making a difference to school culture.

After the work on leadership, teams, and culture the team solved their own problems without the direction of the Principal and Assistant Principal. They showed courage in stating innovative solutions to age old problems.

Competency Five: Has a High Sense of Urgency for Change and Sustainable Results in Improving Student Achievement

As noted in the first competency, adults often have difficulty with change that occurs too quickly. However, a sense of urgency is not something that is meant to be crisis oriented; rather it is strategic and purposeful to prepare students to be successful in life. The world and our students are changing quickly, and education cannot slow down. It needs to remain as fast paced with its changes to accommodate the world's changes. While we often think of urgency as reactive, it is actually about moving initiatives forward without getting lost in the planning process. Successful leaders in this competency are decisive. They make decisions without trying to please the masses. Decisions are based on data and will change based upon data trends.

The sense of urgency was externally driven initially. Now the sense of urgency for sustainable change is owned by the administration and faculty. They originally felt the stigma of being a low performing school and the pain of hearing that people did not want to work in the school. Now they feel pride in their school and do not ever want to lose that feeling.

Her leadership team often raises concerns on follow through and timelines that help keep the school on track. The team helps the Principal and Assistant Principal with follow-up steps to allow both leaders to suspend more time coaching teachers.

An example of urgency for improvement in the school involves the use of the new ANET data used in the data meetings. Data was a source of defensiveness and now is embraced by the staff. The school also looks openly at the other schools and how they perform at grade levels. Since there is equity in resources in all schools the data indicates areas that need improvement in the school based on another school's success. This was a source of defensiveness before the culture changed.

Competency Six: Has a Commitment to Continuous Improvement for Self and Organization

Successful leaders embrace learning and improvement for themselves and their staff. If a leader understands that the journey to great leadership is constant and never fully obtained, he or she tends to be a high performer. The principal who feels she has learned to be a great leader from her education or experience and does not continue the learning process often slips back to lower performance. Great leaders must be curious about what they can learn from others to always get better at their craft. They must be open to change even if they have been successful in the past with tried-and-true practices. Building an environment of continuous improvement requires a lot of listening. (Kirtman and Fullan 2015)

The principal began her journey trying to follow instructional solutions to her school's problems. She is now a continuous learner and realizes that the internal work on self-reflection and changes directly improves external results.

She still has to work on improving her skills as a leader. She is concerned that her stress tolerance is too low and must find more balance in her life to maintain her strength and focus on continually improving her school.

Further evidence of the commitment to continuous improvement is the openness that teachers show to peer observations. The principal has also worked on her technology skills and now is attending forums to learn about new apps that can help her teachers and students.

Competency Seven: Build External Networks and Partnerships

A leader's ability to see the world as his or her network of support is a defining competency for today and in the future. A principal is not just the school's leader; he or she is also a part of a district group of principals and the network of principals in the state, country, and world. Forming networks of colleagues and contacts in education and other fields is a key to success for great leaders.
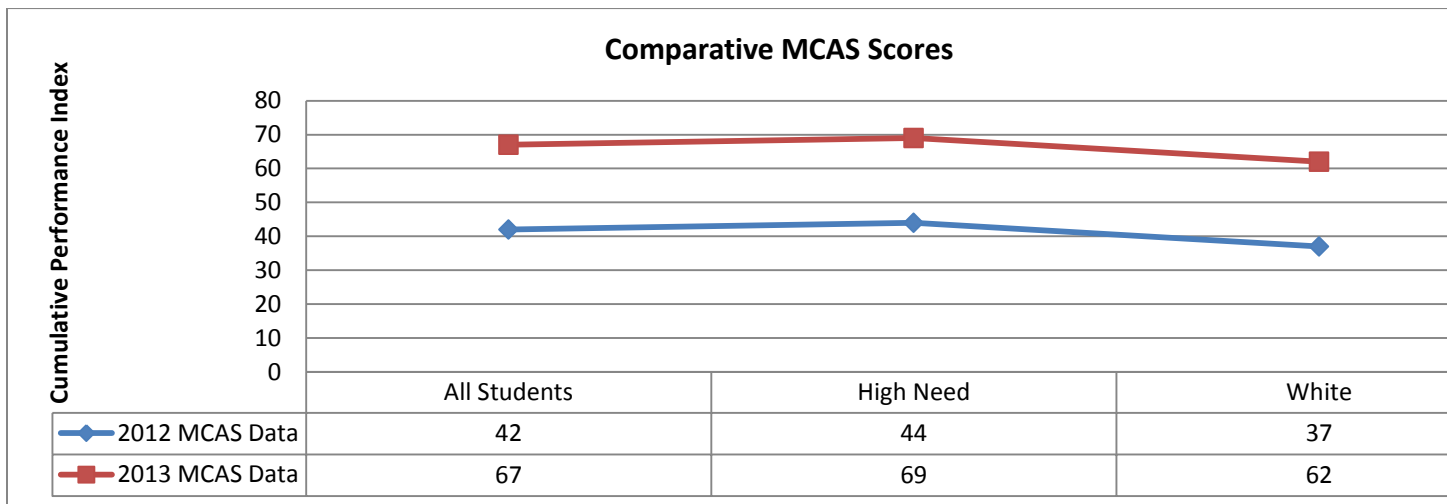
The principal has started to network outwardly on partnerships to improve her school's performance. Her new partnership with Baystate Reading Institute has already paid dividends for staff and students. She has also been part of a state-wide conference telling her story of success. Now that she feels less burdened

that she has to create change and that she has a team to support her, this area will be an area for increased emphasis.
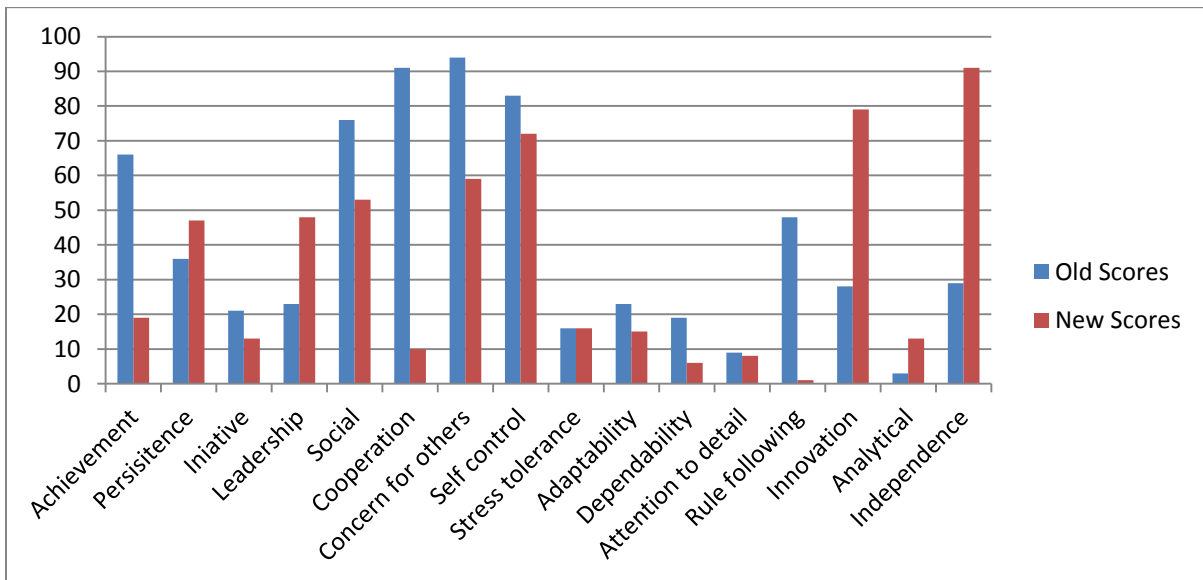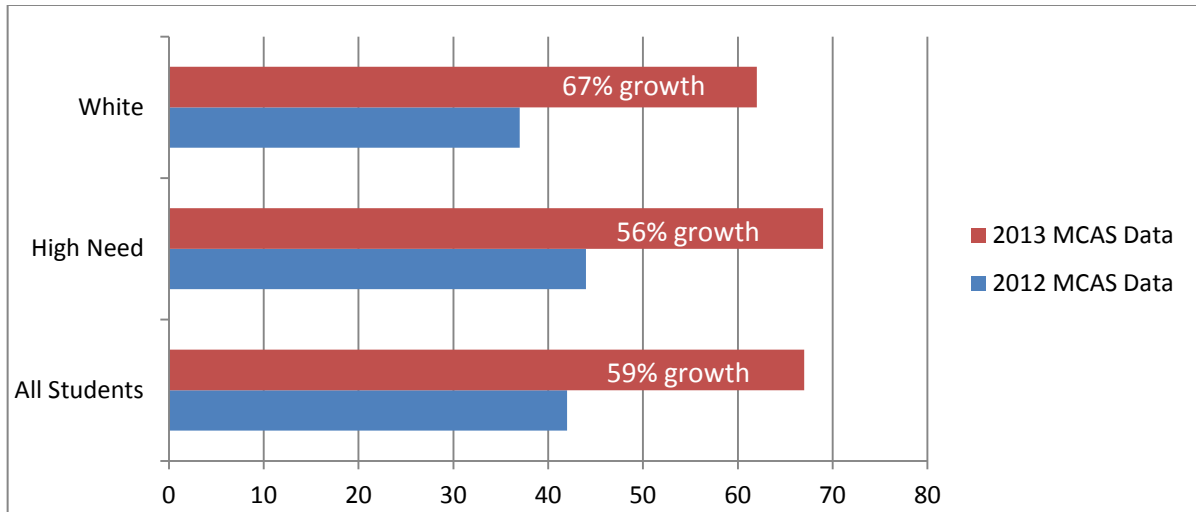
She is also reaching out to her colleagues locally and nationally through twitter and LinkedIn. These new ideas are often tested with her leadership team. One new idea from a colleague is the 1:1 text to parents on key issues in schools. She is also active in the (National Institute on School Leadership) NISL program, SRI and other urban education networks.

A Change in Culture Creates a Change in Student Achievement

The principal anxiously awaited the following school year's MCAS data. When she finally received the results at the end of the summer of 2013 she was astounded with the changes. <mark>Her school had an average of 60% growth in student achievement.</mark>

Comparative MCAS Scores

	All Students	High Need	White
2012 MCAS Data	42	44	37
2013 MCAS Data	67	69	62

(Cumulative Performance Index)

Comparative growth percentiles indicated the following:

Bar chart comparing 2012 MCAS Data (blue) and 2013 MCAS Data (red) for White, High Need, and All Students, showing 67% growth, 56% growth, and 59% growth respectively.

Bar chart comparing Old Scores (blue) and New Scores (red) across: Achievement, Persisitence, Iniative, Leadership, Social, Cooperation, Concern for others, Self control, Stress tolerance, Adaptability, Dependability, Attention to detail, Rule following, Innovation, Analytical, Independence.

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# Did her scores on the WPI and Seven Competencies Improve?

The principal's scores on her new WPI tells the remarkable story of her leadership change. The surprise drop in her achievement score demonstrates how a broad and deep improvement in leadership and capacity building in a school is more powerful than a narrow focus on achievement. Her achievement score went down. The research has showed that scores above 60 on achievement are an indicator of a high performing leader. This translates into a leader that is focused on the highest results for themselves and their students. In her case the high initial score indicated success. However, as her scores were analyzed with her coach the success for achievment was too based on her sigular performance. She was always a high performer on achievment individually as an instructional coach. Her initial focus as a principal was to continue her focus on curriculum which served her well as an instructional coach.

However, through her work with her coach she realized that her new role as a Principal was less about individual performance and more about building acheivment in others. Therefore, she focused on broadening her leadership behaviors in line with the high performing principals. To broaden her leadership and to build others leadership skills she reviewed her WPI results. Through this coaching effort she incresased her leadership work and improved her results on becoming more independent, persistant, more direct with teachers on performance issues (lower cooperation and concern for others) are more in line with high performers), and lowered her focus on rules and compliance. Now she was building her team's ability to lead not just relying on her own leadership. This is evidenced by her decrease in dependability, detail, and rule following (48-1) which are all indicators of more focus on delegation and team building. Her independence increased from 28-91 and her leadership score moved from 21-48 which demonstrated that she was more confident in her new role as a capacity building leader. The principal was now spending more time analyzing data and focusing on innovation (28-78).

Her leadership team designated as an instructional leadership team by the state was now a true team. They did not even know what an instructional leadership team was supposed to do when the leadership work began. The team thought they were just supposed to attend meetings to hear about the schools initiatives and status.

The graph below shows how the principal's scores on the seven competencies all increased significantly. She now understands that leadership is the key to improving student achievement.
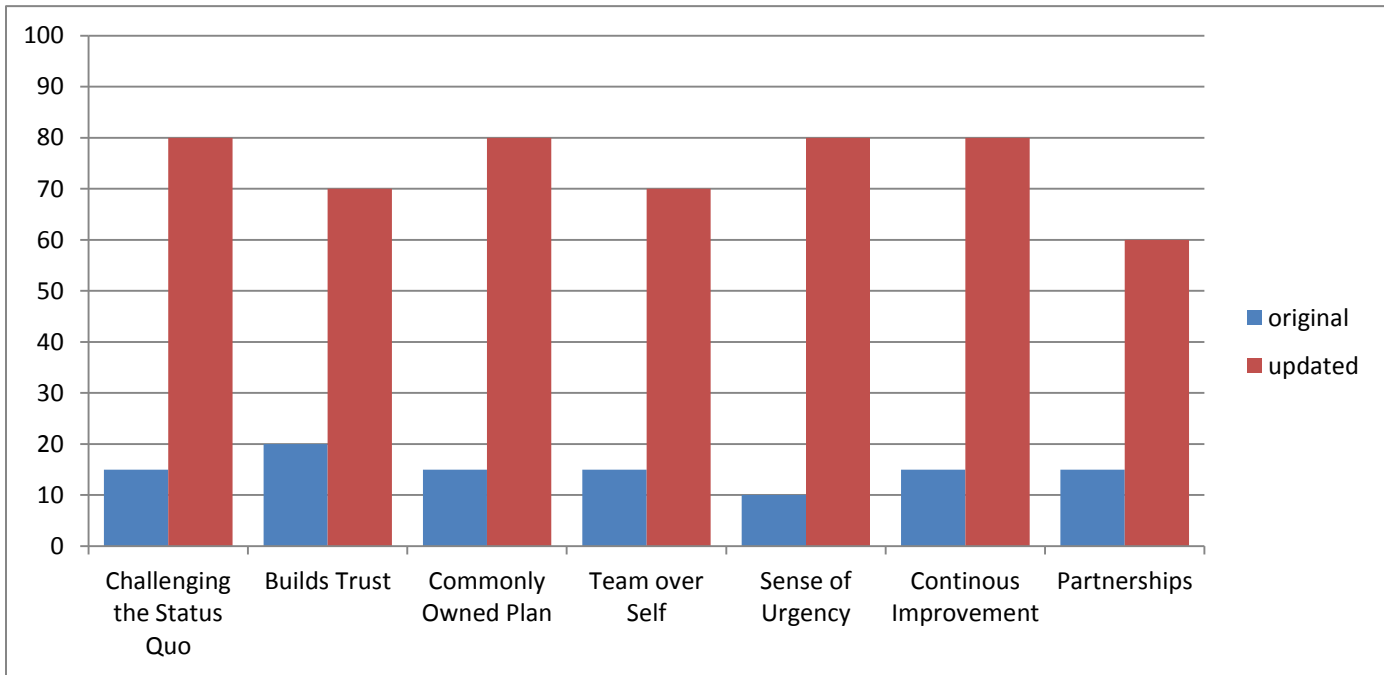
Did the leadership team's scores improve?

The WPI scores of the leadership team (Assistant Principal and Nine (9) teacher leaders) were not strong from a leadership point of view. Since the inventory assesses behaviors not skills, it was understandable that the members on the team were not showing leadership behavior. In fact, one teacher who was considered to be one of the best teachers in the school showed very low scores on key traits for leadership. The teacher in front of her colleagues stated that the scores were accurate. She continued by saying that she had shut down her leadership skills with the stress of the job, the constant and numerous initiates and requirements by the state and was just trying to survive. Later on through the work on developing the leadership team she used her great skills and talent to help improve the student achievement for her grade level. The improvement

in the leadership team can be shown in their increase in the scores on the 7 competencies.
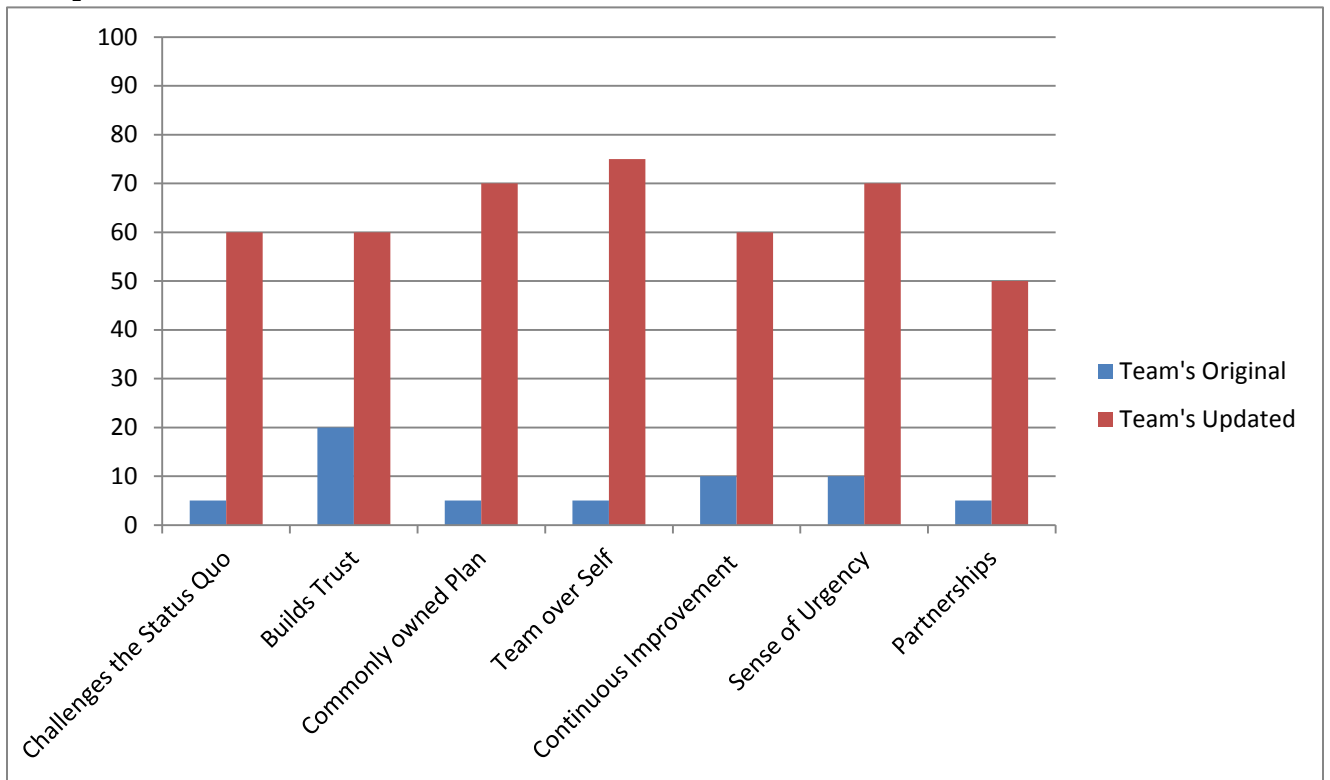
What is next for the principal, her team and the School?

The principal realizes there are still areas for improvement in her leadership style and behaviors. She understands that this is a continuous process and a marathon not a sprint. She still has a low score on stress tolerance, which indicates that the pressure of the job is still an area of improvement.

The WPI and the competencies have been used to improve the leadership of the instructional coaches in the school with great success. Now it is time to focus on improving teamwork at the grade levels and in the key subject areas.

Conclusion

The principal's leadership improvement story and her team and teachers leadership capacity building has been the catalyst for sustained improvement in student achievement. It is important for policy makers and instructional organizations to realize that instructional leadership and capacity building leadership are interdependent. Put them together and the students will benefit both short term and throughout their lives.

Her story can also serve as a case study for principals to use to improve their school's performance. Professional development programs can provide the data and facts about the principal and her school and then ask the following questions.

- What do you believe are the key problems that the principal must address to improve her school's performance?
- How would you begin to address her leadership challenges?
- How could she begin to develop her leadership team and increase the sense of urgency for her team and staff?
- How would you divide your time as a Principal to improve the school's results?

Once the group has addressed the questions ask them to read the case study.

After reading the case study as the group.

What would you do differently now that you have read the case study?

Associated Publications by Lyle Kirtman, CEO Future Management Systems:

1. *Leadership and Teams: The Missing Piece of the Education Reform Puzzle (Pearson Publishing)*
2. Harvard Education Letter Article: *Four Steps to Building Leadership Capacity*
3. Contributing author – Smart Cities that Work for Everyone: Seven Keys to Education and Employment (Innovation Leadership)
4. *Leadership: Key Competencies for Whole -System Chance* (co-authored with Michael Fullan – Solution Tree)