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Recommendation Nine

Leadership

The Organizational Structures That Support Rigor

[The highest level] leaders are a study in duality: modest and willful; humble and fearless. To quickly grasp this concept, think of United States President Abraham Lincoln . . . who never let his ego get in the way of his primary ambition for the larger cause of an enduring great nation.¹

Recommendation 9 — Leadership. Foster distributed leadership, collaborative decision making, and regular data analysis to realize and sustain a middle grades vision for focused learning and continual improvement.

Leadership is one of the Recommendations in the Focus Area on [Organizational Structures and Processes](#).

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Footnote

¹Jim Collins, *Good to Great*. New York: Harper Business, 2001, p. 22.

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California's Distributed Educational Leadership Structure

Research on successful school improvement efforts indicates that leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to student learning at school.¹

In California, one and one-half million middle grades students (grades six through eight) constitute nearly 24 percent of the total K-12 public school population. Focused leadership will help prepare these middle school students to gain the academic content and skills they need at a critical juncture in their educational careers. Those who attain grade-level proficiency have the skills to progress to greater academic rigor in high school. Those who do not engage in learning middle grades standards through the help of caring adults are often at risk for dropping out in ninth grade—if they enter high school at all.

It is up to leaders at every level of the educational system to give middle grades students the resources needed to become proficient in grade-level standards. However, political pressure for improved preparation in elementary schools and for graduation preparation in high schools often causes middle grades education to be overlooked. Nonetheless, the research on the need for adequate funding is clear. For example, a 2007 study by the American Institutes for Research (AIR), [Efficiency and Adequacy in California School Finance: A Professional Judgment Approach](#) (PDF; Outside Source) found that "...more resources are necessary for average schools to meet state standards."²

In effective schools, districts, and county offices, the overarching question educational leaders ask about every new program, idea, or decision is, "How does this decision help *every student* (including those who struggle) to succeed?" Leaders move programs that do not meet the vision and mission to a lower priority in decision making. In addition, these leaders model what research shows to be an effective strategy: they work in teams to form a "professional learning community" that focuses on student success and the factors that improve achievement for all students.



Information and Resources

Report Reveals the Effect of Leadership on Student Achievement

The largest in-depth study of school leadership to date, this report from the Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement gathers and analyzes quantitative data confirming that education leadership has a strong impact on student achievement, as measured by student test scores. [Learning from Leadership Project: Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning](#) (PDF; Outside Source) discusses what school leaders do to improve student achievement, how districts foster school improvement, and the relationship between state educational leaders

and districts.

Leaders in many segments of society are responsible for supporting middle grades education to ensure that students are prepared to enter high school. Key players in education include the county offices of education, districts, local governing boards, school administrators, and teachers. Discussion about their leadership roles in improving middle grades education follows.

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¹State Policy Framework to Develop Highly Qualified Educational Administrators (PDF; Outside Source). Washington, D.C.: The Council of Chief State School Officers, 2005, 31.

²[Efficiency and Adequacy in California School Finance: A Professional Judgment Approach](#), (PDF; Outside Source). Stanford, CA: American Institutes for Research, March 2007, 2.

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County Leadership

The county offices of education throughout California serve a unique role in supporting school improvement efforts. County offices of education (COEs) provide services and approve budgets and expenditures for school districts, as well as providing direct services to students with particular needs. Typically, services for middle schools fall under one of many umbrella programs such as technology, after-school, or special education.

Among other things, the county offices of education may coordinate the following areas for districts in their regions:

- Professional development
- Curriculum expertise
- [Program Improvement](#). County teams often serve as the School Assistance and Intervention teams. In this role, they help schools and districts in program improvement to use the [Academic Program Survey](#) (DOC; 669KB; 39pp.) to assess their progress toward implementing all of the [Essential Program Components](#).
- Policy Support
- Resources (for example, programs for special education, and juvenile offender programs)



In the Spotlight

Los Angeles County Office of Education and the Wiseburn Elementary School District

In partnership with the Los Angeles County Office of Education, Wiseburn District staff members facilitated faculty discussions to design a writing plan for the year. Faculty conversations also focused on how to calibrate the scoring of those writing samples so teachers would know how well students were demonstrating their knowledge of grade-level standards and how well they were prepared for the next grade level. The districtwide teacher teams developed a writing document to demonstrate what students should be able to do in each grade level, how they will demonstrate it, the support mechanisms that will be in place to assist them, and the assessments that will measure success. The teams developed anchor papers to show what students' work would demonstrate. They also identified instructional steps to help students develop needed skills. At the end of the conversations, all teachers were on the same page about expectations, instructional methods, and assessments to increase student writing ability.

- [Los Angeles County Office of Education DataQuest Profile](#)
- [Los Angeles County Office of Education](#) (Outside Source)
- [Wiseburn Data Quest School District Profile](#)
- [Wiseburn Elementary School District](#) (Outside Source)



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Regional Leadership—Creating a Culture of Learning

California middle grades educators have access to assistance from a wide variety of regional support systems that provide conferences, training, legislative advocacy, and coaching. Although these groups often collaborate with the California Department of Education (CDE) (and have been partners in the development of many of the ideas in *Taking Center Stage—Act II*), their positions do not always align with those of the CDE. For that reason, any policy decisions made by these groups should be cross-referenced with the *Education Code* and State Board of Education policies.

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The CMGA is a statewide partnership organization dedicated to promoting middle grades excellence in California. The goals of the partner organization are to:

- Influence middle grade policy and inform decision making.
- Encourage California-based research on middle grades.
- Disseminate research.
- Leverage resources across organizations.
- Increase public awareness and engagement regarding middle-level education.
- Foster professional learning communities.
- Collaborate on joint projects.

Member organizations in the CMGA partnership include the following:

- [Advancement Via Individual Determination \(AVID\)](#) (Outside Source)
- [Association of California School Administrators \(ACSA\)](#) (Outside Source)
- Curriculum and Instruction Steering Committee (CISC) Secondary Subcommittee of the [California County Superintendents Educational Services Association \(CCSESA\)](#) (Outside Source)
- [California Department of Education \(CDE\)](#)
- [California League of Middle Schools \(CLMS\)](#) (Outside Source)
- [California Middle Grades Partnership Network \(CMGPN\)](#)
- [California School Boards Association \(CSBA\)](#) (Outside Source)
- [California Teachers Association](#) (Outside Source)
- [Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs \(GEAR UP\)](#) (Outside Source)
- [California Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Program](#) (Outside Source)

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The [California Middle Grades Partnership Network](#) (CMGPN) is a collaborative, principal-to-principal and school-to-school network sponsored by the California Department of Education. In 2006 there were 25 networks (320 schools) actively participating in CMGPN. Each local network meets several times during the year so principals and site administrators can support, visit, mentor, and assist one another with issues and challenges specific to middle grades education and improve student achievement.

The goal of the CMGPN is to help middle schools share expertise, resources, and program ideas so they:

- Implement the California Department of Education's (CDE) 12 Recommendations for Middle Grades Success contained in *Taking Center Stage—Act II*
- Improve student achievement through standards-based education
- Promote research and knowledge about young adolescent learning
- Initiate collegial dialogue across school and district boundaries
- Share the successes and challenges of managing, operating, and teaching in a middle school
- Pool and share resources to leverage others who affect middle grades education
- Serve as a resource to the school, the community, and other education stakeholders, and
- Prepare students for the rigors of high school and beyond.

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The [California League of Middle Schools](#) (Outside Source) is a founding partner in the California Middle Grades Alliance and hosts the [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage program](#) (Outside Source) on its Web site. An inclusive nonprofit association for middle grades educators, the CLMS organizational structure draws strength from regional grassroots participation. There are 11 geographic regions in California, and CLMS has a volunteer panel in each region that is led by one CLMS trustee. Regional panel members serve on statewide committees to lend direction to the organization, select the regional CLMS Educator of the Year, and enjoy all the networking, support and growth opportunities of a professional association chapter. Regional panel members also help run CLMS' professional development events, which are held each year across the state. As a nonprofit organization, CLMS is volunteer-driven and values the expertise and energy of the teachers, administrators, professors, and others who contribute at the regional panel level.

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Association of California School Administrators —Middle Grades Council

The [Association of California School Administrators \(ACSA\)](#) (Outside Source) appoints members to represent key issues in California education. The ACSA [Middle Grades Education Council](#) (Outside Source) is a partner in the CMGA. The purpose of the ACSA Middle Grades Education Council is to:

- Identify and study issues relating to middle grades administrators and to recommend practices and policies that will lead to high-quality programs for young adolescents.
- Strengthen a network for communication among middle grade administrators.
- Plan, provide, and encourage professional development programs for middle grades administrators.
- Assist in the recruitment of middle grades administrators as ACSA members.
- Encourage interaction and support between ACSA, the national association of secondary school principals, the California Department of Education, and other organizations and agencies promoting the interests of middle grades education.
- Recommend practices and policies to the ACSA board and to perform tasks requested by the board.

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California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA)

The [California County Superintendents Educational Services Association \(CCSESA\)](#) (Outside Source) is an organization designed to assist the 58 California county superintendents and their staff in providing services to their local districts and schools. The CCSESA has organized a statewide network of curriculum, instruction, intervention, and educational subcommittees that coordinate services to counties, districts, and schools. The Curriculum and Instruction Steering Committee (CISC) has a subcommittee on secondary education that focuses on supporting the needs of middle and high school educators throughout California.

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Regional System of District and School Support (RSDSS)

The Regional System of District and School Support (RSDSS) is a component of California's [Statewide System of School Support \(S4\)](#). The RSDSS responds to state and federal requirements for a support system to increase the opportunity for all students to meet academic content and achievement standards. However, services to schools and districts in Program Improvement (PI) are a priority. The statewide system consists of regional consortia of county offices of education aligned to the 11 regions established by the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA). Federal funding supports the RSDSS.

Related Links

- [Contacts for Regional Support](#), California Department of Education.
- [Contacts for Regional Support](#) (DOC; 103KB; 2p.), California Department of Education. This document includes color-coded map of the 11 regions.
- [Program Improvement](#), California Department of Education.

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School District Leadership

"In the high-achieving districts, the board/superintendent team and school personnel consistently expressed an "elevating" view of students. Students were viewed as emerging and flexible and the school's job was seen as releasing each student's potential."¹

District offices and local governing boards oversee the operations of schools in their jurisdiction and are responsible for balancing resources between schools. "Although the California public schools system is a statewide system under the policy direction of the Legislature, more local responsibility is legally granted to school districts and county education officials than to other government entities and officials . . . laws relating to local schools occupy a unique constitutional position. Under this 'permissive education code,' as long as statutes do not prohibit the program or activity and it is consistent with the purposes for which school districts are established, it can be undertaken. In other words, it is constitutionally unnecessary to enact any statutes that merely allow or permit school districts, at their discretion, to do something."²

Research has shown that specific district conditions influence student learning. Those conditions include, for example, district culture, the provision of professional development opportunities for teachers, and policies governing the leadership succession. Districts also contribute to student learning by ensuring alignment among goals, programs, policies, and professional development.³

According to the Springboard Schools research on "H2" schools (those that are both high performing and high poverty), "High performing middle grades schools in California tend to be clustered in particular school districts, and the district's role in alignment appears to be an important reason for this fact. Districts can play a key role in creating the structures that support greater K-12 articulation and alignment in general."⁴

Related Links

- [CalEdFacts](#) is a compilation of statistics and information on a variety of issues concerning education in California, California Department of Education.
- [Characteristics of Improved School Districts: Themes from Research](#) (PDF; Outside Source), G. Sue Shannon and Peter Bylsma. Olympic, Washington: Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2004.

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¹ [Lighthouse Study: School Boards and Student Achievement](#) (Outside Source), Iowa Association of School Boards Compass, Vol. V, No. 2 (Fall 2000), 4.

²

“Local Control,” from *the 2006 Fact Book: Handbook of Education Information* (PDF; 856KB; pp.137). Sacramento: California Department of Education, 2005, 17.

³ Kenneth Leithwood, Karen Seashore Louis, Stephen Anderson, and Kyla Wahlstrom, [Learning from Leadership Project: Executive Summary—How leadership influences student learning](#) (PDF; Outside Source). University of Minnesota: Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, for the Wallace Foundation, 2004, 11.

⁴ [Balancing Act: Best Practices in the Middle Grades \(Executive Summary\)](#) (PDF; Outside Source). San Francisco: Springboard Schools, Spring 2007, 4.

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Local Governing Boards

Local governing board members play a critical role in ensuring that all students have access to excellent instruction using State Board of Education-adopted content standards and instructional materials. They are also responsible for overseeing the progress of schools in closing the achievement gap. Specifically, they can require, monitor, and reward practices that will help ensure that middle grades students are prepared to succeed in high school and beyond. The following are some of the key issues that school board members can oversee to improve middle grades achievement:

- Articulation agreements. Boards can develop policies to ensure practices that provide time for elementary, middle, and high school teachers to meet together, align grade-level course work and materials to the content standards, and prepare sequenced common assessments that move students from one level to the next.
- Professional development opportunities. School board members can allocate time and resources to support professional learning opportunities that help middle grades team members learn how to teach standards-aligned materials in a way that engages the interests of young adolescents.
- Resource allocation. School board members can allocate resources to provide technology, facilities, counseling, and instructional materials needed so that middle grades students are prepared for success in high school.

As elected representatives of the community, local governing board members represent the educational interests of that community. According to the California School Boards Association's (CSBA's) [Professional Governance Standards](#) (PDF; Outside Source), effective school district boards:

1. Involve the community, parents, students, and staff in developing a common vision for the district focused on learning and achievement and responsive to the needs of all students.
2. Adopt, evaluate, and update policies consistent with the law and the district's vision and goals. The California School Boards Association (CSBA) offers [policy services](#) (Outside Source) to local governing board members.
3. Maintain accountability for student learning by adopting the district curriculum and monitoring student progress.
4. Hire and support the superintendent so that the vision, goals, and policies of the district can be implemented.
5. Conduct regular and timely evaluations of the superintendent based on the vision, goals, and performance of the district and ensure that the superintendent holds district personnel accountable.
6. Adopt a fiscally responsible budget based on the district's vision and goals and regularly monitor the fiscal health of the district.
7. Ensure that a safe and appropriate educational environment is provided to all students.
8. Establish a framework for the district's collective bargaining process and adopt responsible agreements.
9. Provide community leadership on educational issues and advocate on behalf of students and public education at the local, state, and federal levels.

Each year, the [California Middle Grades Alliance](#) (CMGA) recognizes outstanding leadership and commitment to California's middle grades. A middle school principal from each district nominated the 15 school boards honored in 2007; the district superintendent or another administrator within each district endorsed each nomination. Each year, the celebratory luncheon is held the day before the start of the Annual Conference of the [California League of Middle Schools](#) (Outside Source). Guests include superintendents, school board members, administrators, teachers, and key representatives from the California Middle Grades Alliance.

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Professional collaboration among board members

Effective local governing boards take time for regular learning and reflection about effective school and district practices. Meetings and policies articulate the district vision that all students can achieve. As well as making time for regular meetings with school staff members and attendance at [California School Boards Association](#) (CSBA) professional workshops and trainings, local governing board members can take time to reflect on their practices. The linked document, [Professional Considerations about the Middle Grades: School Board Members](#), provides a starting point for discussion.

Education Code (EC) sections 35160 through 35178.4 list the general power and duties of the school board. *EC* Section 35160 states that the board has the power to carry out any activity or program that is not in conflict with law and that section is generally cited as the board's governing role. Throughout the *EC* there are sections dealing with specific topics such as the board's selection of curriculum or evaluation of employees. The CSBA provides training for members on many of those topics.

Related Links

- [Effective Governance System](#) (Outside Source), California School Boards Association.
- [IASB's Lighthouse Study: School Boards and Student Achievement](#) (Outside Source), Iowa School Board, *Compass*, Vol. V, No. 2 (Fall 2000).
- [Policy Services](#) (Outside Source), California School Boards Association.
- [Professional Governance Standards](#) (Outside Source), California School Boards Association.
- [School Board Leadership—The role and function of California's school boards](#) (PDF; Outside Source), California School Boards Association.
- [Vision and Mission](#) (Outside Source), California School Boards Association.

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Local governing board support for aligning curriculum with the standards

Education Code Section 60119 requires local school boards to adopt an annual resolution on the sufficiency of instructional materials in the four core subject areas of reading/language arts, mathematics, science, and history-social science. Materials are to be aligned with the California content standards in these subjects. Local governing boards must also use their state funds to provide students with instructional materials that align with the California content standards in these subjects. Using state-adopted instructional materials, for kindergarten through grade eight, ensures that the instructional materials fully align with the California content standards.

Legislation requires local school boards to certify that instructional materials align with the California content standards. Standards maps are a publishers' tool for local educational agencies to use when evaluating instructional materials for alignment with content standards.

"In the high-achieving districts, school board members showed greater understanding and influence in . . . key areas for school renewal. They were knowledgeable about topics such as improvement goals, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and staff development. They were able to clearly describe the purposes and processes of school improvement initiatives and identify the board's role in supporting those initiatives."¹

Related Links

- [Curriculum and Instruction](#), California Department of Education.

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¹ [Lighthouse Study: School Boards and Student Achievement](#) (PDF; Outside Source) Iowa School Board Compass, Vol. V, No. 2 (Fall 2000), 4.

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Local governing board support for articulation

It is essential for school board members to encourage and require articulation among schools and grade levels throughout the district as well as with neighboring schools. Students will be learners who are more effective when their textbooks, materials, and lessons build from one year to the next. State-adopted instructional materials are an essential tool for building student knowledge in a sequential manner and a powerful asset in articulation efforts. Local governing boards can support the delivery of sequential instruction by providing the resources for professional development on instructional materials and state-adopted standards and frameworks for both teachers and administrators.



In the Spotlight

Rio Norte Junior High School, William S. Hart Union High School District
Vertical articulation groups meet to ensure that students learn from sequenced materials and assessments between one year and the next. In addition, teachers meet with peers from feeder elementary schools to explain how to prepare students for middle school rigor in English, math, social sciences, and science. For example, fifth- and sixth-grade teachers learn what they can do to lay the groundwork for seventh- and eighth-grade. Articulation allows teachers to count on the fact that students know terminology and concepts such as how to construct a five-paragraph essay.

- [Rio Norte Junior High DataQuest School Profile](#)
- [Rio Norte Junior High School](#) (Outside Source)

Some of the ways district governing boards can support articulation include the following:

- Allocate funds for articulation days and direct district staff to coordinate a system that allows cross-grade articulation among academic-area teachers.
- Develop a student data management system that allows for speedy transfer of student data and records when students move to new schools.



In the Spotlight

Long Beach Unified School District

To help schools ensure articulation of standards from one grade level to the next, the district developed a clear vision of what standards-based curriculum looks like at each grade level. This ensures that students encounter a high level of consistency in grade-level content even in communities with district boundaries that lack obvious feeder patterns from one grade level to the next

- [Long Beach Unified DataQuest District Profile](#)
- [Long Beach Unified School District](#) (Outside Source)

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Fiscal support from the local governing board

According to the [National Middle School Association](#) (Outside Source), only about 15 percent of Title I funds go to the middle grades.¹ However, Title I funds are only one source of money for schools, and it is essential for policymakers to ensure equitable resources for students in the middle grades so that they do not become dropout statistics in high school.

According to [Essential Program Component](#) (EPC) #9, school districts in program improvement (PI) and those wanting to improve student achievement must provide fiscal support to provide [facilities](#), [instructional materials](#), [training](#), and [technology](#) so that each school has the resources needed to close the achievement gap. "As school board members set the policy and direction for school districts, they support the district's goals by providing the resources needed to achieve those goals. It is through their budgetary decisions that teachers are provided with the resources necessary to implement programs and meet students' needs."²

Effective local governing boards give schools time to use a program long enough to see if it works. The board approves a district budget that provides funding and resources to support:

- Ongoing teacher preparation (see Recommendation 10, [Professional Learning](#))
- Middle school structures such as adequate staffing in academics, including the library-media center, interventions, and co-curricular offerings
- Flexible scheduling to extend learning time as necessary to support student success (see Recommendation 3, [Time](#))
- Longer school days and years to help students catch up to grade-level achievement
- Data analysis (Refer to the section in Recommendation 2, [Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention](#)): Douglas Reeves developed the "leadership for learning framework" that shows how successful educational leaders use data to isolate school factors that work from those that do not³
- Academic language development (literacy councils/schoolwide literacy practices—refer to the section in Recommendation 1, [Rigor](#))
- Student health and safety (see Recommendation 8, [Safety, Health, and Resiliency](#)).



In the Spotlight

San Francisco Unified School District

The district's Students and Teachers Achieving Results! (STAR—not affiliated with the statewide testing program) initiative provides school-focused interventions to underperforming schools. The three categories of interventions are (1) additional school site personnel to support instructional improvement, (2) additional district support for instructional improvement (e.g., technical assistance), and (3) additional resources to address key areas of need (e.g., materials and funding). The district's

STAR Web page includes program overviews, data, and resources related to the program.

- [San Francisco Unified DataQuest District Profile](#)
- [San Francisco Unified School District](#) (Outside Source)

The following chart provides data about California's rank nationally concerning resources for education:

New Data on California Schools from EdSource

Reprinted with permission. Copyright EdSource 2007. [EdSource](#) (Outside Source)

Topic	California Rank in U.S.	California Average	U.S. Average
Teachers' salaries (2004-05)	2	\$57,876	\$47,674
Expenditures per pupil (2004-05)	29	\$7,942	\$8,661
Per capita personal income (2003)	13	\$33,389	\$31,487
Total ratio: certified staff to 1,000 students (2004-05)	49	51.8	70.2
School principals and assistant principals	49	2.2	3.4
Teachers	49	48.4+	63.6+
Guidance counselors	51	1.0	2.1
Librarians	51	0.2	1.1

Related Links

- [Ed-Data: Fiscal, Demographic, and Performance Data on California's K-12 Schools](#) (Outside Source)
- [EdSource: Clarifying Complex Education Issues](#) (Outside Source)
- [Education Budget](#), California Department of Education.

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¹ [NCLB Recommendations—National Middle School Association](#) (PDF; Outside Source), n.d.,

2.

² Luan Rivera, President, California School Boards Association, in a presentation at the California League of Middle Schools conference, March 8, 2006.

³ Douglas B. Reeves, *The Learning Leader: How to Focus School Improvement for Better Results*. Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2006.

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Compliance with the Williams case

The [Williams case](#) requires every California school to provide all students with sufficient instructional materials, safe schools, and quality teachers. Among other things, learning leaders make sure to provide each pupil with:

- State-adopted instructional materials in the four core subjects (English-language arts, mathematics, history/social science, and science)
- Highly qualified teachers
- [Safe schools](#) (refer to Recommendation 8, [Safety, Resilience, and Health](#), for more details.)

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Support for facilities that are safe and attractive

Although not all school boards have a chance to design a developmentally responsive middle school or to redesign or renovate an existing school, those who can emphasize:

- Layouts that facilitate easy supervision (for safety) of all areas
- Small learning community areas that facilitate team teaching and professional learning community collaboration
- Technology supports such as projectors, electronic whiteboards, and computer labs
- Areas for the visual and performing arts
- Areas for physical education
- Classrooms that allow for math projects and science labs
- A library/media center where students can do research in an inviting setting with knowledgeable support personnel

“Successful examples of new school architecture, while varying in material and form, all emphasize the creation of sociable, enjoyable spaces . . . and the best school architecture can itself serve as an inspiring, educational tool.”¹

The schools listed below are designed to help the professional learning community focus on small learning communities and teaming:

- [John Glenn Middle School of International Studies](#) (PDF; Outside Source), [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage](#) (Outside Source), Indio.
- [Silverado Middle School](#) (PDF; Outside Source), [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage](#) (Outside Source), Placer County.
- [Rio Norte Junior High School](#) (Outside Source), William S. Hart Union High School District, Santa Clarita.

The schools listed below are designed to promote teaming and articulation:

- [Toby Johnson Middle School](#) (PDF; Outside Source), [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage](#), (Outside Source), Elk Grove.
- [Reyburn Intermediate School](#) (Outside Source), [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage](#), (Outside Source) Clovis.

Related Links

- [8 Strategies for Middle School Design](#) (Outside Source), August Battaglia and Robin Randall, *American School*, (October 2005).
- [Dollars & Sense II: Lessons from Good, Cost-Effective Small Schools](#) (PDF; Outside Source), Barbara Kent Lawrence and others. Cincinnati, Ohio: KnowledgeWorks Foundation, 2005.
- [Healthy Children Ready to Learn](#), California Department of Education.
- [School Nutrition . . . BY DESIGN: Report of the Advisory Committee on Nutrition Implementation Strategies](#) (PDF; 705KB; 45pp.), California Department of Education.

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¹ Jonathan Glancey, [A Classroom with a View](#) (Outside Source), The Guardian, June 20, 2006.

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Support for instructional technology

The district plays a powerful role in helping middle schools purchase and make good use of instructional technology. Although some teachers and principals are up-to-date on technology innovations, others feel overwhelmed and need professional help to keep track of new hardware and software that will improve instruction, student record-keeping, family connections, and data analysis. Local governing board members support instructional excellence by providing district technology specialists who can help schools with purchases and training on new hardware and software. (Refer to the later section on [Technology support for leaders.](#))

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Support for professional development

As overseers of the district vision, school board members are responsible for ensuring that professional development is an integral part of the district and school operations. The Iowa School Board Association's Lighthouse study found that in effective school districts, "Board members described staff development activities in the district and could describe the link between teacher training and board or district goals for students."¹

Teacher quality has taken center stage in the U.S. now that the federal government is requiring schools to ensure all teachers are highly qualified. Ramping up the intensity of teacher-education programs may improve the overall preparedness of the teaching work force, but in-school support from principals and positive leadership from school boards also are crucial, experts say.²

Related Links

- [Recommendation10—Professional Learning](#), TCSII.

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¹ [Lighthouse Study: School Boards and Student Achievemen](#)" (Outside Source), Iowa School Board Compass, Vol. V, No.2 (Fall 2000), 8.

² Nina Hurwitz and Sol Hurwitz, "The Challenge of Teacher Quality," *American School Board Journal* (April 2005), 38-41.

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School District Superintendents

Superintendents help to ensure that middle grades students are not “caught in the middle.” Those who know about middle grades issues work to provide professional development for articulation and to learn how to engage young adolescent learners.

A team of California superintendents, including the ACSA Superintendents Committee and the CSBA Superintendents Advisory Council, developed a set of Superintendent Governance Standards stating that the superintendent shall:

- Promote the success of *all* students and support the efforts of the board of trustees to keep the district focused on learning and achievement.
- Value, advocate, and support public education and all stakeholders.
- Recognize and respect the differences in perspective and style on the board and among staff, students, parents, and the community and ensure that the diverse range of views inform board decisions.
- Act with dignity, treat everyone with civility and respect, and understand the implications of demeanor and behavior.
- Serve as a model for the value of lifelong learning and support the board's continual professional development.
- Work with the board as a “governance team” and ensure collective responsibility for building a unity of purpose, communicating a common vision, and creating a positive organizational culture.
- Recognize that the management team in each district supports the board/superintendent governance relationship.
- Understand the distinctions between board and staff roles, and respect the role of the board as the representative of the community.
- Understand that authority rests with the board as a whole; provide guidance to the board to assist in decision making; and provide leadership based on the direction of the board as a whole.
- Communicate openly with trust and integrity, including providing all members of the board with equal access to information, and recognizing the importance of both responsive and anticipatory communications.
- Accept leadership responsibility and accountability for implementing the vision, goals, and policies of the district.¹

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¹ [Superintendent Governance Standards](#) (PDF; Outside Source), California School Boards Association.

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Set the vision

Eleanor Roosevelt once said, “The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.” Effective school leaders ignite their professional learning community with a vision that focuses all resources, discussions, and data analysis on student learning. Although a leadership team may help write the vision, the superintendent is the person who continues to mobilize the community around that vision.

Research on youth development supports the importance of a vision that all students can achieve and meet standards—a high-expectations-plus-support message.¹ As keepers of the vision, local governing board members and the superintendent help district staff members, school personnel, and community representatives focus each discussion on the vision: will this decision help us to close the achievement gap in our middle grades and raise the achievement of all students?

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¹ *Resilience and Youth Development Module Handbook*. Prepared by WestEd and the Safe and Healthy Kids Program Office. Sacramento: California Department of Education, 2002, 9.

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Keep a focus on accountability

Superintendents are responsible to their local governing board and community to help schools focus on results that close the achievement gap and help each student prepare for a successful future.

When district accountability results do not meet achievement targets, the [District Assistance Survey](#) (DOC; 388KB; pp.34) helps a district assess whether or not its operations support a coherent, school-level instructional program that improves student achievement. Because student achievement in reading/language arts and mathematics is central to student success in other areas, the survey analyzes district support for schools in these primary areas of student literacy. The survey reveals how a district's support in seven areas directly affect student achievement:

- Standards-based Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
- Professional Development
- Human Resources
- Data Systems/Data Analysis/Ongoing Monitoring
- Parent and Community Involvement
- Fiscal Operations
- Governance and Leadership

District Assistance and Intervention Teams (DAITs) may be assigned to a school district in year three of sanctions under Program Improvement (PI) when the State Board invokes at least one corrective action. The DAIT is intended to assist a local school district in PI by investigating and recommending corrective actions for improving teaching and learning through district-level findings, support, and assistance.

Related Links

- [Academic Program Survey—Middle School Level](#) (DOC; 669KB; 39pp.), California Department of Education.
- [Recommendation 11—Accountability](#), TCSII.

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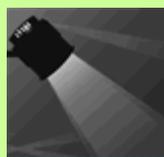
School professionals often feel bombarded by national, state, county, and district reform documents and mandates. Superintendents and board members can minimize confusion and overload by ensuring that the focus stays on results: Which instructional strategies help middle grades students learn to master the state-adopted content standards?

[A Delicate Balance: District Policies and Classroom Practice](#) (PDF; Outside Source) showed the negative impact of districtwide reforms that did not focus on instruction. The districts in the study “largely failed to communicate and translate their ‘big ideas’ into improved instruction because their tools and mandates were not informed by school level expertise and were not accompanied by the kind of support and capacity-building necessary to change instruction.”¹

Based on the study findings, the authors made the following recommendations for district leaders who are working toward instructional improvement:

1. Superintendents need to have a vision of good instruction.
2. Central office leaders should evaluate policies and mandates based on how they help principals and teachers improve instruction and student learning.
3. Districts should be responsible for providing a plan, a realistic timeline, and sufficient resources to build staff capacity when new instructional policies are adopted.
4. Student academic needs should drive the district’s policy agenda.
5. Professional development should be school-based and embedded in teachers’ daily work.
6. If teachers and principals are to focus on instruction, central office demands need to be drastically reduced.²

A book from WestEd called [Central Office Inquiry: Assessing Organization, Roles, and Functions to Support School Improvement \(2006\)](#) (Outside Source) offers practical advice to help district staff develop a plan for continuous school improvement. WestEd researchers found that leaders in successful districts (1) align their efforts to a shared theory about how to achieve school improvement; (2) engage in frequent, open communication and establish a common vocabulary with each other and their schools; and (3) maintain focus in the face of external demands and distractions.



In the Spotlight

Snowline Joint Unified School District

The district exited "program improvement" status based on 2006 data. The district had not met adequate yearly progress targets for special education students. According to the district’s assistant superintendent, the teacher-led Focus on Standards initiative made the difference. The districtwide initiative has five components: (1) common standards, (2) pacing, (3) common assessments, (4)

structured teacher planning time (STPT), and (5) instructional changes and interventions based on STPT.

The district provides extensive and ongoing professional development to support the initiative. At a minimum, grade-span teachers spend 90-120 minutes during biweekly professional development sessions. Teacher leaders guide discussions about instructional changes based on data from the district's benchmark assessments.

In addition to subject-specific meetings, special education and English learner coaches lead meetings for special education and EL teachers during separate STPT meetings. Because of the sessions, the district reports increased trust between teachers and decreased isolation.

Prior to each teacher planning time session, coaches meet with district staff by grade span for subject-specific training. During this time, coaches analyze data for the upcoming STPT session and become familiar with the data. The district supports the schools by preparing the data for each coaching session and STPT session.

The STPT Summary Form provides space for coaches to record major data-based conclusions, immediate instructional changes, and requests for additional support. The district uses the forms to monitor progress. Principals meet with the district for several half-days per year to discuss issues recorded on the Summary Forms.³

- [Snowline Joint Unified DataQuest District Profile](#)
- [Snowline Joint Unified School District](#) (Outside Source)

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¹ [A Delicate Balance: District Policies and Classroom Practice](#) (PDF; Outside Source). Chicago: Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, 2005, 4.

² Ibid., 10.

³ [Support for School Improvement e-Newsletter](#) (Outside Source). A joint project of the Council of Chief State School Officers and the Center on Innovation and Improvement, March 2007.

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School Site Leadership

School site leadership begins with the principal but should not stop there. Professional learning communities, teacher leadership teams, along with students, parents, and community leaders all play a role in helping local middle grades educators achieve results.

According to the National Association of Secondary School Principals, site leaders are responsible to “Institute structural leadership systems that allow for substantive involvement in decision-making by students, teachers, family members, and the community and that support effective communication among these groups.”¹ Principals play a central role in creating a system of distributed leadership where all stakeholders play a role in the success of the enterprise. “It is this simple: schools won’t improve until the average building leader begins to work cooperatively with teachers to truly, meaningfully oversee and improve instructional quality.”²

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¹ Cornerstone Strategy #7, [Breaking Ranks in the Middle: Strategies for Leading Middle Level Reform](#) (Outside Source), Reston, Va.: National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2006, 8.

² Mike Schmoker, *Results Now: How We Can Achieve Unprecedented Improvements in Teaching and Learning*. Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2006, 29.

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Principals—The Learning Leaders

For years, reformers have called principals instructional leaders. However, recent focus on student learning (results) as opposed to a focus on teaching (delivery) provides a new moniker for principals: the learning leader.¹

One of the essential questions each learning leader needs to address is, “What steps can I take to give both students and teachers the time and support they need to improve learning?”² According to a 2003 study by the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL):

. . . there are two primary variables that determine whether or not leadership will have a positive or a negative impact on achievement. The first is the focus of change—that is, whether leaders properly identify and focus on improving the school and classroom practices that are most likely to have a positive impact on student achievement in their school. The second variable is whether leaders properly understand the magnitude or “order” of change they are leading and adjust their leadership practices accordingly.³

Principals cannot be expert in every level of curriculum and instruction. Their role in a standards-based middle school is to be a learning leader, or coach, for all content areas, classrooms, and teams. The learning leader brings consistency to every level and provides direct support to teachers through coaching, training, and appropriate resources.⁴ However, even though principals cannot be experts in all course content, they must be able to distinguish between standards-based and non standards-based lessons when they observe teachers. Assembly Bill 430 (Chapter 364, Statutes of 2005) [Administrator Training](#) provides administrators with an overview of English/reading language arts and mathematics instructional materials.

A 2004 study about schools that succeed in raising the scores of Latino students from impoverished homes found that successful schools had principals who served as instructional leaders. “The principal brings the goals of learning and instruction to the forefront, coordinates the activities of students and teachers, and integrates the other components of effective schools.” The study authors found that principals at each of the successful schools supported teachers and developed a climate of mutual respect between principals and teachers.⁵

Another study, [Why Some Schools with Latino Children Beat the Odds . . . and Others Don't](#), (PDF; Outside Source) lists three key ingredients in schools that overcame the barriers of poverty:

- Disciplined thought: These principals and teachers admitted failure and changed their approach. One principal said he judged himself and each teacher on the daily, weekly, and monthly test results of each child. If a child was not making progress, the principal and the teacher worked together in the classroom and consulted other teachers until they found a better way.
- Disciplined people: These principals pushed ahead despite roadblocks and used their entire staff to find solutions.
- Disciplined action: The principal and staff selected one program or plan, stayed with it,

and made it better and better. "It's not the (test) data that's so important. Instead, it was about teachers taking responsibility for every one of the 28, 32 or 35 kids in their class: what the data said and how the teacher used that data."⁶



In the Spotlight

Reyburn Intermediate School, Clovis Unified School District

The principal has a schedule that includes weekly visits to every class. This is one part of a strategy that has helped the school achieve consistent gains in testing over the past three years.

- [Reyburn DataQuest School Profile](#)
- [Reyburn Intermediate School](#) (Outside Source)

The [National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform](#) (Outside Source) developed criteria for high performance. The [School Self-Study and Rating Rubric](#) (DOC; 413KB; pp.9) is a tool designed by the [California Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage](#) program for instructional leaders. At the beginning of a school year, the principal can use the first staff meetings to analyze school practices using the rubric. As an alternative, the principal can break the rubric into segments for a yearlong analysis of the school's effectiveness. The rubric leads school team members through a comprehensive review of the school's practices in four areas: academic excellence, developmental responsiveness, social equity, and organizational structures and processes. The criteria are based on research, on the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform's findings, and on the [California Department of Education's \(CDE\) 12 Recommendations for Middle Grades Success](#).

As the leader for student learning, the middle grades principal does not assume that standards-aligned curriculum ensures good teaching. Instead, the learning leader guides teachers to:

- Discuss the vision and how to communicate high expectations for all students.
- Translate standards to a scope and sequence curriculum map or implement the scope and sequence in state-adopted instructional materials.
- Understand the content and skills that the state-adopted content standards call for students to know and be able to do.
- Define what students should know and be able to do for subject areas for which there are no state-adopted content standards.
- Discuss rubrics to communicate what students will learn to do.
- Know how to assess when learning has occurred.
- Provide collegial, honest feedback on teaching and learning.
- Provide structures so teachers and students feel connected and valued.⁶

Related Links

- [Balanced Leadership Profile](#) (Outside Source)
- [Balanced Leadership: What 30 years of research tells us about the effect of leadership on student achievement](#) (PDF; Outside Source), Tim Waters, Robert J. Marzano, and Brian McNulty. Denver, Colorado: McREL, 2003.
- [e-Lead: Leadership for Student Success](#) (Outside Source)
- [National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality](#) (Outside Source)
- [Using the Classroom Walk-Through as an Instructional Leadership Strategy](#) (PDF; Outside Source), Newsletter, The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and

Improvement, Learning Point Associates.

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Footnotes

¹Mike Schmoker, *Results Now: How We Can Achieve Unprecedented Improvements in Teaching and Learning*. Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2006, 125.

² Richard DuFour, [The Learning-Centered Principal](#) (Outside Source), *Educational Leadership*, Vol. 59, No. 8 (May 2002), 13.

³Tim Waters, Robert J. Marzano, and Brian McNulty, [Balanced Leadership: What 30 Years of Research Tells Us about the Effect of Leadership on Student Achievement](#) (PDF; Outside Source). Denver, Colo.: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL), 2003, 5.

⁴ "Taking Center Stage". Sacramento: *California Department of Education*, 2001, 105.

⁵ Dan Jesse, Alan Davis, and Nancy Pokorny, [High Achieving Middle Schools for Latino Students in Poverty](#) (PDF; Outside Source), *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, Vol. 9 (2004), 33, 34.

⁶ Mary Jo Waits, [Why Some Schools with Latino Children Beat the Odds . . . and Others Don't](#) (Outside Source), [Center for the Future of Arizona](#), [Morrison Institute for Public Policy](#), Arizona State University (March, 2006).

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Create a climate for learning

School leaders play a critical role in establishing the school's culture, which affects the learning climate for students. According to resilience research, "A positive school climate was the critical variable differentiating between schools with high and low rates of delinquency, behavioral disturbance, attendance, and academic attainment."¹ Educational researcher Jon Saphier says that the educational leader has five ways to build and maintain such a school culture: "Say it; model it; protect it; organize it; reward it."²

The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) Web page distinguishes between school climate and school culture. School climate refers "mostly to the school's effects on students, while school culture refers more to the way teachers and other staff members work together." In *Shaping Culture: The School Leader's Role*, Terrence Deal and Kent Peterson describe culture as ". . . the underground stream of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals that have been built up over time as people work together, solve problems, and confront challenges."³

In a 2003 study by the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL), culture—or ". . . the extent to which the principal fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation" is the most effective leadership practice according to magnitude of change in a school and in student achievement.⁴ According to the [School Self-Study and Rating Rubric](#) (DOC; 413KB; pp.9), effective middle schools are ones where there is a shared vision and where "someone with responsibility and authority holds the school-improvement enterprise together."

Research on effective leadership shows the importance of building healthy relationships.

A school's climate is the summation of all the positive and negative interactions among all people at the school in a given day. The tone of those interactions is largely shaped by the school's culture—the unspoken norms, habits, and traditions that influence how people behave. To shape a socially intelligent culture, school leaders may need to change norms, starting with their own behavior.⁵

A study of California public schools that made significant gains in poor and minority student achievement found that API scores were higher in schools where the principals indicated that they acted "as managers of school improvement, driving the reform process and cultivating the school vision. In particular, they were more likely to embrace the state's academic standards and to ensure classroom instruction was based on them."⁶ The study went on to say that:

. . . When teachers and principals report that the principal communicates a clear vision for the school, sets high standards for student learning, and makes expectations clear to teachers for meeting academic achievement goals, the school is more likely to be high achieving. Equally important, better school performance seems to be associated with both teachers' and principals' reports that teachers at the school take responsibility for and are committed to improving student achievement.⁷

Probably the most important, and the most difficult, job of a middle grades learning leader is to change the prevailing culture of a school.

"The school's culture dictates 'the way we do things around here.' Ultimately, a school's culture has far more influence on life and learning in the school than the president, the state department of education, the superintendent, the local governing board, or even the principal, teachers, and parents can ever have. One cannot, of course, change a school culture alone. But one can provide forms of leadership that invite others to join in as observers of the old and architects and designers of the new. The effect must be to transform what we did last September into what we would like to do next September. The culture of a school is quite apparent to the newcomer."⁸

Setting a school culture often involves understanding and addressing a student counterculture. For example, many young adolescents face pressure to join gangs or to appear cool to disaffected, counterculture leaders. Gangs in poorer neighborhoods often target student groups such as the non-English speakers or immigrants for recruitment, causing a greater disconnect between those students and school.

Effective middle grades leaders find ways to engage these at-risk youths in the school culture. Some of these strategies include the following methods:

- Engage negative student leaders in positive school leadership roles. For example, invite them to help plan a multicultural feast day that includes family members or a games day at lunch.
- Host student forums (with translators if there is a large population of English learners) so they can discuss concerns, things they like about school, and things about school that bother them. Invite the students to propose events or strategies to remedy their concerns and to work with a faculty committee to implement changes.
- Work with faculty teams to institute a wide variety of fun lunch activities that engage the entire student body.
- Work with faculty teams to create many different awards and celebrations to honor many kinds of student achievement (in arts, sports, service, academics, etc.).

Other research focuses on the importance of a healthy adult culture at the school.

Hoy and Sabo (1997) found that student achievement increased in middle grades schools where teachers and administrators had stronger professional and emotional support among themselves. This suggests the possibility of some sort of trickle-down effect from such a climate. In addition, Lepper and Hodell (1989) found that when teachers relied on threats of punishment, middle grades students were less likely to be motivated, and their academic performance decreased. This suggests that a "communitarian" climate may be effective.⁹

Related Links

- [Connexions](#) (Outside Source)
- [Major Characteristics of a Middle School Culture Capable of Implementing and Sustaining Standards-Based Education](#) (DOC; 32KB; 1p.), Document Library, TCSII.
- [A Middle School Culture to Sustain Standards-Based Education](#), Document Library, TCSII.
- [Professional Considerations: School Vision](#), Document Library, TCSII.
- [School Culture: "The Hidden Curriculum"](#) (PDF; Outside Source), Issue Brief, The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, Learning Point Associates.

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Footnotes

- ¹ *Resilience & Youth Development Module*. Prepared by WestEd and the Safe and Healthy Kids Program Office, California Department of Education, 2002, 12.
- ² Jon Saphier, *How to Make Supervision and Evaluation Really Work: Supervision and Evaluation in the Context of Strengthening School Culture*. Carlyle, Mass.: Research for Better Teaching, Inc., 1993.
- ³ T. E. Deal and K. D. Peterson, *Shaping School Culture: The School Leader's Role*. San Francisco: Calif.: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999.
- ⁴ Tim Waters, Robert J. Marzano, and Brian McNulty, [Balanced Leadership: What 30 Years of Research Tells Us about the Effect of Leadership on Student Achievement](#) (PDF; Outside Source). Denver, Colo.: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL), 2003, 9-12.
- ⁵ Daniel Goleman, The Socially Intelligent Leader, *Educational Leadership*, Vol. 64, No. 1 (September 2006), 76-81.
- ⁶ [Similar Students, Different Results: Why Do Some Schools Do Better?](#) (Outside Source), Mountain View, Calif.: Prepared by EdSource, 2005, 20.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.
- ⁸ Roland S. Barth, "The Culture Builder," *Educational Leadership*, Vol. 59 No. 8 (May 2002), 6-11.
- ⁹ [Academic Achievement in the Middle Grades: What Does the Research Tell Us?](#) (Outside Source), Atlanta, Ga.: Southern Regional Education Board, 2003, 5.

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Lead professional learning

Learning leaders do not stop at encouraging student learning; they also focus on adult growth and education through professional learning communities. To encourage robust learning communities, leaders can regularly gather:

1. Schedules for team meetings, agendas, and attendance rosters
2. Protocols and team norms that ensure that team members respect each other and operate efficiently
3. Team lessons or unit logs that document team productivity in developing common assessments, pacing guides, and other instructional improvement strategies
4. Evidence of small wins for both teachers and students: do the teams celebrate success?¹

Effective principals also participate as members of the broader district and regional learning community. In that role, principals engage parents and community members as partners in helping all students to succeed. For example, learning leaders ask tough questions such as:

- Are all key community stakeholders included in the process?
- How does a focus on success for all students (increased rigor/more challenging classes) help our community?

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Footnote

¹ Mike Schmoker, *Results Now: How We Can Achieve Unprecedented Improvements in Teaching and Learning*. Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2006, p. 130.

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Ensure availability of instructional resources

One of the most important jobs of a learning leader is to support and equip teaching team members to do whatever it takes to improve student learning and close the achievement gap. However, even small wins are difficult when teachers lack basic resources and time to focus on differentiated instruction, building relationships, and providing timely interventions.



In the Spotlight

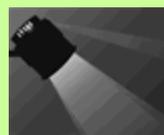
Granite Oaks Middle School, Rocklin Unified School District is a California Middle Grades Partnership Network School

The faculty works as a team to manage resources that meet the school's goals. For example, the school requested district funding to support release time for department leads. The administrator has developed a good relationship with the district so that the school receives flexibility in using its funds. The administrator works with the leadership team and staff to set priorities for a budget. All funding sources are on the table for discussion. The principal sets the vision for how to save and distribute the money and leads the staff in frequent discussions about what is working and what is not.

- [Granite Oaks DataQuest School Profile](#)
- [Granite Oaks Middle School](#) (Outside Source)
- [California Middle Grades Partnership Network School](#)

With district support, the site administrator's job is to ensure that each professional in the organization has the tools needed to accomplish his or her responsibility:

- Middle grades counselors need access to resources for social and emotional health services.
- Middle school library/media centers require professional staffing and up-to-date, culturally relevant resources.
- Custodial staff members need resources to maintain facility appearance and safety.
- School classified staff members require technologies to assist in tracking attendance, informing parents about school events, and maintaining student records.



In the Spotlight

Richard Henry Dana Middle School, Wiseburn Elementary School District is a 2006 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage 2006 Model School

The school uses an Internet-to-phone based technology that sends out mass personalized telephone messages in several languages.

- [Richard Henry Dana DataQuest School Profile](#)
- [Richard Henry Dana Middle School](#) (Outside Source)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Model School-Visitor's Guide: Richard Henry Dana Middle School](#) (PDF; Outside Source)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage](#)



In the Spotlight

McKinleyville Middle School, McKinleyville Union Elementary School District, is a 2006 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage 2006 Model School
is a CalSTAT Leadership model for special education in the middle grades.

- [McKinleyville DataQuest School Profile](#)
- [McKinleyville Middle School](#) (Outside Source)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Model School-Visitor's Guide: McKinleyville Middle School](#) (PDF; Outside Source)
- [CalSTAT Leadership](#)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage](#)

Related Links

- [Academic Program Survey—Middle School Level](#) (DOC; 669KB; 38pp.), California Department of Education.
- [California Least Restrictive Environment \(LRE\) Self Assessment and Continuous Improvement Activities—District Level](#) (PDF; Outside Source), WestEd.
- [Compliance Monitoring](#), California Department of Education.
- [Improvement Tools](#), California Department of Education.
- [Teacher Work Conditions as Catalysts for Student Achievement](#) (Outside Source), Scott Emerick, Eric Hirsch, and Barnett Berry, ASCD InfoBrief, No. 43 (October 2005).

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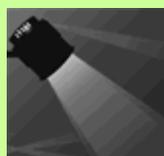
Teaching teams can use educational data (from common assessments, state tests, demographics, and surveys) as a powerful tool to improve student learning, or they can see it as a bureaucratic task that eats their time. Principals and district leaders who lead their teams to use data effectively will not only improve student achievement but staff morale as well.

According to Gaining Traction, Gaining Ground, effective principals

. . . tend to be hands-on when it comes to analyzing data. They use data to actively supervise and oversee teacher and student performance. Principals institute formal methods of analyzing data with teachers to determine course content, strengths and weaknesses. Principals may review each student's transcripts to ensure correct placement or to recognize students who have improved performance.¹

According to a study published by The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, there are several ways that leaders can help school teams use data effectively:

- Use data coaches (on-site colleagues who have special training to analyze and interpret data and its application to instruction).
- Provide better training.
- Address fears about how administrators will use data results for staff evaluations. (For example, the leader establishes a culture where team members use data objectively for improvement and not for evaluation of classroom practice.)
- Model a positive attitude about the use of data for school improvement.
- Provide sufficient time.²



In the Spotlight

Carlsbad Unified School District, San Diego County

Carlsbad Unified School District has embraced data driven decision making, effectively incorporating technology to manage and analyze student data—including academic and attendance information. Data analysis is only the beginning of the data cycle, however. Once results have been obtained from data analysis, information is used to determine what resources are needed to best meet student needs. SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely) goals are used at the district and site levels to design and target interventions that will make a difference at the student level. Individual student progress is tracked and measured over time. Data are shared with site professional learning community teams who use the information to create common assessments focused on California Standards Tests (CST) outcomes. Teachers are provided with early release one day a week to review student work and student data in grade level teams. The district is seeing results

through an increase in overall Academic Performance Index.

- [Carlsbad Unified School District](#), DataQuest Profile
- [Carlsbad Unified School District](#) (Outside Source)

A study about data use in high schools highlights effective practices that are applicable to middle schools as well. The four-year study tracked improvements in the low-performing schools that resulted from better data analysis. For example, the study suggests the following practices will lead to school improvement:

- Provide timely data in an easily accessible format.
- Establish structures that encourage and support data use.
- Encourage a culture of questioning.
- Ensure adequate teacher professional development.
- Demonstrate leadership in using data.³

The Technology Information Center for Administrative Leadership (TICAL) Web site features new tools for administrators on [Radio TICAL](#). One of their February 2008 podcasts was about the [Program Improvement Resources](#) developed by CTAP Region IV and Regional System of District and School Support (RSDSS) to assist school data teams in analyzing both STAR and benchmark exams.

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Footnotes

¹ [Gaining Traction, Gaining Ground How Some High Schools Accelerate Learning for Struggling Students](#) (Outside Source). Washington, D.C.: The Education Trust. 2005, 31.

² [Using Data: The Math's Not the Hard Part](#), (PDF; Outside Source), Craig D. Jerald, The Center Issue Brief, September 2006.

³ [Research Brief: Practices That Support Data Use in Urban High Schools](#), (PDF; Outside Source), Learning Point Associates for The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, October 2006.

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Hold teachers accountable

As the learning leader, the middle grades principal focuses the vision and all decisions on *results*. Are *all* students making adequate progress on the grade level content standards? Is the school a place where positive relationships prevail, and where the culture is one of mutual respect and continuous learning? To keep that vision, the leader helps teachers look at three things:

- Action: what the teacher or teacher team did
- Reaction: how the student(s) responded
- Outcomes: whether the response led to student learning

Effective principals learn how to include the active participation of teachers and teacher teams in all phases of the evaluative process. Effective evaluation is based on clear goals and a mutually agreed upon plan for professional growth. For example, the principal can work with the school site leadership team and/or district staff to develop a clear evaluation and professional development plan for the year. Based on specific criteria from the [California Standards for the Teaching Profession \(CSTP\)](#) (PDF; Outside Source), local assessment (or achievement) data, and on learning goals derived from an analysis of the schoolwide testing scores, the leadership team can identify key areas for professional growth for all staff members.

Classroom visits, or walk-throughs, are one strategy for teacher evaluation. Perhaps even more effective, however, is the team analysis of data and resulting discussions about how to improve instructional practices based on goals for student achievement. In this way, the site principal leads all staff members in evaluating their *own* practice relative to specific student achievement goals. For more on this concept, see the previous section on [Lead data analysis](#).

In **Results Now**, Mike Schmoker pushes learning leaders to have the courage to monitor instruction and suggests four key questions that help teachers focus on learning outcomes:

1. What are the results of periodic or formative assessments?
2. What evidence do grade books provide about essential standards being taught and the number of students who are succeeding in learning the standards?
3. Is the teacher using team lesson logs or learning logs, and what are the results?
4. Do samples of student work demonstrate scoring on rubrics that help the teacher know how to improve learning?¹

The bottom line is that the learning leader ties all adult job performance to student achievement. This focus underscores the value of common assessments—the principal and team members can analyze how students in the same grade and course are progressing. When there are disparities, the team members can share strategies that helped students succeed.²

Related Links

- [Administrator Training](#), California Department of Education.
- [Association of California School Administrators](#) (Outside Source)

- [CLMS Professional Development Events](#) (Outside Source), California League of Middle Schools..
- [The Role of Principal Leadership in Improving Student Achievement](#) (Outside Source), Newsletter, The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, Learning Point Associates.
- [Using Data: The Math's Not the Hard Part](#) (Outside Source), Issue Brief, The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, Learning Point Associates.

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¹ Mike Schmoker, *Results Now: How We Can Achieve Unprecedented Improvements in Teaching and Learning*. Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2006, 130 and 143.

² Hugh Burkett, "Eight Don'ts of School Reform." Keynote address given at the [On the Right Track 4 Symposium](#), San Jose, California, April 2006.

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Hire and retain qualified teachers

According to findings from the California School Boards Association, California's "teacher pipeline" is drying up at the same time that the No Child Left Behind requirements for highly qualified teachers¹ raise challenges for middle grades principals. This is not an urban problem. In fact, it is an issue that every district in the state is likely to face. It is also a national trend. The [National Center for Education Information](#) (Outside Source) says 40 percent of America's public school teachers plan to leave the profession in the next five years. . . . Increasingly, though, teachers are filtering into the profession through university or district internships, which allow individuals to complete their teacher preparation coursework on the job with mentoring and support from colleges, universities or through school districts. Nevertheless, the challenges that new teachers encounter once they are on the job are daunting, and the level of support and professional development they receive can vary greatly.²

Over the next ten years, some 97,000 teachers, nearly a third of California's teacher workforce, expect to retire.³ Middle schools in California face a difficult challenge in recruiting qualified candidates for two reasons:

1. There is no official credentialing program for middle school teachers. In the past, many teachers came to middle school with a multiple-subject elementary credential. The NCLB requires highly qualified teachers; therefore, more and more middle-level teachers must possess a single-subject credential. However, many people who choose that credential path do so because they want to teach their specialty in a high school setting.
2. Many teacher candidates do not receive training on adolescent development and, as a result, lack insights into how to deliver curriculum to meet the needs of young adolescent.

[A Possible Dream: Retaining California Teachers So All Students Learn](#) (PDF; Outside Source) analyzed data collected from a survey of 2,000 current and former California public school teachers about the professional and personal reasons for leaving or remaining in the classroom. According to the study's author, "Although better compensation matters to teachers, if the classroom and school environment are not conducive to good teaching, higher salaries are not a prominent factor in increasing teacher retention rates."⁴

Preservice training for the middle grades is essential, particularly in light of the lack of a middle grades credential. In a speech to the Association for Teacher Educators, Stanford University education professor Linda Darling-Hammond called for a strengthening of teacher-preparation programs. According to Darling-Hammond, classroom teachers—more than any other factor—influence student achievement. "We need to be artistic in articulating how to prepare teachers, rather than lowering standards. It would be penny-wise and pound-foolish to bring people into teaching unarmed."⁵ This is especially true for people going into the middle grades, where students face rapid physical, social, and psychological changes.

In a report by [The Finance Project](#) (Outside Source) (a nonprofit research group for public and private leaders), the authors compare pre-service and in-service training for teachers with that of law, accounting, nursing, architecture, law enforcement, and firefighting. The report's

findings provide insight into areas where teacher training might improve:

- Most of the other fields have more uniform pre- and in-service training guidelines.
- Clinical experiences in education are less structured than those in other professions.
- Peer learning is not emphasized as much in education, although it is becoming more of a focus.⁶

According to a Duke University study, new teachers are more likely to remain in the profession if they are satisfied with the principal's leadership and school climate. In addition to mentoring programs and salary hikes, principal leadership and school climate must be part of a comprehensive effort to retain well-qualified teachers.⁷

Selecting good candidates is only part of the hiring decision, especially at the middle school level where knowledge of adolescent development is critical. As a result, induction and mentoring strategies that help new teachers participate in a professional learning community are key to teacher satisfaction, success, and retention. The principal needs to assign new teachers to strong teams in which they will receive mentoring on how to use standards-based lessons, benchmark assessments, and interventions for struggling students. Leaders must choose mentors who have received education for their role and who share the core values expressed in the school's vision.⁸

In a study of Wisconsin middle schools, for example, Kristine Hipp found that several practices significantly affected teacher's feelings of efficacy. Principals who actively modeled positive behaviors, who recognized and rewarded teachers' accomplishments, and who worked to inspire a sense of group purpose fostered stronger feelings of efficacy among teachers.⁹

Related Links

- [Center for Teaching Quality](#) (Outside Source)
- [e-Lead: LeaderShipShape](#) (Outside Source)
- [Teaching Matters Most](#) (Outside Source), Center for Teaching Quality.

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[Hold teachers accountable](#)

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Footnotes

¹ [NCLB Teacher Requirements Resource Guide](#) (PDF; 248KB; 40pp.). Sacramento: California Department of Education, 2004.

² Bryan Taylor, "Is There Light at the End of the Teacher Pipeline?" *California Schools Magazine*, (Summer, 2006).

³ Jack O'Connell, State of Education 2006. Speech, Sacramento, California Department of Education: February 7, 2006.

⁴ Ken Futernick, [A Possible Dream: Retaining California Teachers So All Students Learn](#) (PDF; Outside Source) . Sacramento: California State University, 2007, 2.

⁵ "Educator Condemns Lack of Respect for Teacher Prep," *Education Week* (March 1, 2006).

⁶ Katherine S. Neville, Rachel H. Sherman, and Carol E. Cohen, [Preparing and Training Professionals: Comparing Education to Six Other Fields](#) (PDF; Outside Source) . Washington, D.C.: The Finance Project, 2005, 33.

⁷ [Principal Leadership, School Climate Critical to Retaining Beginning Teachers](#) (Outside Source), Duke University News (April 12, 2006).

⁸ Hugh Burkett, Eight Don'ts of School Reform. Keynote address given at the [On the Right Track 4 Symposium](#), San Jose, California, April 2006.

⁹ K. A. Hipp, Teacher Efficacy: Influence of Principal Leadership Behavior. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New York, April 1996.

(ERIC Document No. ED396409).

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Assign teachers/team placements

Recognizing that teams are only as effective as their team “culture,” principals include team members in the interviews for prospective new hires. Sometimes a qualified candidate will not “fit” the team personality, and early discussions of those less concrete aspects of hiring can help to avoid disputes and team dysfunction later.

One of the key findings of **Gaining Traction, Gaining Ground** was that in [high-impact schools](#), principals assign teachers to classes based on student need. Teachers with the most experience and skill were assigned to work with the students who needed the most reinforcement and support.¹

Related Links

- [Center for Teaching Quality](#) (Outside Source)
- [Improving Teacher and Principal Quality](#), California Department of Education.

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¹ [Gaining Traction, Gaining Ground](#) (Outside Source). Washington, D.C.: The Education Trust, 2005, p. 24.

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Connect families

Learning leaders play a critical role in keeping families involved in education when middle grades students tend to create distance from family members. Each local community has a unique culture that will guide the school leader in how to involve parents/guardians and family members. However, several leadership strategies have been successful for gaining the trust and involvement of families:

- Work with school and district staff to make the school facilities available for family learning nights in the library, play nights in the gym, or poetry/drama/arts nights in the cafeteria.
- Advertise “coffee hours” or other parent/guardian forums where interested family members can meet the principal and ask questions.
- Host “Parenting Your Adolescent” lecture series that allow family members to discuss changes in their young adolescents and strategies for dealing with those changes.
- Be available during drop-off and pick-up times and greet parents by name whenever possible.

Related Links

- [Parent and family leadership](#), Recommendation 9—Leadership, TCSII.
- [Partnerships](#), Recommendation 12—Partnerships, TCSII.

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Distributed Leadership

In effective middle schools, the school principal organizes and oversees a series of leadership teams that help ensure a focus on student success. Leadership teams within the school assist the principal in maintaining the vision for continuous improvement and ending the achievement gap. “Strong, distributed leadership teams eliminate distractions and support the business of teaching and learning. The distributed leadership team has developed a system to govern democratically and involve all staff members.”¹

Later sections discuss each of the following types of leadership roles in more detail:

- Teacher leaders help to ensure that team members focus on student achievement.
- School site council members are responsible for helping to develop and monitor the implementation of the school's Single Plan for Student Achievement.
- Parents and community partners assist the school staff members in providing the support to ensure that every student succeeds.
- Student leaders help to organize events that engage students as members of the school community so that they take pride and ownership in their education.

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Footnotes

¹ Lou Cicchinelli and others, [Success in Sight—A Comprehensive Approach to School Improvement](#) (Outside Source). Denver, Colo.: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL), 2006, 7.

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Teacher leadership

Teacher leadership taps the strengths and talents of teachers to benefit students at the local level. Teachers know the students, know the issues, and are the local “experts.”¹ When they take an active role in decision making, they can help design short and long-term solutions to issues affecting their students. Often with no additional pay, department chairs are involved in planning staff development, organizing and leading frequent team meetings, tracking results, disseminating information, coordinating data analysis, overseeing the development and dissemination of common assessments, and ensuring smooth team functioning. In light of the extensive need for teachers in leadership roles, site leaders need to help teachers balance their teaching load with additional duties.

Another critical role played by teacher leaders is that of mentoring new staff members. Either in subject-matter or small learning community teams, or as individuals, teacher leaders can help new staff members learn the ropes, become familiar with grade-level standards, understand how to use data, and gain skills in classroom management and instructional strategies.

Researchers emphasize that teachers learn better from their peers than from a supervisor.² Mentoring, curriculum development, lesson studies, and developing common assessments are a few of the many activities leadership teams can organize for professional growth.

Effective middle schools provide many opportunities to include teachers on the leadership team. Teacher leaders include department heads, team leaders (usually a rotating position), and special project leads (such as school site council leaders). However, strong principals also build leadership potential by inviting non-leaders to speak up at faculty meetings, to take charge of a specific project, and to help decide how to spend the budget. “Good principals don’t protect teachers from leadership; they encourage them to lead.”³



In the Spotlight

Granite Oaks Middle School, Rocklin Unified School District, a California Middle Grades Partnership Network School

The faculty designed the academy system (teaming) to support the development of each student and staff member. The leadership team works to maintain adult team membership constant over several years so that strong collegial relationships build rapport. Each team helps with interviews for new hires so they can choose someone who fits the team. The team members then coach new team members so they receive all the support they need through daily interaction during the common preparation time. .

To ensure that each team prepares students with the same level of rigor, departmental teams conduct common unit assessments across the whole school.

- [Granite Oaks DataQuest School Profile](#)
- [Granite Oaks Middle School](#) (Outside Source)
- [California Middle Grades Partnership Network School](#)

Related Links

- [Professional Learning](#), Recommendation 10—Professional Learning, TCSII.
- [Reeves 3—Accountability in a Learning Organization](#), Doug Reeves, Professional Learning Activities, TCSII.
- [Teacher Leaders: The Backbone of Sustained Improvement](#) (PDF; Outside Source), Newsletter, The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, Learning Point Associates.
- [The Teacher Leader: A Precious School Resource](#) (Outside Source), Maria Christina Walker, ASCD Express.
- [What Does Research Tell Us About Teacher Leadership?](#) (PDF; Outside Source), Research Brief, The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, Learning Point Associates.

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¹ [Leadership for Student Learning: Redefining the Teacher as Leader](#) (PDF; Outside Source). Washington, D.C.: School Leadership for the 21st Century Initiative, April 2001, 4.

² Mike Schmoker, *Results Now: How We Can Achieve Unprecedented Improvements in Teaching and Learning*. Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2006, 125.

³ Hugh Burkett, [Six Don'ts of School Improvement—and Their Solutions](#) (Outside Source), The Center for Comprehensive School Reform (May 2006).

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School site council (SSC) leadership

Education Code Section 52852 (formerly 52012) specifies that a school improvement plan shall be developed by a school site council (SSC). The law says, “The SSC shall be composed of the principal; representatives of teachers selected by teachers at the school; other school personnel selected by peers at the school; parents of pupils attending the school selected by such parents; and, in secondary schools, pupils selected by pupils attending the school.”

Middle grades SSC composition falls under the rules for secondary schools. For the first time students are included in the SSC.

At the secondary level the council shall be constituted to ensure parity between the principal, classroom teachers and other school personnel; (b) equal numbers of parents or other community members selected by parents, and pupils.

At both the elementary and secondary levels, classroom teachers shall comprise the majority of persons represented under category (a). (*Education Code* Section 52852)

Furthermore, *Education Code* Section 52852 states that parents or community members on the SSC may not be employed by the school district.

School Improvement is a program for elementary, intermediate, and secondary schools to improve instruction, services, school environment, and organization at school sites according to plans developed by School Site Councils.

The California *Education Code* requires the school site councils to:

1. Measure effectiveness of improvement strategies at the school.
2. Seek input from school advisory committees.
3. Reaffirm or revise school goals.
4. Revise improvement strategies and expenditures.
5. Recommend the approved single plan for student achievement (SPSA) to the governing board.
6. Monitor implementation of the SPSA.¹

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¹ [2010 Single Plan for Student Achievement: A Guide and Template for Creating/Updating the Single Plan for Student Achievement—A Resource for the School Site Council](#) (DOC; 1.3MB; 62pp.). Sacramento: California Department of Education, 2010.

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Single plan for student achievement

The purpose of the [Single Plan for Student Achievement](#) (SPSA) is to raise the academic performance of all students to the level of state achievement standards. California Education Code sections 41507, 41572, and 64001 and the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) require each school to consolidate all school plans related to state and federal funding.

The California Department of Education has developed a planning guide and template for local educational agencies (LEAs) to meet the program requirements. Use of the [2010 Single Plan for Student Achievement: A Guide and Template for Creating/Updating the Single Plan for Student Achievement--A Resource for the School Site Council](#) [DOC; 1.3MB; 62pp.], California Department of Education, 2010, is entirely voluntary.

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Categorical program monitoring

It is important for the school site council to coordinate the single plan with [Compliance Monitoring](#). The Compliance Monitoring program helps local educational agencies (LEAs) verify compliance with requirements of each categorical program and ensure that program funds are spent to increase student performance. The [Inventory of Program Documents](#) (DOC; 641KB; 11pp.) lists all the program plans that will be included in the CPM review.



In the Spotlight

Serrano Intermediate School, Saddleback Valley Unified School District

The Serrano Middle School Single Plan addresses key compliance issues such as those listed below.

- Use of state and local assessments to
 - ◆ modify instruction and improve student achievement (NCLB)
 - ◆ monitor student progress on curriculum-embedded assessments
 - ◆ modify instruction (Essential Program Component [EPC] #5)
- Sufficiency of teacher professional development and alignment of staff development to content standards, assessed student performance, and professional needs. (NCLB; EPC #4)
- Ongoing instructional assistance and support for teachers (e.g., use of content experts and instructional coaches. (EPC #6)
- Teacher collaboration activities. (EPC #7)
- Alignment of curriculum, instruction, and materials to content and performance standards. (NCLB; EPC #1)
- Research-based educational practices to raise student achievement at the school. (NCLB)
- Availability of standards-based instructional materials appropriate to all student groups. (NCLB and Williams case)
- Use of SBE-adopted and standards-aligned instructional materials, including intervention materials. (EPC #1)
- Services provided by the regular program that enable under performing students to meet standards. (NCLB)
- Sufficient intervention opportunities. (EPC #8)
- Services provided by categorical funds that enable under performing students to meet standards. (NCLB)
- Resources available from the family, school, district, and community to assist underachieving students. (NCLB)
- Involvement of parents, community representatives, classroom teachers, other school personnel, and students in secondary schools, in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of consolidated application programs.

- [Serrano DataQuest School Profile](#)
- [Saddleback Valley DataQuest District Profile](#)
- [Serrano Intermediate School](#) (Outside Source)
- [Saddleback Valley Unified School District](#) (Outside Source)

- [Essential Program Component](#)
- [Williams case](#)
- [2010 Single Plan for Student Achievement: A Guide and Template for Creating/Updating the Single Plan for Student Achievement—A Resource for the School Site Council](#) (DOC; 1.3MB; 62pp.) California Department of Education, 2010

Related Links

- [Compliance Reviews—Categorical Program Monitoring \(CPM\)](#), Recommendation 11—Accountability, TCSII.

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Parent and family leadership

In spite of the fact that many young adolescents want their parents to be invisible, especially when peers are nearby, effective middle schools provide many invitations and opportunities for parent and family involvement. One way that many middle school parents or guardians stay involved is through leadership or participation in committees and events that improve school climate and student achievement.



In the Spotlight

Rio Norte Junior High School, William S. Hart Union High School District

The school boasts a strong Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) whose members continue to recruit successors by involving new parent/guardians at the beginning of each year. The PTSA hosts many interesting events for the entire school community. For example, at the annual Candidate's Forum, the PTSA invites candidates for local or region offices to attend an evening community event at the school. History teachers give credit to students who attend. During Red Ribbon Week, the PTSA helps organize prizes and assemblies. PTSA volunteers help students log into their accounts in the library, monitor grounds during breaks, and help with before- and after-school traffic control, host fundraisers, assist with summer check-in, and serve as "team" parents for field trips. Each summer, the school staff mails a PTSA survey home with the school registration packet. In one year, the PTSA received 400 e-mails from parents interested in serving as a result of the survey.

- [Rio Norte DataQuest School Profile](#)
- [William S. Hart DataQuest District Profile](#)
- [Rio Norte Junior High School](#) (Outside Source)
- [William S. Hart Union High School District](#) (Outside Source)

If parents work several jobs and have students in a number of schools, planners can facilitate parent involvement in leadership teams by providing meals, child care, and, in some cases, transportation. Planners should consider other ways to encourage participation by all parents/guardians: use them as translators, plan festivals, and advertise coffeehouse chats with the principal, faculty members, or counselors.

The following is a short list of the ways parents and family members can provide leadership at their middle schools:

- **Home guidance for student work.** Parents and family members are powerful leaders for educational excellence. Parents who understand grade-level standards, the earning potential for college graduates, and how to help students succeed, become powerful

allies for achievement.

- **Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) leadership.** Parent leaders on PTSA councils enjoy the satisfaction of raising money, test scores, and participation at middle school events.
- **Transition leaders for incoming parents.** Just as students need help in making the transition from elementary to middle school, their parents often feel overwhelmed by the changes. Middle grades parents can help counselors plan events that will guide elementary school parents in understanding how to prepare for the middle grades.
- **School planning teams.** Parents are important members of special leadership teams such as the school site planning council, the technology committee, and the school safety team.
- **Planning special events and field trips.** Health fairs, recognition events, “Raising a Young Teen” presentations, library fund-raisers, field trips, and college awareness nights are just a few of the many special events parents can host to involve other parents and provide both awareness of and involvement in the school.
- **Organizing multicultural awareness activities.** Family members can share foods, dances, stories, and games that illustrate their culture during multicultural lessons or events—see Recommendation 4, “Relevance” for more on [Multicultural experiences](#).
- **Organize booster clubs.** Schools often need parent leadership for raising funds to support sports, robotics clubs, visual and performing arts, or other special offerings that districts do not fully fund. Credentialed teachers must be present in any clubs that are run by parents.
- **Provide volunteer leadership for student clubs.** Many schools rely on parent volunteers to run after-school clubs based on their areas of expertise (weaving robotics, leather work, etc.).

Related Links

- [Partnerships](#)—Recommendation 12, TCSII.

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Student leadership

In a distributed leadership system, adults find ways to include students in decision making. Effective middle schools use a wide variety of strategies to help students develop leadership skills and feel ownership for the success of the school community:

1. Student council or associated student body membership
2. Class (grade level) leadership
3. Classroom leadership
4. Team leadership (see Recommendation 5 — Relationships, [Small Learning Communities](#))
5. School site council membership (*Education Code* Section 33133[c] states that “in addition to the composition set forth in section 52012, a school site council at the middle school level may, but is not required to, include pupil representation.”)
6. Suggestion boxes or regular meetings with the principal that are open by grade/class or team
7. Participation on planning teams for school events such as:
 - Lunch events
 - Assemblies
 - Spirit days
 - Multicultural events
 - Parent nights
 - Transition events for elementary students moving to the middle grade
8. Debate teams
9. Club leadership (credentialed teachers must be present in any clubs that are run by students)
10. Sports leadership
11. Training as peer helpers (see the Healthy Kids publication *Resilience & Youth Development Module*, page 49).
12. Training as peer mediators (also on page 49 of the *Resilience & Youth Development Module*).
13. Visitor relations (trained to greet guests on campus, including incoming students from elementary school)
14. New member helpers (trained to guide new students around campus)
15. Buddies (trained to help special education students at lunch)
16. Planning team members for science fairs or other competitions



In the Spotlight

Toby Johnson Middle School, Elk Grove Unified School District, a 2006 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School

To foster student leadership, teachers encourage seventh graders to apply for the

eighth-grade student leadership elective. Toby Johnson offers the leadership course as a one- or two-semester class so that students can fit other electives if needed. During the class (which serves as the school's Associated Student Body), students plan and implement campus events and learn to serve as hosts for visitors to the Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage campus. For example, when Superintendent Jack O'Connell visited Toby Johnson to release the California Department of Education's (CDE) 12 Recommendations for Middle Grades Success, members of the leadership team welcomed all guests and served as guides for dignitaries who wanted a tour of the campus. Students in the class study leadership skills and team processes. The principal explained that the faculty established student leadership as an elective class rather than staging class elections so that a wide range of students would be able to participate. . .

Students in the class wear a T-shirt that quotes Jim Collins from *Good to Great*:

"Greatness is not a function of circumstance. Greatness, it turns out, is largely a matter of conscious choice and discipline."

- [Toby Johnson DataQuest School Profile](#)
- [Elk Grove DataQuest District Profile](#)
- [Toby Johnson Middle School](#) (Outside Source)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Model School-Visitor's Guide: Toby Johnson Middle School](#) (PDF; Outside Source)
- [Elk Grove Unified School District](#) (Outside Source)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage](#)

It is critical to find ways to involve struggling students who are natural leaders but who may not feel engaged in the school community. In addition, some students may not exhibit "natural leadership" potential, but they can develop leadership skills when school staff members offer opportunities through leadership classes and mentoring from adults. By recognizing these students for their natural leadership capability and finding a positive outlet for their talent, middle school leaders can reconnect potential dropouts and use them to reconnect their followers.

Related Links

- [A Seat at the Table: Tapping the Power of Student Leadership](#) (Outside Source), Kathy Checkley, Classroom Leadership, Vol. 7, No. 8 (May 2004).
- [Creating a Climate for Learning](#), Recommendation 9—Leadership, TCSII.

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Education Technology Leadership

California's middle schools must prepare students to function in an ever-growing information-based world. To be effective in preparing students for adult work world and making education more effective and efficient, students need training to use modern technology tools. Therefore, educational leaders play a critical role in ensuring that these key elements are in place:

- A comprehensive curricular design that effectively integrates technology into teaching, learning, and assessment
- Sufficient and appropriate hardware and software to effectively implement programs
- Sufficient, timely support to maintain both hardware and software
- Ongoing professional development and coaching for administrators, teachers, and other instructional staff to support effective integration of educational technology into the school culture
- An understanding of the social, ethical, and legal issues related to using technology
- Ongoing funding to support the continued implementation of educational technology

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Educational technology leadership roles

Leadership in educational technology crosses all levels of middle school education. Administrators, teachers, students and their parents, and information technology departments have important roles in determining how well California schools use technology.

School Administrators: The publication *Technology Standards for School Administrators* (2001, pp. 6-7) suggests the following responsibilities for educational leaders to ensure effective technology use in schools:

- “Inspire a shared vision for comprehensive integration of technology and foster an environment and culture conducive to the realization of that vision.
- Ensure that curricular design, instructional strategies, and learning environments integrate appropriate technologies to maximize learning and teaching.
- Apply technology to enhance their professional practice and to increase their own productivity and that of others.
- Ensure the integration of technology to support productive systems for learning and administration.
- Use technology to plan and implement comprehensive systems of effective assessment and evaluation.
- Understand the social, legal, and ethical issues related to technology and model responsible decision making related to these issues.”



Information and Resources

According to “[Leadership in the 21st Century: The New Visionary Administrator](#)” report, (PDF; 4MB; 23pp.) administrators who are concerned about technology integration have more in common with students than with fellow administrators in terms of technology use and priorities for integrating technology in instruction. The report notes that visionary administrators hold many different positions at schools and district offices and do not only represent technology professionals. They believe that seamless, ubiquitous technology—when effectively integrated into learning—has the potential to expand the classroom walls, transform the pedagogy, and help students better prepare for life in the 21st century. The report includes examples of what visionary administrators are doing to transform their schools to adapt to the culture of the new digital world. The report is based on a survey conducted by [Project Tomorrow's](#) (Outside Source) [Speak Up 2007](#) (Outside Source).

Local governing board members: In the article “Critical Issue: Technology Leadership: Enhancing Positive Educational Change,” Gilbert Valdez, the senior adviser for technology and co-director of the North Central Eisenhower Mathematics and Science Consortium at Learning Point Associates, suggests that local governing boards:

- “Ensure that vision building is focused on student and teacher excellence and not on isolating technology improvement from other systematic considerations such as teacher professional development, facilities, support, and essential resources.
- Schedule meetings and inform the community about the necessity of using technology in schools to prepare students for future work and to full participation in a technology-based information society.
- Communicate the challenges and resource needs inherent in successful educational change. Emphasize that technology integration cannot be considered in isolation of system wide improvement efforts.
- Put into place an accountability system to collect and analyze with integrity information indicating that technology efforts will result in increased quality of education.
- Make certain that all segments of the community have representation on planning committees, giving special attention to the inclusion of traditionally underrepresented members of the community.”

Teachers. The Commission on Technology in Learning (CTL) provides guidance for teachers and their roles in technology leadership through the California [Commission on Technology in Learning](#).

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Technology Support for Leaders

Technology is a tool to help administrators, yet it also is one more thing to manage. For example, software tools can help leaders provide quick feedback after classroom walk-throughs, and e-mail messages can reduce the number of items that must be discussed at staff meetings and save time. However, security issues, data management, and maintenance issues can often occupy the administrator's day.

It is important for school team members to tie technology purchases to the [School's Single Plan for Student Achievement](#) and the district's state-approved [technology plan](#) (PDF; 104MB; 104pp.). Every year in schools, technology committees, school site councils, administrators, teachers, students, and parents look at how to allocate limited school funds. Technology purchases can be very costly, but administrators and teaching teams do not always have the data they need to know how to prioritize the effectiveness of planned technology purchases.



In the Spotlight

Serrano Intermediate School, Saddleback Valley Unified School District

The technology committee at Serrano Middle School compiles and works from a technology "wish list" that includes both the "need to have" items (including low-tech items) and the "nice to have" items (usually more progressive and expensive technologies). This prioritizing helps them evaluate expenditures in light of the entire school budget.

- [Serrano DataQuest School Profile](#)
- [Saddleback Valley DataQuest District Profile](#)
- [Serrano Intermediate School](#) (Outside Source)
- [Saddleback Valley Unified School District](#) (Outside Source)

To help the school planning teams decide on technology purchases, leaders can help teaching teams and technology committees visualize the "ideal classroom" by asking the following questions:

- What technology would it have (LCD projector; wireless laptop lab; large, flat-screen monitor)?
- What Web-based assessment tools would speed and improve monitoring of student progress?
- What furniture would be needed to house technology or maximize its use?
- What support would be needed to maintain it?
- What are the "Need to Have" items? (Think of those that should be in every classroom or available to every student in California.)
- What are the "Nice to Have" technologies that may require more sophisticated training

or may only be used in certain content areas (GIS, animation, etc.)?

Among other things, administrators and school teams often need support for the areas of:

- Maintenance
- Servers
- Firewalls
- Antivirus software
- Acceptable use policies

As defined in the California Department of Education's [Education Technology Planning Information](#), an acceptable use policy is a policy that contains provisions for student's use of the Internet and network in a school district and serves as a contract between the parent and the school.

[SAFE](#) (Outside Source) —an Internet safety education nonprofit foundation —provides free examples of acceptable use policies.

- Cost-effective tools (such as [open source software](#)) (Outside Source)
- Online assessment programs
- Smartboards
- Wireless PCs
- Teacher Web pages
- Office productivity software and tutorials for teachers and students (for example, word processing programs, spreadsheets, presentation software, and databases)
- [E-rate](#) issues (federal funding, formulas)
- Wiring and infrastructure issues



In the Spotlight

Standard School District

Standard School District uses SchoolDude.com, a fee-based online work order management system, to save time and money and lessen frustration that comes from waiting for repairs to be completed. Teachers report maintenance issues by filling out a simple form accessed from their computer. A work order is generated in the online work order system which is then prioritized by the superintendent. The maintenance department staff provides an estimate for the repair (which is itemized by the budget office staff) and then assigns the work to a maintenance employee. The online system notifies the person making the repair request of the date and approximate time the repair will be completed. Data collected by the system documents the type and amount of materials used to complete the repair which helps to determine future supply requisitions.

Communication and consistency have been increased since the online system was instituted and teachers, staff, and administrators are pleased with the streamlined result. Maintenance workers know what repairs are needed and can plan their time accordingly. In addition to generating work orders, the system also provides updates on when routine maintenance should be done such as replenishing the fire extinguishers or replacing the batteries in the schools' smoke alarms.

- [Standard School District](#) (DataQuest Profile)
- [Standard School District](#) Web site (Outside Source)

Related Links

- [California Educational Technology Professionals Association](#) (Outside Source)
- [Technology information center for administrative leadership \(TICAL\)](#), Recommendation 9—Leadership, TCSII.
- [TechSETs](#), Recommendation 9—Leadership, TCSII.

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Technology information center for administrative leadership (TICAL)

The California Department of Education (CDE) commissioned the [Santa Cruz County Office of Education](#) (Outside Source) to help K-12 administrators provide informed and effective leadership in the use of technology to improve education. TICAL is one of four [Statewide Education Technology Services](#) (SETS).

[TICAL](#) (Outside Source) includes a cadre of school leaders who believe in the importance of technology to education, as well as an Internet portal with administrator-reviewed and recommended resources and original content. TICAL's goal is to provide a quick route to information and resources that will help administrators make sure technology improves teaching, learning, and school operations. Resources are on the portal in the following six focus areas:

- Data-driven decision making
- Technology planning
- Financial planning for technology
- Professional development needs of staff
- Integrating technology into standards-based curriculum
- Operations and maintenance

In addition, TICAL offers resources on specific areas of interest such as No Child Left Behind, the Technology Standards for School Administrators (as adopted by the International Society for Technology in Education), and the Principal Training Program. TICAL provides professional development through a series of workshops provided by TICAL cadre members throughout the state and through online presentations and discussion groups on the project's Web site.

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TechSETS

TechSETS is another one of the four [Statewide Education Technology Services \(SETS\)](#) that provide support and/or resources for California schools as authorized by AB 1761. The [California Department of Education](#) awarded a contract to the [San Diego County Office of Education](#) (Outside Source), which works closely with the [Imperial County Office of Education](#) (Outside Source) to develop TechSETS.

TechSETS provides technical professionals in California schools improved access to training, support, and other resources. With the explosive growth in school technology, the need for well-trained technical support staff has steadily risen. TechSETS provides assistance for planning, installing, and maintaining school technology.

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Total cost of ownership and maintenance issues

As commonly used, the phrase "total cost of ownership" (TCO) refers to the complete costs of hardware purchases, including the cost of infrastructure, software, staff development, and technical support necessary to use the hardware, in addition to the purchase price or lease cost of the hardware.

Just as administrators need to consider the cost of training, supplies, and maintenance when purchasing new cleaning equipment for its schools, districts have discovered that purchasing new technology involves much more than just buying new hardware and placing it in classrooms.

District and site administrators must consider the cost of new software licenses, supplies (i.e., paper, compact discs), furniture, networking, Internet service, and professional development for teachers in how to use the technology effectively to improve teaching and enhance learning. Administrators and leadership team members also need to consider the cost of training technical staff to provide ongoing support and the maintenance of the new hardware as well as the impact any new technology will have on the existing infrastructure.

Maintenance and upkeep of technology should be a major consideration before purchasing district, school, or classroom equipment. For example, district and/or school administrators need to develop and fund a system for maintaining servers, student accounts, passwords, firewalls, and anti-virus programs (that may conflict with other programs). For example, students often report broken keys, files that vanish, inability to log in, files that will not print, and programs that malfunction. As much as technology engages students, it can also interfere with learning if they do not have a good experience. Several options are available to address these needs:

- Hire full-time site technology coordinators.
- Provide a tech-savvy teacher with two free periods per day to trouble-shoot technology problems.
- Use reliable business partners or volunteer help.

Related Links

- [CoSN-Gartner TCO Tool Intro](#) (Outside Source), Consortium for School Networking (CoSN).
- [Consortium for School Networking \(CoSN\)](#) (Outside Source)
- [Technology Information Center for Administrative Leadership \(TICAL\)](#) (Outside Source)
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Network and computer security

Security is an ever-changing but necessary feature of school-based technology.

Related Links

- [California Technology Assistance Project \(CTAP\)](#), California Department of Education.
- [Child Safety on the Information Highway](#) (PDF; Outside Source), National Center for Missing & Exploited Children and U.S. Department of Justice.
- [Computer-Using Educators, Inc.](#) (Outside Source)
- [Education Technology](#), California Department of Education.
- [International Society for Technology in Education](#) (Outside Source)
- [Internet safety](#), Recommendation 8—Safety, Resilience, and Health, TCSII.
- [iSAFE](#) (Outside Source)
- [Security issues related to technology](#), Recommendation 4—Relevance, TCSII.
- [Statewide Education Technology Services \(SETS\)](#), California Department of Education.

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The Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) provides administrators with software, called the Walk In, that helps them conduct a quick and meaningful “walk-through” with minimal disruption in the classroom. The software helps principals generate reports after classroom visits. The PDA-generated reports focus on the California Standards for the Teaching Profession, and specific standards the teacher may need to address. In addition, leaders can use PDAs for facilities management.

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E-mail

E-mail can be a tool for busy administrators and teacher leaders. Both e-mail and electronic calendars speed the transmission of administrative details so that faculty meetings can focus on student achievement.

In some schools where e-mail and e-calendars are new, administrators may have to attach receipts to e-mail messages to keep track of who has, and who has not, opened important notices. If the notices help teachers by streamlining their day, most teachers will quickly learn to view it as a tool rather than as a burden.

Leaders may have to monitor the effect of using e-mail as a means of communication in his or her school. For example, a quick show of hands could give the administrator a sense of how valuable e-mail is as a communication tool. Depending on the staff members' comfort levels, they can view e-mail as a stressor rather than a help.

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Web sites and Web portals

Along with e-mail, school Web sites and team “portals” speed communication of helpful information. Many effective middle schools involve students in designing the school Web site, which includes sections to celebrate student successes, inform families about school events, and highlight important testing dates and achievement data.

Nationally recognized experts in electronic school communication have developed a rubric for school Web sites that addresses content, security, functionality, and interaction. “Where a district scores on this rubric is highly dependent not on its technology, but on its commitment to effective communication. Those who have a Web site because everyone else has one, or who focus on making a ‘pretty’ site, will be surprised to find themselves scoring less than expected.”¹

Team Web portals differ from Web sites because they do not include access for students and parents. Instead, portals serve as a collaborative workspace where teams can share helpful documents, post team meeting dates and times, and cooperate with each other on lesson planning. The [Technology Information Center for Administrative Leadership](#) (Outside Source) is an example of a professional Web portal.

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Footnotes

¹ Nora Carr, [New Rubric Offers First Functional Standards for School Web Sites—How Does Your School Web Site Measure Up? Consult This Framework to Find Out](#) (Outside Source), eSchool News (May 1, 2006).

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Professional organizations and tools

Administrators and teachers have access to many resources that will guide them in both purchasing and using educational technology.

Related Links

- [Data-Driven Decision-Making and Electronic Learning Assessment Resources \(ELAR\)](#) (Outside Source), Technology Information Center for Administrative Leadership (TICAL).
- [ISTE Conference](#) (Outside Source), International Society for Technology in Education.
- [K12video.org: Connecting California Schools](#) (Outside Source)
- [Leader Talk](#) (Outside Source), Education Week.

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Online fund-raising

Fund-raising is a headache for many school leaders, and yet the need for supplemental funds for science labs, band uniforms, field trips, and other enrichment opportunities is often real. Although schools have sold candy, wrapping paper, or magazine subscriptions, these campaigns are time-consuming and often duplicated by nearby schools. Some leaders have turned to the Internet as a fund-raising vehicle. Several for-profit sites help schools explore the options. Administrators can search online for school fund-raising ideas. To ensure that they use reputable firms, they can collaborate with their regional counterparts.

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Conclusion

Distributed leadership helps to ensure that all stakeholders contribute to the success of middle grades students in California. At each level—from state government through county and district offices, school sites, homes, and communities—adults work together to implement California’s vision for standards-based, grade-level learning for every student.

Parents play a leadership role—as do students—in an effective middle school. They lend their talents to a system where teacher teams work with school site, district, and county leaders to solve issues and to create vibrant learning communities.

The appendixes that follow provide a recommendation and resources on the topic of leadership.

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