Organizing Adults Block Party

Distributed Leadership

Jaime Robles, Principal of Lindsay High School, understands why we need to transform our schools. He grew up just a bit south of Lindsay in an agricultural community, a first-generation resident and the first in his family to go to college. He saw many of his high school friends disengage from school.

*As an instructional leader, I focus my job on three goals. First, my job is to keep the*[*compelling purpose*](http://www.lindsay.k12.ca.us/filelibrary/LUSD%20Strategic%20Design%201.pdf)*of supporting our learners alive. It’s easy to slip back into doing things just because that’s the way we’ve always done them. Second, my job is to empower our staff. They need to have the freedom to do their jobs in supporting our learners. Third, I operate from a position of service and collaboration. This is very important because if I used top-down leadership, I wouldn’t be able to empower staff. These three elements go hand in hand.*

*The reason that Lindsay is able to make this transformation is because of the structure of shared leadership. The process we use to arrive at decisions reduces mistakes because we make sure to gather input and address all the issues. We seldom have to cut and recut because we are measuring every step of the way.*

*My job as a principal is to make sure our decision-making processes are managed effectively. At times I may need to step in to remind the team of our compelling purpose – our learners. When we have a shared goal, it makes decisions a lot easier. Collaboration is also a lot easier*

Bringing People Together the Dance of Leadership – Innovation in Schools

One of the best things about working in education

is that overwhelmingly, your colleagues and fellow educators

are people who care deeply about children and about learning.

Your school, your organization is made up

of people who want students to do well.

And they have a set of beliefs about what good teaching

and learning looks like.

Together, those beliefs help shape and define

the culture of a school.

Those beliefs are a resource for leaders.

And they're the starting point for thinking

about creating a vision to guide new innovation.

One of the things that we often expect the leaders to do

is to help create a vision for a community.

A stereotype that we have of leaders

is that they'll hand down this vision

and then followers will execute on it.

Most school people know that this stereotype doesn't hold up

in schools.

It's the very rare school community

where a superintendent or a head of school

comes to a faculty meeting and says,

we're all going to do this.

And all the faculty in the audience

throw their hands up in the air and say, yeah

we're all going to do this.

That's not the way leadership works or how visions get formed

or how new innovations take root.

Creating a shared vision in a community

is a dance between two general approaches.

Sometimes leaders do point the way for a community.

Let's call that pointing the light.

Sometimes leaders bring people together

around ideas they care about.

And there are very few organizations that simply

follow the will of a leader.

And there are very few organizations

that take the time to develop a consensus from carefully

listening to and weighing equally,

every single viewpoint.

In most cases, leadership is a dance

between bringing people together around ideas they care about

and pointing a light.

Getting everyone in an organization

to pull their oars in the same direction

is some combination of asking people where they want to go,

and having steady hands on a tiller that sets a direction.

Everyone is a learner at Kettle Moraine. And with the distributed leadership model, everyone can be a leader. Currently, 10 percent of the educators are recognized as leaders of teacher teams. There are several ways that KM is developing leadership. (You can listen directly to Superintendent Pat DeKlotz, Assist Superintendent Theresa Ewald, and teacher leaders talk about [distributed leadership](https://www.kmsd.edu/futureready) on the second video in the left hand column.)

**Tools for Distributing Leadership**

DeKlotz described a number of techniques that she and Ewald used to engage educators, to help build a shared understanding of the strategic vision for the district, and, listen for coaching opportunities when there were misconceptions or narrow understanding of what personalized learning means. These tools or techniques included:

* *Rounding*: Drawing from the hospital practice of rounds, the administrative team would visit schools and engage in conversation with the cook, new teachers, teacher leaders, principals, and students. DeKlotz emphasized, “I want the communication. I want to know people’s names and what they are thinking about. There are so many things to celebrate in a school, and by being in the school, we can recognize and lift up small and large achievements. Rounding is critical to our building and nurturing the culture that relationships matter.”
* *Practice critical conversations*: Conversations matter, as well. There are many crucial conversations during any transition process or learning process. The district team took time to model and engage principals and teacher leaders in how to have conversations with teachers who were having difficulties of one kind or another; conversations about beliefs, skills, and actions; and conversations about when expectations weren’t being met. This capacity has helped to create the learning culture. Everyone knows there will be mistakes, that expectations need to be discussed so they are shared, and that feedback is valued.
* *Focus on high performers*: Teachers matter. DeKlotz knew that high performers were driving the change to personalized learning. So DeKlotz worked closely with principals about how they thought about recruiting and nurturing high performers. Questions such as *How are you re-recruiting your high performers? How do you know your high performers are satisfied with their jobs?* guided the conversations.
* *Invest in principals*:  DeKlotz and/or Ewald meet with principals individually every other week. This creates opportunity for dialogue, reflection, and problem-solving. It also gives them another way to discover trends or emerging problems early.
* *Power of modeling:*DeKlotz and Ewald are very intentional about their modeling. They both have an open way of engaging and talking. But don’t be fooled, they are constantly seeking out opportunities to engage in conversation and reflection that deepen the understanding and skills to implement personalized learning.