

Leadership

By Gail Malay

Superintendent, Lake Havasu Unified School District #1

Many business publications, from *Fortune* magazine to *Harvard Business Review* contend there is a critical shortage of effective leaders. Author, John Maxwell, believes everything rises and falls on leadership.

It is frustrating to me to see the comments about school administration among some members of our community. Six years ago, Lake Havasu did not have one excelling school. Today, we have six excelling schools, 2 highly performing and one performing plus. These increases in student achievement did not happen by accident but by leadership and a lot of hard work by our team.

Leaders embrace responsibility. We make things happen. Our community has a high mobility rate; students are moving in and out . . . sometimes up to fifty percent of our population will turn over. Often our incoming students are behind; we do not use that as an excuse, we just work harder to get results. Every one of our elementary schools has an uninterrupted 90-minute reading block. Our best practices in reading came from two of



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our principals who attended a State conference on providing leadership in reading. Scheduling is a responsibility of leadership. Making change happen is a responsibility of leadership. We share best practices and most effective strategies.

I taught for fifteen years; one of those years our principal left in the middle of the year. Within a short period of time, it was evident how important the principal was. Each of our principals is expected to be an instructional leader. What does this mean? They spend a good part of their day in classrooms helping improve instructional practices of our teaching staff. This job responsibility is in addition to everything else they need to do to keep their school running. Principals are responsible to provide a safe environment for students to learn in. When discipline problems come to the principal's office, time is taken to investigate the facts of the situation and then consequences must be given. Again, I invite the public to shadow any of our principals for a day to see what leadership is doing.

Administrative/leadership duties do not end when students leave. Our school district holds a lot of evening and weekend events. Many times you will see administrators present. We all attend evening Governing Board

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meetings. A school administrator works more than a 40 hour week on a consistent basis. I am always after our leaders to make sure they are taking care of their health and spending time with their families.

So what is the role of the district office? The district office provides consistency in what our school district offers. Our Governing Board has clearly set the expectation that the address of where a student lives will not determine the quality of education they receive . . . to say it in another way . . . all of our schools will be effective and effective practices will be shared.

We meet twice a month as an administrative team to go over what is happening at our schools and to solve, as a team, any problems that have arisen. We also spend time planning on how we are going to improve. For example, right now we are working on a math initiative. We plan at the grade level and we also do what is called vertical articulation. Vertical articulation happens when the middle schools and high school sit down and talk to one another. Recently the high school asked the middle school to increase their rigor and we are in the process of making that happen.

The district also deals with all the regulations that are involved in

running a school district. More importantly the district has a vision of where we are going . . . we want all of our students adequately prepared to be successful in the 21st Century. What does that mean? Our students must be able to read well, write well, do higher level math, communicate, be technologically literate and develop the skills to be a good citizen and a team player.

We have cut back on administration. Last year we reduced by two positions. In 2004, a Director's position was cut and never replaced. This year we cut an administrative assistant and a teacher on assignment for special education. We do have to watch workloads. Conscientious people will continue to work harder and longer hours and eventually will burn themselves out.

I hope that you will make sure you educate yourself about school leadership before offering an opinion. I ask the community: what is the value of an uninformed opinion? Thank you for thinking about this . . . it is important to the future of our schools and our community.

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