White Paper on School Climate and Culture

A report for the

What's Next Nevada Project

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The context

Who would want to be a teacher these days? Faced with a growing teacher shortage problem, many educational institutions are urgently looking for the answer to that question. Given the fact that there are fewer people interested in entering the teaching profession[1], schools and districts will have to find ways not only to recruit more teachers, but also to retain the effective teachers who are already in the system.

One aspect of making the teaching profession more attractive is to improve the school climate and culture (defined below). While low compensation and even lower prestige are often cited as reasons for the decline in interest, poor working conditions and the absence of a high-performance culture also inhibit a school's ability to hold on to the teachers it has managed to hire. In a study of the retention crisis facing America's schools, a report by The New Teacher Project found that "poor school culture and working conditions" was one of the primary reasons great teachers left schools.[2]

Effective leaders are purposeful about creating an environment in which teachers feel valued and also feel supported. Schools that provide strong supports to new teachers, for example, and offer growth or leadership opportunities to all staff members are more likely to keep teachers from looking elsewhere.

Beyond supporting retention goals, a positive and professional school culture is an integral part of the foundation upon which all great schools are built.
School culture is the "beliefs, values, and priorities or the organization that guides behavior and decision-making." Unfortunately, many schools and districts outline beliefs and values that then exist only on paper or in nice posters. It is the failure to act on delineated values that undermines culture and ultimately pushes out the top performers.

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[1]See for example, *Steep Drops Seen in Teacher-Prep Enrollment Numbers,* by Stephen Sawchuk, Education Week, 21 October 2014.

[2] *The Irreplaceables: Understanding the Real Retention Crisis in America's Urban Schools,* The New Teacher Project (TNTP), 2012.

Of all the "reforms" that have to be advanced and initiatives that have to be implemented, creating a high-performance and adaptive culture is the most important and, at the same time, hardest to get right.

Climate and culture

In order to improve school culture, it is useful to first differentiate school culture and school climate. **School culture** is the beliefs, values, and priorities of the organization that guides behavior and decision-making. **School climate** is an amalgam of the experiences of students, parents, and staff regarding the school. It is their perception of safety, working conditions, welcoming feelings, belonging, morale, and an overall sense of efficacy of a school. As such, school climate is largely connected to how people feel about the organization; culture is tied to how people behave in the organization and the degree to which that behavior aligns with articulated values.

Climate and culture overlap and can work in either reinforcing or opposing ways. And while the distinction between climate and culture may be subtle, the two are not the same, and efforts to improve one may have little impact on the other.

For example, high or low morale is part of a school's climate, and does not directly translate to a description of school culture. A tragic event such as a fatal accident involving students can lower morale, but will probably not affect the school's values or how people act upon those values. Teachers may feel stressed about a new principal coming on board after the retirement of a beloved school leader, and that may have a dampening effect on staff morale or their perception of changes to working conditions, but that does not mean the school culture will change.

School climate is more variable than school culture and is easier to change. Telling teachers that they no longer have to monitor the hallway outside their classroom during passing period may be seen in the short term as an improvement in working conditions, but may not have a positive impact on school culture. Investing in nicer furniture for the teachers' lounge, offering free neck and back massages every Tuesday, or putting more lights in the parking lot – all good things to do for staff – may improve the perception of working conditions, but may have little impact on school culture.

Culture is harder to change and can only be improved over time. It takes a thousand purposeful, observable actions to create a strong or high-performance culture. These actions or deeds must be consistent with the stated or written core beliefs and values. In

such a culture, leaders prioritize key actions and resources and the priorities reflect what the organization values most.

While it takes a thousand purposeful actions to create a high performance culture, it only takes a handful of counter-examples to undermine that culture and make it much harder to achieve. Imagine, for example, that a district valued a meritocracy – a system in which staff members were evaluated based on defined competencies and clear criteria, and in which people were hired, promoted, or relieved of duty based on those criteria rather than on whose favor they had received or the length of their employment. It would take a thousand acts – making sense of the concept, agreeing on competencies, defining outcomes, creating fair processes, developing staff, training leaders, analyzing data, providing examples, adjudicating disagreements – before people would "own" the concept of a meritocracy and begin to make decisions based on that core belief without direction or supervision.

> *While it takes a thousand purposeful actions to create a high performance culture, it only takes a handful of counter-examples to undermine that culture and make it much harder to achieve.*

What would happen though, if, in a handful of cases, the superintendent or principal promoted someone who had not demonstrated competency, but was the friend of a Board member? Or if the principal gave an ineffective teacher a proficient evaluation in order to allow that teacher to move to another school? It would be hard for others to believe that the system really did value merit. Over time, there would be more and more "inconsistent" behaviors and that part of the core beliefs would exist only on paper.

Perhaps the greatest test of leadership for principals and superintendents is whether they can consistently act upon the organization's beliefs and priorities. The difficulty of maintaining that consistency of word and deed is what makes changing culture in a large organization so hard. Further, in highly politicized environments and ones in which patronage is part of the "unwritten" culture, tremendous leadership density over time is needed to create a high performance culture.

A high performance culture

Over time, every school and community creates the culture it wants and the culture that exists. To a large extent, the school culture is a reflection of the values and priorities of the community served by that school. If the parents and other stakeholders expect rigor and believe their students should go to college, the school is likely to cultivate those expectations in its own set of core beliefs. Unfortunately, if expectations for student

success are low, a culture of mediocrity or excuse-making may become the unwritten, but observable, culture.

Effective leadership and strong staff capacity can help build a community's understanding of and appetite for a high performance culture. In order to create a high performance culture, leaders in schools and districts usually do the following:

- **Outline core beliefs and what the organization values most**. This is not a laundry list of every value or belief, but a short (no more than five-item), prioritized list of the most important values *that will guide the organizations actions and behaviors*. They may be aspirational, but also represent a commitment by the members of the organization to behave in ways consistent with the core beliefs. Effective leaders continually raise awareness of the core beliefs with staff and stakeholders. They are purposeful about developing staff understanding of the beliefs and ensure staff members recognize how the core beliefs manifest themselves in practice, in the classroom and in the school.

- **Create a shared and inspiring vision.** Effective leaders work with the staff to create a vision of what success looks like. In schools with high performance cultures, the vision is inspiring and also challenging. People believe the goal can be reached, but only if the organization does its best work. The vision should also be tied to some purpose and hope that people in the organization can make a difference. According to business analyst Cathy Benko,

  Today's talent wants to work for organizations that share similar beliefs and values and provide individuals with opportunity to make a positive difference in the world. Alignment of values makes employees feel more invested in their work and better able to serve as strong ambassadors for the organization.[3]

  The key of course is to ensure that the vision drives priorities and organizational behavior.

- **Set high expectations**. High performance cultures have high expectations for all children – they believe that all children can learn and they act upon that belief.

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[3] *Five Ways to Prevent Your Top Recruits from Jumping Ship*, by Cathy Benko, Fast Company on-line magazine, 22 May 2014.

They also have high expectations for staff, believing that staff members can grow and perform at high levels of effectiveness. Too many times, administrators behave as if teachers cannot meet rigorous standards of performance or that they cannot learn quickly. Such low expectations for teachers will ultimately result in lower expectations for students. Conversely, high expectations for teachers will ultimately result in higher expectations for students.

- **Focus on outcomes**. Great schools get results. The teachers and leaders of these schools understand that success or goal attainment has to be demonstrated. Theirs is a culture that establishes measurable outcomes, especially around student proficiency and staff performance. They use data and monitor progress toward key benchmarks and objectives.

- **Hold people accountable for outcomes and provide a high level of support**. High performance cultures value and reward people who "get the job done" and get it done right. They value effectiveness and the ability to achieve defined outcomes. At the same time, these schools create a culture in which poor teaching is not tolerated – purposeful steps are taken to help ineffective teachers improve or, if necessary, removed from the system.

These same organizations believe that high accountability must come with high levels of support. Accountability without support breeds a culture of fear. Because there is

High performance cultures marry high levels of accountability with high levels of support. Accountability without support breeds a culture of fear.

support and the sense that the administration is invested in the success of the staff, teachers in a high performance culture are motivated by the challenging mission and do not fear accountability. In the "Irreplaceable," a report cited earlier in this white paper, researchers found that schools that retained high percentages of their most effective teachers had demanding cultures with high levels of support: "In particular, principals at these schools were more likely to communicate high expectations to teachers and ensure that teachers feel supported, and less likely to tolerate ineffective teaching."[4]

- **Grow the level of autonomy to allow staff members to do their best work**. Teachers want to work in an environment in which they have some control over that environment – where they can make the decisions that directly impact their ability to accomplish their goals. In this type of culture, leaders may provide

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[4] The Irreplaceables, p. 18.

direction and some parameters, but decisions around what strategies to employ, which resources to use, and how to monitor progress are left to the teacher. The most effective teachers, in particular, need the freedom to get results without micromanagement.

- **Support continuous improvement**. Leaders of high performance cultures use continuous improvement models. They know that transformation takes time and one cannot reach challenging objectives without numerous smaller steps. At the same time, they maintain a sense of urgency and expect progress. In these cultures, teachers and principals are allowed to innovate and try strategies that are non-traditional. Mistakes and missteps are viewed as a consequence of continually trying to improve; people and the organization learn from any failures to become more effective.

The rubric on the next page outlines the key characteristics of a school with a high performance culture. The rubric can be used to assess the degree to which a school has a strong culture and suggest areas for improvement if the culture is weak.

Because of the school culture's importance to organizational effectiveness, developing a high performance culture should be among the key competencies of school leaders and should be part of the principal evaluation. Appendix A includes parts of a model principal evaluation rubric that focuses on the development of a high performance culture.[5]

Problem definition

A positive school climate and a high performance school culture go hand in hand. However, and as mentioned earlier in this white paper, the two are distinct. Strategies to improve climate may not have a big impact on school culture. And strategies to improve school culture may actually hurt perceptions of school climate in the short term. Attempts to hold people accountable for outcomes, for example, even with high levels of support and strong sense-making, may raise anxiety and lower morale in the short term.

One challenge in identifying the specific problem that needs solving is that "teacher morale" often becomes the proxy – the one metric – for school climate. Because morale is rarely assessed in a rigorous way and because anecdotal information about morale is

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[5] The entire rubric can be found in appendices 1 and 2 of the first white paper on school leadership.

often politicized, school and district leaders are more likely to try to address school climate concerns instead of school culture problems.

Over time, culture trumps climate.

To be sure, school leaders need to work on both school climate issues as well as develop a high performance culture, and while school climate and culture are distinct, they are nevertheless interrelated. Still, culture is one of the foundational aspects of organizational effectiveness. Its embodiment is the behavior of the staff which in a high performance culture is tied to the core beliefs. If the culture is weak or toxic, short term strategies to improve morale, provide more resources, or give more bonuses – all helpful to a good school climate – may mask deeper issues of culture that will eventually prevent achievement of a challenging vision and that will undermine school climate in the long run.

Over time, culture trumps climate.   Thus the problem is not how to improve teacher morale; rather it is **how to develop high performance cultures that will create an environment that will attract and retain top-performing teachers**.

System Assessment Rubric – Culture

Weak			Proficient			Strong		
L	M	H	L	M	H	L	M	H

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- The school outlines core beliefs and values. However, the beliefs and values do not guide the school's actions and the staff's behavior.
- Leaders may have developed a vision for the school, but the vision does not drive operational priorities or does not align with the District's vision or community aspirations.
- There is a focused action plan with measurable goals that are also prioritized. Teachers have limited input into the action plan.
- There is very little congruence between what the top priorities of the school are and what teachers believe they *should be*. The vision, goals, and plan are seldom discussed. When conflicts arise, the priorities are not followed. Teachers, lacking direction or agreement on the direction, act in disconnected ways.
- Leaders have low expectations for both students and staff. Parents and community members identify the culture of the building as one with low expectations.
- Leaders and staff members do not focus on outcomes nor use data to monitor progress toward key benchmarks and objectives.
- Improving the quality of instruction does not seem to be a priority. Poor teaching is not purposefully addressed – ineffective teachers are not remediated or removed.
- Teachers and teams have limited autonomy and have limited authority to make the decisions that directly impact their ability to accomplish their goals.

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- The school outlines core beliefs and values. They guide the school's actions and the staff's behavior.
- Leaders develop a shared vision for the school. The vision drives operational priorities and aligns with the district's vision and community aspirations.
- There is a focused action plan with measurable goals that are also prioritized. Teachers have input into the action plan and take concrete steps to help implement the plan.
- There is great congruence between what the top priorities of the school are and what teachers believe they *should be*. The vision, goals, and plan are revisited often. When conflicts arise, the priorities are followed.
- Leaders hold high expectations for both students and staff, but do not always follow through in practice. On average, the students, parents, and community identify the culture of the building as one with high expectations for all students.
- Staff focuses on outcomes and use data to monitor progress toward key benchmarks and objectives.
- The school values effectiveness and the ability to achieve defined outcomes; however, standards for classroom instruction for some teachers are not rigorous. Some teachers are given too much time to reach proficiency.
- Teachers and teams have limited autonomy and have limited authority to make the decisions that directly impact their ability to accomplish their goals.

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- The school outlines core beliefs and values. They guide the school's actions and the staff's behavior.
- Leaders develop a shared vision for the school. The vision drives operational priorities and aligns with the district's vision and community aspirations.
- There is a focused action plan with measurable goals that are also prioritized. Teachers have input into the action plan and take concrete steps to help implement the plan.
- There is great congruence between what the top priorities of the school are and what teachers believe they *should be*. The vision, goals, and plan are revisited often. When conflicts arise, the priorities are followed.
- Leaders establish high expectations for both students and staff, and ensure new teachers and others understand and behave consistent with the school's philosophy. The students, parents, and community identify the culture of the building as one with high expectations for all students.
- Staff focuses on outcomes and uses data to monitor progress toward key benchmarks and objectives.
- The school values effectiveness and the ability to achieve defined outcomes. Poor teaching is not tolerated – purposeful steps are taken to help ineffective teachers improve or, if necessary, to remove them from the system.
- Teachers and teams have the autonomy to make the decisions that directly impact their ability to accomplish their goals.
- The school uses continuous improvement models. Teachers and administrators are allowed to innovate and try non-traditional strategies. They learn from mistakes and missteps to become more effective.

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Recommendations

While school culture may take time to change, it can nevertheless show improvement in a much smaller amount of time. We make the following recommendations to start the creation of high performance cultures in most schools:

1) Train and support school leaders in creating a high performance culture
2) Assess school culture and establish outcomes related to it
3) Differentiate compensation based on performance and achievement outcomes
4) Define and implement levels of autonomy for schools and teachers

> **A framework for improving school culture**
>
> - **Train and support school leaders in creating a high performance culture**
> - **Assess school culture and establish outcomes related to it**
> - **Differentiate compensation based on performance and achievement outcomes**
> - **Define and implement levels of autonomy for schools and teachers**

1) Train and support school leaders in creating a high performance culture

While all stakeholders – students, parents, community members, teachers, and other staff members – have a role to play in creating a high performance culture, it is the school leader who sets the tone and guides the development of a strong culture. Effective leadership matters, and it matters most when it comes to establishing the conditions by which a high performance culture can actually take root. A strong leadership team ensures core beliefs are acted upon, that the vision guides actions, that outcomes are clear, that expectations are high, and that there is both high accountability and high support.

School leaders can be trained to take specific steps to build a stronger culture. If nothing else, outlining for them the specific characteristics of a high performance

culture and providing training around specific steps effective leaders take to build culture will help many principals move in the right direction.

2) *Assess school culture and establish outcomes related to it*

Many schools conduct climate surveys and take advantage of the feedback to improve school climate. Fewer schools conduct "school culture" reviews, even though strengthening culture has a greater impact on the long-term success of the school.

At a minimum, school leadership teams should use a rubric (similar to the one on page 9) to assess their schools culture. Better still if a district-level team used objective metrics to determine the degree to which a school had a high performance culture. Additionally, the principal's specific actions to create a high performance culture should be part of his evaluation rubric and should be assessed.

As with student achievement data, school leaders and the school should have specific outcomes delineated for school culture. It is not that "what gets measured, gets done;" rather it is "what gets measured, gets done better." If organizations want stronger cultures, then success has to be defined, outcomes delineated, desired behaviors described, support and training provided, progress assessed, culture evaluated, and leaders and staff held accountable.

3) *Differentiate compensation based on performance and achievement outcomes*

In a high performance culture, results matter, and those who meet challenging achievement goals are recognized and rewarded. In those cultures, teacher effectiveness is

> *An organization cannot maximize its effectiveness if what it values is disconnected from how it compensates employees.*

differentiated as is compensation or rewards. Conversely, and as referenced in The New Teacher Project report, in some districts the most effective teachers were more than twice as likely as poor-performing teachers to leave because of dissatisfaction with compensation and "compensation systems were especially demeaning to

teachers who excel early in their careers, yet often earn far less than many of their low-performing colleagues.[6]

If districts value effectiveness over years of experience (which does not mean that the two are mutually exclusive), they should find some way to compensate teachers for what their organization values most. And if they want to retain their most effective teachers, they will need to find ways to differentiate the compensation based on teacher effectiveness.

4) *Define and implement levels of autonomy for schools and teachers*

The culture in most schools and districts is heavily influenced by a "compliance-driven" and "process-focused" mentality. This leads to "check-the-box" behavior and is reinforced by systems that are too directive and in which leaders are overwhelmed with policies, regulations, reports, and deadlines placed upon them by central office or higher educational agencies.

If organizations want schools to maximize their effectiveness and to be adaptive and innovative, then leaders at the district will have to provide greater autonomy to schools. Similarly, schools will have to provide greater autonomy to its effective teachers.

Autonomy must include the freedom to make most of the decisions that directly impact a principal's or teacher's ability to accomplish their goals. It must also include decision-making over the use of resources. Leaders may provide direction and some parameters, but decisions around what strategies to employ, which resources to use, and how to monitor progress should be left to the school and teacher.

Appendix B provides an example of the levels of autonomy a district could provide for its schools. Higher levels of autonomy are granted to those schools that are meeting performance and achievement goals. Struggling or failing schools have less autonomy.

Schools could develop similar levels of autonomy for its teachers. Distinguished teachers would have the greatest level of autonomy; struggling or ineffective teachers would receive tighter parameters.

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[6] *The Irreplaceables*, p. 21.

APPENDIX A

Excerpts – Principal Evaluation Rubric
Related to Creating a High Performance Culture

Appendix A: Excerpts – Principal Evaluation Rubric – Related to Creating a High Performance Culture

1B. ESTABLISHES AND MAINTAINS A SHARED VISION OF SUCCESS

	Unsatisfactory			Progressing		Proficient		Exemplary		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Reinforces Core Beliefs	The leader fails to establish school Core Beliefs or adherence to the Beliefs is perfunctory. He fails to reinforce District Beliefs. Staff behavior is inconsistent with the school or District Core Beliefs.			With input from staff, the leader establishes school Core Beliefs; *expands understanding of and adherence to* Core Beliefs. However, reinforcement of Core Beliefs is not purposeful or regular. Some actions of leaders or staff are inconsistent with Core Beliefs.		With input from staff, the leader establishes school Core Beliefs that *complement or reinforce* District Core Beliefs*; purposefully and frequently* reinforces Core Beliefs; shares examples of staff actions that exemplify the Beliefs; expands understanding of and adherence to Core Beliefs. Actions of the staff are consistent with the Core Beliefs.		With input from staff, the leader establishes school Core Beliefs that *complement or reinforce* District Core Beliefs; *purposefully and frequently* reinforces Core Beliefs in multiple ways and in different venues; conducts exercises or activities to expand understanding of them; shares examples of staff actions that exemplify the Beliefs; tracks staff understanding and adherence to Core Beliefs. Actions of the staff are consistent with the Core Beliefs.		

	Unsatisfactory			Progressing		Proficient		Exemplary		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Guides staff to a shared vision	The leader cannot articulate a vision for the school. His plan for the school is not directed toward a picture of success or purposeful end. Discussions around the future of the school are not purposeful and do not lead to school improvement. Staff members *do not feel that they have direction* to accomplish challenging work. There is a sense of *being adrift*.			The leader has a vision, but that vision is *not translated into meaningful guidance* for the school. Discussions around the future of the school are not purposeful and do not lead to school improvement. The school creates a mission statement that has meaning for some members of the staff, but the words are largely *empty* as they do not guide the staff's actions.		The leader has a vision of what the school is about and where it is going. He articulates that vision in a way that *provides meaning* to staff and community. The leader and staff create or validate a *"mission statement"* that holds meaning for most members of the school and stakeholders.		The leader *engages* the staff in creating a shared vision of what the school is about and where it is going. He articulates the vision in a way that provides meaning to staff and community. He develops an *"actionable picture of success"* and staff members understand what success looks like. The leader develops a strategic plan that looks beyond the present horizon and *takes steps* to secure the long-term success of the school.		

1B. ESTABLISHES AND MAINTAINS A SHARED VISION OF SUCCESS

	Unsatisfactory			Progressing		Proficient		Exemplary		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Establishes goals and clarifies purpose	Goals are *vague* or developed as a paperwork drill. The leader *does not establish measurable indicators* of success or indicators that make a difference with regard to quality instruction and student achievement. There is a *lack of focus and clarity* about the work of the school.			The leader develops goals that are focused on school improvement, but may not be measurable. The *rationale* for some goals may not be clear to everyone on the staff. The leader and staff refer to the goals, but the goals *do not guide* their efforts.		The leader develops *measurable* goals that will improve the school. He *provides focus* and clarity to the goals through *indicators of success*. Staff members understand the goals and *use the goals and indicators* to guide their efforts. There is strong congruence between what the school's priorities are and what the staff believes they should be.		The leader *engages* the staff in developing measurable goals that will improve the school. The goals are clear and reinforce the school's vision. The goals provide *focus and prioritize actions*. The leader outlines specific actions and *indicators of success*. The staff uses the goals and indicators to guide their efforts. There is strong congruence between what the school's priorities are and what the staff believes they should be. Priorities are followed.		

Competency 3 – Create a high-performance and adaptive culture

Performance criteria	Possible sources or evidence of performance
3A. DISTRIBUTES DECISIONMAKING **3B. DEVELOPS AND ADAPTIVE CULTURE** **3C. HOLDS STAFF AND THE ORGANIZATION ACCOUNTABLE FOR OUTCOMES**	• Review of action plan responsibilities and job descriptions and the decision-making authority • The articulated decision-making process • Training of staff on D1-D5 decision-making • Staff responses on the climate survey • Staff comments during mid-year review, systems review, or other venues • Degree of teacher autonomy as evidenced by a review of lesson plans, lesson activities, use of resources, and PLCs • Notes in communications and other documents read by staff • Principal 360 evaluation • Review of established outcomes and metrics and how they were accomplished

Proposed specific outcomes	Notes
Proficient on the Competency 3 rubric	Minimum score is 21 out of 30
Increase in the number of new strategies or methods tried by teachers over the course of one quarter	The increase in the number of new strategies has to be balanced with ensuring students are still learning the objectives
The articulation of an effective decision-making process	Review template for developing an effective decision-making process
The percentage of outcomes and metrics achieved through the decisions of those responsible for achieving the metric	This outcome overlaps the leaders ability to design and implement effective action plans (see Competency 4)
Significant goal accomplishment	Assess how well goals were accomplished; use rubric that considers how challenging the goals were
Improvement in the percentage of teachers scoring "Proficient" of higher on the "Professionalism" domain	In a high-performing organization, over 80% of the staff are proficient or higher on professional conduct
Overall positive responses to relevant questions on staff survey	Include questions on the degree of autonomy and ability to exert influence over decisions that affect the classroom

Competency 3 – Create a high-performance and adaptive culture

3A. DISTRIBUTES DECISIONMAKING

Unsatisfactory		Progressing			Proficient			Exemplary	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
There is not a clear decision-making process, only a chain of command. Operational decisions are not pushed to the level of implementation. There is little autonomy and teachers do not feel that they have control or influence over their work. The leader is focused on compliance and distributes tasks and responsibilities rather than decision-making. The leader is overly critical when mistakes happen or if staff members implement in a way other than the way suggested by the leadership team.		The leader establishes a clear decision-making process; however, operational decisions are not pushed to the level of implementation. The leader provides for greater autonomy over decisions based on capacity and demonstrated effectiveness. He distributes some decisions to campus leaders. The leader encourages staff members to take the initiative, but is overly critical when mistakes happen or if staff members implement in a way other than the way suggested by the leadership team.			The leader establishes a clear decision-making process, with most *operational decisions being pushed to the level of implementation*. He provides for greater autonomy over decisions based on capacity and demonstrated effectiveness. He ensures *decision-making is distributed* to expand buy-in and to grow leadership density. The leader encourages staff members to take the initiative and allows for mistakes to happen.			The leader establishes a clear decision-making process, with most *operational decisions being pushed to the level of implementation*. He provides for greater autonomy over decisions based on capacity and demonstrated effectiveness. He ensures *decision-making is distributed* to expand buy-in and grow leadership density. The leader encourages staff members to take the initiative and allows for mistakes to happen. While allowing for some decisions to be imperfect, the leader coaches staff and *grows individuals' capacity to make good decisions*. He ensures that key decisions that impact the success of the entire organization are made thoughtfully and in a way that includes appropriate input.	

3B. DEVELOPS AN ADAPTIVE CULTURE

Unsatisfactory		Progressing			Proficient			Exemplary	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
The leader *uses a problem-solving model* with his staff. Sometimes, challenges or problems stymy the team's ability to try creative solutions. The staff exhibits "learned helplessness" behavior. The leader does not purposefully institute a continuous improvement model and		The leader *uses a problem-solving model* with his staff. Sometimes, challenges or problems stymy the team's ability to try creative solutions. The leader institutes a *continuous improvement model*, and focuses on growth and progress through accurate, data-informed			The leader *encourages innovation* and is slow to criticize staff members who "color outside the lines." The leader *uses a problem-solving model*; he, other campus administrators, and teacher-leaders work as a team and approach issues or challenges as problems that can be			The leader *encourages innovation* and is slow to criticize staff members who "color outside the lines." The leader *uses a problem-solving model*; he, other campus administrators, and teacher-leaders work as a team and approach issues or challenges as problems that can be	

does not focus on progress. He places a premium on compliance even at the expense of promising, innovative practices. He is not supportive of disruptive change and expects the staff to closely follow the rules. The staff is loath to try new strategies or break with past practices.	program assessment and continuous revision of programs or initiatives. However, the leader places a premium on compliance even at the expense of promising, innovative practices. He is not supportive of disruptive change and expects the staff to closely follow the rules.	solved. He institutes a *continuous improvement model*, and focuses on growth and progress through accurate, data-informed program assessment and continuous revision of programs or initiatives.	solved. He breaks a learned helplessness culture by *encouraging a "figure-it-out" mindset.* He institutes a *continuous improvement model*, and focuses on growth and progress through accurate, data-informed program assessment and continuous revision of programs or initiatives. The leader *promotes action research* and, when appropriate, encourages people to "fail faster." He coaches and trains school leaders on problem-solving and continuous improvement models and processes.

3C. HOLDS STAFF AND THE ORGANIZATION ACCOUNTABLE FOR OUTCOMES

Unsatisfactory		Progressing			Proficient			Exemplary	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
The leader and organization are not clear about what success looks like and do not establish indicators of success or outcomes to guide the school's work. Staff members have difficulty seeing the connections between specific actions and the established outcomes. The organization is compliance-driven and process-focused. People are afraid to try new strategies or think of creative solutions. Outcomes are not monitored, and no one is held accountable for the accomplishment of specific outcomes.		The leader establishes clear *indicators of success and outcomes* to guide the school's work. Staff members however have difficulty seeing the connections between specific actions and the established outcomes. The leader establishes broad operational parameters except in compliance areas. The organization is compliance-driven and process-focused. *Outcomes are monitored*, but there is little accountability for failure to accomplish specific outcomes.			The leader establishes clear *indicators of success and outcomes* to guide the school's work. He helps others hone in on the results they are seeking and the connection between specific actions and those results. He establishes broad operational parameters, allowing *wide latitude on how individuals accomplish the goals*. While processes are also established, the leader takes steps to move the organization from being a compliance-driven, process-focused one, to an adaptive, outcomes-focused one. *Outcomes are monitored*, and the leader holds staff members accountable for goal completion and the accomplishment of specific outcomes.			The leader establishes clear *indicators of success and outcomes* to guide the school's work. He helps others hone in on the results they are seeking and the connection between specific actions and those results. He establishes broad operational parameters, allowing *wide latitude on how individuals accomplish the goals*. While processes are also established, the leader takes steps to move the organization from being a compliance-driven, process-focused one, to an adaptive, outcomes-focused one. *Outcomes are monitored*, and the leader develops a team that feels ownership over the goals and *holds itself accountable* for accomplishing specific outcomes.	

APPENDIX B – Example of a District Autonomy Plan

Levels of Autonomy

Category	Decision	Alpha 1	1B	Alpha 2	2B	Alpha 3	3B	Alpha 4	Notes
Staff/Hiring School decides on a staffing pattern that creates the best learning environment for the students it serves.	• Hire candidates of their choice	✓		✓		✓		✓	
	• Opt out of job fairs					✓		✓	
	• Interview and hire candidates from inside or outside the District	✓		✓		✓		✓	Alpha 1 schools receive guidance from EDs on staff hires and non-teaching duties
	• Determine non-teaching duties for staff			✓		✓		✓	
	• Re-define or expand individual roles					✓		✓	
	• Change the number and types of staff the school chooses							✓	
	• Create new staffing positions, job descriptions, or hiring criteria							✓	
Schedule/Calendar Schools have flexibility to build time into or to quickly modify the existing schedule and/or calendar to best serve their students.	• Alter the master schedule or schedule within the school day	✓		✓		✓		✓	
	• Increasing the amount or changing the use of common planning or PD time					✓		✓	All schools already have the ability to plan PD; higher autonomy levels address PD time that affects student-teacher contact time
	• Increasing teacher instructional hours per week (adding instructional time to the school day)					✓		✓	
	• Changing timing and length of the school year					✓		✓	
	• Changing the number, time, or place of parent-teacher meetings					✓		✓	
	• Use block scheduling					✓		✓	

Category	Decision	Alpha 1	1B	Alpha 2	2B	Alpha 3	3B	Alpha 4	Notes
Curriculum/ Assessment Schools have the freedom to structure curriculum and assessment practices.	• Decide what texts and resources to use	✓		✓		✓		✓	
	• Establishing an alternative curriculum (what students have to know and do)					✓		✓	Alpha 3 students must still take state and district common assessments, Alpha 4 students must still take state assessments
	• Offer on-line or other innovative courses					✓		✓	
	• Changing the timing of report cards							✓	
	• Opting out of or choose alternative tests (instead of ACPs)							✓	
	• Setting more rigorous promotion and/or graduation requirements							✓	
Instruction Schools have the freedom to structure instructional practices.	• Decide which teachers submit lesson plans	✓		✓		✓		✓	
	• Change the number of spot observations					✓		✓	Alpha 3 and 4 schools will still have some minimum number of required spot observations
	• Allow peer observers to conduct required spot observations					✓		✓	
	• Change or adjust the requirement to use multiple response strategies					✓		✓	This autonomy may apply to some Alpha 3 schools, but not others. Alpha 3 and 4 schools must still demonstrate that all students are engaged in learning
	• Implement school-wide, instructional programs			✓		✓		✓	

Category	Decision	Alpha 1	1B	Alpha 2	2B	Alpha 3	3B	Alpha 4	Notes
Professional Development Schools have the autonomy to establish professional development that aligns with the instructional program and best suits the needs of the school community.	• Specify the amount of professional development and collaborative time teachers spend	✓		✓		✓		✓	This applies to school-level PD; higher autonomy levels address PD time that affects student-teacher contact time
	• Determine the topics and agenda for district-scheduled professional development time					✓		✓	Alpha 1 and 2 have limited autonomy for district-scheduled PD
	• Opt into or out of district-provided/mandated professional development services or session agendas					✓		✓	
	• Establish formal relationships (via MOUs, contracts, etc.) with vetted providers							✓	
Budget Schools have a lump sum, per-pupil budget in which it has discretion to spend in a manner that provides the best programs and services.	• Decide on use of discretionary school budget	✓		✓		✓		✓	
	• Decide on use of donated funds	✓		✓		✓		✓	
	• Rollover funds allocated by the District from year to year					✓		✓	
	• Repurpose allocations to establish additional unrestricted funds							✓	
	• Convert staff positions to dollars or dollars to staff							✓	
	• Purchase certain services or staff from outside partners							✓	
	• Buy back certain discretionary services from the District							✓	
	• Budget using average or actual teacher salary							✓	

Category	Decision	Alpha 1	1B	Alpha 2	2B	Alpha 3	3B	Alpha 4	Notes
Other Allow campuses to propose additional requests and approve on a case by case basis.	• Opting out of district-mandated record-keeping and/or paperwork							✓	
	• Setting alternative attendance regulations					✓		✓	All schools must follow Board policies with regard to attendance
	• Setting alternative student discipline codes					✓		✓	All schools must follow Board policies with regard to student discipline
	• Allocate stipends based on individual teacher/ school-site position responsibilities							✓	
	• Opting out of Executive Director or Asst. Superintendent meetings							✓	
	• Attend conferences and PD outside of the District								

Non-negotiables

1. All schools will use the District principal and teacher evaluation systems.
    - However, some adjustment to the evaluation system may be allowed.
    - Spot observations must be conducted per the evaluation system.

2. All schools will ensure good, first instructional practices as defined by the District.

3. All schools will implement minimal, core instructional practices as defined by the District.