

# Curriculum Leadership Institute E-Hint

## Reaching Quality Consensus

The E-Hint "The School District's Decision-Making and Action-Taking Culture", discussed a district's decision-making and action-taking culture, and concluded by telling us that according to research, the consensus-driven culture yields the most positive results. However, simply implementing a consensus approach is not enough to accomplish those desired results. Here are some points that should be remembered when using any kind of consensus model:

### **QUALITY CONSENSUS ISN'T ATTAINED BY THE USE OF "BUY-IN" MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES**

Most of us in education are acquainted with the managerial notion that if we give parents, patrons, subordinate administrators, teachers, and professional support persons a "say" in the decision-making process, they will happily support administrative directives and actions. Most educators now understand that process to be a kind of guileful manipulation that does nothing more than cause cynicism and a play-their-game attitude.

### **QUALITY CONSENSUS CANNOT BE ACHIEVED IN A KNOWLEDGE VACUUM.**

"School improvement is data-driven" is a mantra that has been heard from the 1990s through today, and has resulted in an explosion of information seeking and reporting strategies. Every state now has an information bank about each school and district, and information can certainly be useful. However, it is clear that often such information is trivial, contrived, or based on poorly constructed or interpreted research protocols. Educators need a deep understanding of what happens to students because of their pedagogical efforts, so they must seek and use an ever more sophisticated system for improving professional insight.

### **QUALITY CONSENSUS DOESN'T OCCUR IN AN ENVIRONMENT OF FEAR OR IMPENDING THREAT**

While the use of external review of academic programs (accreditation) is an important impetus to quality school improvement, it must be seen as a kind of procedural partner in the overall effort. Too often administrators see external review as a kind of commandment-based assessment, and constantly remind their subordinates and colleagues that judgment day is coming. Most states and accrediting organizations don't like that perception and are working to overcome it, but unfortunately it exists now more than ever.

### **QUALITY CONSENSUS CANNOT ACHIEVE QUALITY RESULTS WITHOUT GOOD LEADERSHIP**

Another way to express this point is that frequently a consensus-created decision is botched because of inept leadership, or an implementation process that tries to ignore the need for leadership completely. Leadership in consensus-building is not necessarily the same thing as leadership in action-taking. One is facilitative and encouraging while the other is characterized by mission-focused action. Mission-focused action doesn't require a dictatorial demeanor, but it does call for good organization and communication, appropriate delegation of authority, clear objectives and goals, and well understood benchmarks of accomplishment.

### **QUALITY CONSENSUS MUST RESULT IN A MUTUALLY ACCEPTED ACCOUNTABILITY TO FOLLOW UP ON DECISIONS MADE**

While leadership is important in implementing decisions, there must be a district-wide acknowledgement that the original consensus-based decision is worthwhile and critical to the improvement of curriculum, instruction, and excellence in student learning. That kind of acceptance is what William Edwards Deming would say is an "allegiance to the quality of product and service" (in schools — "quality of learning"). It should also be the fundamental interpretation of professional accountability that once a decision is made everyone works to make sure the intended outcome is achieved.