

Curriculum Leadership Institute E-Hint

True Academic Leadership

The Curriculum Leadership Institute offers services to schools that are different than those provided by other consultant and publishing organizations, in that it does more than suggest simple systems for meeting standards and other student learning challenges. The CLI's Model is focused on helping local teachers and administrators become *academic leaders* in their own right. That means that those who become local leaders actually participate in the decision-making and action-taking processes in personally assertive and creative ways. Developing that leadership is much more dynamic and far-reaching than, let's say, training on how to use software that automatically maps curriculum, or processes that show teachers how to "unpack" state standards.

The purpose of this E-Hint is to provide a working definition for what a true academic leader really is. *Academic leadership is anything done in a school that directly affects the quantity and quality of student learning.* In that sense, anyone who regularly leads a decision-making and action-taking process in curriculum, instruction, and assessment of student learning can be called an academic leader. Academic leadership in the schools is important because preservice teacher education programs cannot — no matter how they are restructured — thoroughly prepare new, young teachers with all the skills necessary to be fully competent and scholastically adept classroom practitioners. Moreover, a single teacher's success is often contingent on the professional milieu in which he or she works, one that can effectively encourage or discourage professional and scholastic growth. New, young teachers need guidance beyond simple mentoring from an experienced peer. They need to know they work in a school or district that dynamically and continuously strives for excellence, and is willing and able to help them become part of a dynamic organization committed to quality student learning. Such a school or district will have many seasoned educators who meet the definition of academic leader, working individually and in teams.

The following list, while not comprehensive, includes jobs ordinarily associated with academic leadership. The tasks shown are typically linked to various job titles and responsibilities, and those titles and responsibilities are shown in the right column.

ACADEMIC Leadership Tasks And Assigned Personnel	
TASKS	JOB TITLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES
managing and evaluating certified employees	Ideally, the management and evaluation of certified teachers is a responsibility of administrators who clearly qualify as academic leaders.
developing or participating in the development of curriculum and/or managing curriculum	These academic leadership roles can be held by teachers or other certified staff, curriculum coordinators, or administrators who have identifiable skills, or training/experience in curriculum management. Often these tasks are completed collegially by a group of such leaders.
interpreting and/or applying state standards to a local curriculum	
developing and/or overseeing the use of local core or common summative assessments	
guiding faculty development in teaching and conditions for student learning	
creating and managing a scholastic environment throughout the school	These academic leadership roles are commonly held by certified administrators or curriculum coordinators, but often are also delegated to teachers and other qualified persons, or (as above) may be completed by a <i>group</i> of leaders.
creating systems and processes for data management and use	
conducting public relations activities in academic functions of the school	
maintaining good relations with the school's adult constituency (parents and patrons) in academic domains	
ensuring that all academic accreditation standards are met	

It is also instructive to look at tasks usually associated with *administrative* leadership. While there is obviously an overlap between tasks assigned to *academic* leadership functions and *administrative* leadership functions, the distinctions can be important for purposes of establishing local priorities.

ADMINISTRATIVE Leadership Tasks And Assigned Personnel

TASKS	JOB TITLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES
supervising and evaluating uncertified employees	With a few exceptions, most of the tasks shown on the left are assigned to certified building or district administrators.
sponsoring or conducting staff development activities as appropriate to the smooth functioning of the school's extramural activities	
scheduling classrooms, classes, and daily operations of the school	
overseeing budgets	
maintaining the physical plant	
disciplining students as necessary for nonacademic infractions	
scheduling coordination of special services and personnel	
meeting managerial expectations as issued by the board and district executives	
conducting public relations activities in nonacademic functions of the school	
maintaining good relations with the school's adult constituency (parents and patrons) in nonacademic domains	
ensuring that procedural and logistical accreditation standards are met	
ensuring that building policies and personnel actions are in compliance with state law and agency mandates	

It is becoming increasingly obvious that schools and districts that impose all academic *and* administrative leadership tasks on their administrators, which is commonly the case, are overloading them... especially now that school accreditation is standards-based and a function of high-stakes testing. Because of that condition, the Curriculum Leadership Institute is conducting research and development activities centered on the possibility of changing the leadership culture of schools and districts. Those activities are based on the hypothesis that schools and districts should not necessarily emulate line and staff leadership structures found in business and the military. Instead, a hypothesis is being constructed that suggests that administrative and academic leadership functions should be separate and mutually supportive.

A leadership structure that currently separates the two functions can be found in health care organizations, particularly hospitals. In hospitals there are administrators who manage the facility, and chiefs of staff who oversee the professional medical personnel who provide patient care. While the two functions are separate, they must find ways to be mutually supportive. That separate but mutually supportive structure is described in corporate bylaws and policies.

For nearly 20 years the CLI has advocated the preparation and use of policy statements to guide academic decision-making and action-taking. Those policy statements have been used to create curriculum coordinating councils and other bodies, such as subject area committees, that give organizational substance and direction to academic leadership. There is considerable evidence that such actions, given time and solid backing, improve a district's ability to create and nurture a body of academic leaders who can work with their colleagues to achieve quality student learning. It is time to expand that idea and practice so that everyone understands exactly what academic leadership is, and how its characteristics can be woven into the organizational fabric of every district, building, department and grade level team.