

Introduction:

Honorable Committee members:

Good afternoon. My name is Scott Turner and I am the superintendent of Spartanburg School District Five and am the president elect of the South Carolina Association of School Administrators. It is an honor to be able to address you today. I believe you are aware of the varied and complex issues that this committee is charged with addressing. These issues range from funding mechanisms, identifying programs that have been successful with the capacity to be replicated, increasing efficiency in the delivery of public education, infrastructure issues facing rural school districts, as well as many others.

I would like to address the role of well-trained effective leadership in our districts and schools. Leadership skills need to be developed, identified, and placed in areas of greatest need. As we examine methods of improving schools throughout our state, we must understand the importance of leadership development for our schools and districts.

Effective Leadership:

We all agree that effective leadership is necessary for success in any endeavor. Leadership styles may vary in effectiveness depending on the desired outcomes. Some of the issues that leaders are expected to manage are

school climate, student achievement, professional development, financial management, 21st century skill sets, communication, and many others. These would all be considered indicators of effective school leaders.

Current research on school leadership indicates that it is multi-faceted and increasingly complex. Characteristics ranging from inclusiveness to self-awareness, to emotional intelligence are a few that have been identified through research. There are five characteristics of effective leaders found throughout current research that I would like to address.

The first is having high expectations of students and helping to develop a sense of ambition. This does not necessarily mean a focus on test scores, or completing a program of study. Effective leaders have high expectations for the whole student in all areas of their lives and do not sacrifice one area of success at the expense of another. These leaders instill a belief that success is not a one-time thing; it is an all the time thing (Vince Lombardi)

The second characteristic of effective leaders is making clear that being disadvantaged may be a hindrance, but it cannot be allowed to become an excuse. The relationship between educational outcomes, family and community dynamics, parental involvement and the successes of peers are well documented. In many cases parents may have difficulty attending school

conferences to discuss student progress in areas of academics or social skills due to conflicts with rigid work schedules, or lack of sufficient educational attainment themselves. They may have difficulty helping their children with academic work. Effective leaders recognize these issues and work to ensure they do not become excuses. Districts such as Chester County have programs where principals help parents gain knowledge they may need to help their children, and to become more involved in their children's education. In my own district we have implemented a Parenting and Family Literacy program, which provides training for students and parents. Effective leaders find ways to help students and families realize their current situation does not determine their future.

The third characteristic of effective leaders is a relentless focus on improving teaching and learning through professional development. This means they understand the needs of their teachers, the challenges they face and how those challenges are best addressed. They do not approach professional development as a one time event or class, but as an opportunity for continuous improvement essential to the profession.

The fourth characteristic is that effective leaders understand assessment data and track how students are progressing. They search for ways that will help students continually improve academically, whether they are in the 95th percentile or in a much lower level

of achievement. They use assessment data to help teachers plan individualized instruction for students. Effective leaders understand the function of assessment data, what is being measured, and how it should be used to improve instruction and learning.

Finally, effective leaders cultivate partnerships within their communities with parents, businesses, and local leaders. Leaders use persuasion to influence rather than direct actions. They may persuade students, parents, teachers, and communities that valuing education leads to more productivity, higher income levels, higher levels of employment, and lower crime rates. Education is a social good and school leaders cultivate this understanding in their communities.

Developing Effective Leaders

Effective leaders borrow from the successes of others, as Drucker (2009) states, “effective leaders are not born, they are grown.” Early theories of leadership posited that strong managerial skills were needed to be a successful school leader. Work involving evaluations, finance, facility planning, and work schedules were the central themes of leadership development. While these skill sets are critical to leaders being successful, they are not enough to help leaders be their most effective. 21st century leadership must involve managing rapid and systemic change. The impact of bringing change to bear upon a school or system to initiate, and sustain,

much needed improvement is a necessity. Management will bring stability and results wanted today, but leadership will develop people, policies, and organizations for our future. Change is central to our roles as effective leaders. This change can be constructive or destructive depending on how it is implemented by leaders.

There are several prerequisites for constructive change. Effective leaders must possess the skill of assessing the systems they lead, as well as, the people within the systems, and determine the indicators that are of most importance to bringing positive change. Some indicators such as time on task, or behavioral models may be very similar in a variety of schools, whereas others such as assessing violence, suspensions, attendance rates, formative and summative assessment changes, drop-out or retention rates may have different values depending on the environment within the system. Effective leaders must understand and know which indicators need their focus and the proper responses for each.

Self-awareness is another characteristic needed to lead effectively. We must understand our own strengths and weaknesses before bringing about positive change within a school or system. Leaders must understand the culture and needs of their organizations and how their own skill sets can help the organization move forward. Leaders must be open to critical self-reflection and

understand how they may act to bring improvements to the system. Once a leader possesses these skills, they will be able to adapt to meet challenges within the school or system.

What is the Challenge for this Committee?

I have listed a number of characteristics needed by leaders to be effective in our complex changing educational systems. I urge the committee to consider the following issues as you move forward with your work:

- Seek well-defined leadership standards that detail the essential knowledge, skills, and abilities school leaders should possess. These will help guide a leader's career from preparation, recruitment, retention, monitoring, and advancement.
- Define the roles and responsibilities for teacher leaders, assistant principals, principals, and superintendents, differentiating among specific needs of urban, suburban, and rural schools, as well as, those of varying poverty levels.
- Cultivate a pipeline of effective school leaders and focus on a specific set of skills necessary for bringing necessary change to low performing schools.
- Identify and develop quality mentoring, and continuing education programs for new school

leaders, as well as for those seeking to become leaders.

- Develop a quality school leadership development program, for both aspiring school leaders, as well as those seeking to transition into new roles and environments such as leading change in a low performing school or turn-around school.

This is an abbreviated list but is derived from best practices identified in policy changes enacted in 23 states since 2009. I urge you to seriously consider the information and recommendations provided today, and I know that the organization I represent, the South Carolina Association of School Administrators (SCASA) stands ready to assist the committee in its endeavors.

Thank you.