Chapter 10
Transformational Leadership Initiatives Driving P–12 School Change:
A Look at Leadership Through the Implementation of School and District Change Initiatives

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, educational leaders who are driving school change through transformational leadership initiatives share their stories. The authors range in their respective roles with an elementary school classroom teacher, a math-science departmental supervisor, a high school principal and a district superintendent. Each case study describes the implementation of a transformative leadership project from the main idea and impetus driving each project to the implementation methods and outcomes of each respective endeavor. The first project describes a teacher's addition of cultural-driven morning meetings to an elementary school classroom. The teacher discusses the necessity and how-to of implementing culture-driven morning meetings in the classroom and reflects on the overall impact on her students. A school superintendent leads the reader through his process of increasing rigor at the start of high school through the implementation of Advanced Placement (AP) courses for ninth-grade students. Next, a high school principal discusses an innovative blended learning program in a low socioeconomic district including the special challenges experienced. Finally, a high school math supervisor describes the school-wide implementation of Khan Academy for SAT preparation.

INTRODUCTION

Achieving school change is difficult regardless of the ideas being set forth or the position of the person driving the change. Careful consideration must be given to the planning, implementation, operation, sustainability, and culmination of large-scale initiatives. This chapter focuses on the case studies of four educators and their unique change initiatives within their schools or school districts. The authors come from various backgrounds and positions, but are aligned in their desire to lead school change as well as the mechanisms and lenses through which they operated. The purpose of this chapter is to provide readers with case studies of real experiences in leadership and transformative change from multiple perspectives and positions within educational settings.

CULTURE-DRIVEN MORNING MEETINGS

Since Gloria Ladson-Billings coined the phrase "culturally responsive teaching" in 1994, there has been a pedagogical shift in education that now focuses on educators being culturally and linguistically responsive. This change has been slow, but steady; as more research has revealed the student academic and social-emotional benefits of the pedagogy, Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) has gained notoriety and popularity with educators. Culturally Responsive Teaching empowers students socially, emotionally and politically (Garcia & Garcia, 2016). Through the integration of CRT strategies, classrooms become more inclusive and respectful to individual and cultural differences. Unfortunately, there is not an abundance of research on practical tools or strategies for educators to employ. Most of the literature is on the theory of CRT, or how a teacher or instruction improves through the use of CRT.

In trying to identify practical strategies, resources or tools that would empower the delivery of culturally responsive instruction, an idea emerged based on the notion that if students learned best from teachers who were culturally responsive, then maybe they would learn best from classmates who were also culturally responsive. This pedagogy has the power to transform relationships between teachers and students – encouraging a higher level of performance by both. Who was to say this would not transform students' relationships with each other as well? If CRT was so great for teachers, then certainly students could and would benefit from becoming more culturally responsive themselves. Classroom communities have the potential to be strongest when morning meetings are employed - a time when all sit together, practice agreed upon rules, find their voices, and take time to understand individual cultures and that of classmates. The implementation of culturally driven morning meetings was achieved, not only to provide a practical tool and resource for educators to use, but, more importantly, it would empower students to be more academically, socially and emotionally successful. This transformational leadership project describes the implementation of culture-driven morning meetings in a 4th grade general education inclusion classroom in Montgomery County Public Schools, Maryland. The classroom was comprised of 15 males and 11 females. Of the 26 students, 42.3% identify as Black or African American, 34.6% as Latino or Hispanic, 7.7% as White, 7.7% as Asian, and 7.7% as Mixed Race. None of the students were receiving special education services. Of the students, seven (27%) received English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) services, while 10 (38.5%) received Free and Reduced-Priced Meals (FARMs). It was significant to run culture-driven morning meetings with such a diverse demographic of students as differences in culture were apparent immediately and discourse flourished.

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