

Preface

We sincerely believe that the only positive example of restructuring American education in the past half century was the movement that developed the middle school to replace the traditional junior high school. Collectively, we have completed more than seventy years as educators, but our time spent in the middle school remains our most rewarding career experience. The ideas of our dynamic staff constantly raised the expectations we had for our students. Their collaborative planning enabled us to both anticipate problems and assertively solve long-standing issues that had stymied our predecessors. Middle-level children discovered an oasis of sanity in our school as they attempted to address the problems of our society and the trials of preadolescence.

Our calendar is intended to serve as a living document. Every entry we've made is incomplete since it lacks your interpretation and the expertise you bring to your position. It is our intent to stimulate the thinking, planning, and implementation phases of a staff's attempt to restructure its educational environment. Our description of many ideas that have proven to be successful in other middle schools may not always be suitable for your building. Use those you find relevant, but feel free to discard items that do not meet your present needs. We placed blank spaces after each activity description in the hopes that you will provide your input and thereby become our coauthors.

A more thorough definition of leadership is necessary since middle school principals must develop staff members who believe they can contribute to every aspect of the school's program and tone. It takes a multitalented professional who is not intimidated by teacher involvement in the decision-making process to run a middle-level school. Having the following qualities and using the organizational skills in our text will help the middle school administrator to truly become a leader of leaders.

Recently a New York State Education Department Blue Ribbon Panel on School Leadership developed a list of essential knowledge and skills of effective

school leaders. We believe these nine characteristics serve as a model for middle school administrators.

Essential Knowledge and Skills for Effective School Leadership Characteristics

1. Leaders know and understand what it means and what it takes to be a leader.

Leadership is the act of identifying important goals and then motivating and enabling others to devote themselves and all necessary resources to achievement. It includes summoning one's self and others to learn and adapt to the new situation represented by the goal.

2. Leaders have a vision for schools that they constantly share and promote.

Leaders have a vision of the ideal and can articulate this vision to any audience and work diligently to make it a reality. Leaders also know how to build upon and sustain a vision that preceded them.

3. Leaders communicate clearly and effectively.

Leaders possess effective writing and presentation skills. They express themselves clearly and are confident and capable of responding to the hard questions in a public forum. They are also direct and precise questioners, always seeking understanding.

4. Leaders collaborate and cooperate with others.

Leaders communicate high expectations and provide accurate information to foster understanding and to maintain trust and confidence. Leaders reach out to others for support and assistance, build partnerships, secure resources, and share credit for successes and accomplishments. School leaders manage change through effective relationships with school boards.

5. Leaders persevere and take the "long view."

Leaders build institutions that endure. They "stay the course," maintain focus, and anticipate and work to overcome resistance. They create capacity within the organization to achieve and sustain its vision.

6. Leaders support, develop, and nurture staff.

Leaders set a standard for ethical behavior. They seek diverse perspectives and alternative points of view. They encourage initiative, innovation, collaboration, and a strong work ethic. Leaders expect and provide opportunities for staff to engage in continuous personal and professional growth. They recognize individual talents and assign responsibility and authority for specific tasks. Leaders celebrate accomplishments. They identify, recruit, mentor, and promote potential leaders.

7. Leaders hold themselves and others responsible and accountable.

Leaders embrace and adhere to comprehensive planning that improves the organization. They use data to determine the present state of the organization, identify root-cause problems, propose solutions, and validate accomplishments. Leaders respect responsibility and accountability and manage resources effectively and efficiently. They require staff to establish and meet clear indicators of success. Leaders in education also know and understand good pedagogy and effective classroom practices and support sustained professional development. They recognize the importance of learning standards and significance of assessments.

8. Leaders never stop learning and honing their skills.

Leaders are introspective and reflective. Leaders ask questions and seek answers. Leaders in education are familiar with current research and best practice, not only in education but also in other related fields. They maintain a personal plan for self-improvement and continuous learning and balance their professional and personal lives, making time for other interests.

9. Leaders have the courage to take informed risks.

Leaders embrace informed, planned change and recognize that everyone may not support change. Leaders work to win support and are willing to take action in support of their vision, even in the face of opposition.