Chapter 1

Behind the Scenes of Data-Driven Leadership: Intentionality of Leadership

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the responsibilities of the school leader, specifically the principal, to effectively apply aspects of data-driven leadership beyond the instructional applications of the classroom and provide applications for data-driven leadership in the crucial leadership functions of staff recruitment and hiring, placement of staff, master scheduling of the institution at both the elementary and secondary level, classroom composition, and finally, the placement of the students in the correct education setting. The intent of this chapter is to provide school leaders with insights into the intentionality required of leadership as applied to often overlooked tasks that are critical to the success of the students, faculty, staff, and overall school community.

INTRODUCTION

If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail!

- Benjamin Franklin

The intent of this chapter is to provide school leaders with insights into the intentionality required of leadership with regard to often overlooked tasks that are critical to the success of: the students, faculty, staff, and overall school community. Specific areas of discussion will include:

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• Staff recruitment and hiring,
• Placement of staff,
• Master scheduling of the institution,
• Classroom composition, and
• Placement of students within the school setting.

For the purposes of this chapter, when the term school leader is used, the reader should interpret this as referencing the principal of the school, or the individual holding what would traditionally be the principal role if another organizational structure is in place.

Data-driven leadership traditionally has been used to improve the effectiveness of the daily instruction provided in the classroom (Sun, Johnson, & Przybylski, 2016). The desired level of effectiveness is most often accomplished using an instructional cycle of re-teaching the material by incorporating instructional scaffolding with the goal of improving student achievement as measured by assessment scores (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). The passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 demanded the reliance of school leaders on specific numerical evidence from student achievement, as well as school-related empirical data to make decisions (Sun, 2014). However, this view of data-driven leadership left a lack of consensus in theory among scholars (Sun, Johnson, & Przybylski 2016).

While many school leaders are strong instructional leaders, perhaps former master teachers or instructional coaches in their own right, a failure to apply data to all areas of decision-making and leadership is detrimental to the success of the school (Hutton, 2000). In fact, without the successful application of data in the more “behind the scenes” activities of leadership, it is entirely possible the more traditional applications of data will be placed at a great disadvantage due to the lack of intentionality of the leader.

A LOOK BEHIND THE SCENES

As a school leader, there is an obvious responsibility for academic achievement, especially in this era of accountability (Leithwood & Azah, 2014). However, this role extends far beyond the selection of materials, adoption of curricula, assurance of instructional efficacy, and monitoring of student achievement outcomes to a more behind the scenes series of responsibilities such as: the recruitment, hiring, and placement of staff; overall scheduling of the building; and ultimately the actual placement of students in classrooms. While the current culture of school leadership preparation programs focuses more on instructional leadership, it is equally important for school leaders to become well-versed in the application of data to managerial aspects of the principal role. If the students are not properly placed and guided by staff who are serving in the correct roles, the capacity is not maximized and the best curricula, professional development, and instructional strategies will be undermined (Elmore, 2007). The students and staff will have been placed at a disadvantage prior to opening the doors on the first day of school and will remain at a disadvantage throughout each day of the school year. Staff and students may achieve despite these obstacles as many schools have met this challenge; however, they will not reach the heights of their academic potential due to a lack of behinds the scenes intentionality from the school leadership.

The concepts provided in this chapter are not intended to be used as a part of a participatory leadership approach (House, 1996). Rather, these are leadership actions taking place behind closed doors or behind the scenes and act as the framework to allow for more collaborative processes to be successful moving forward. Some of the content within this chapter, if conducted in the broad public eye, would potentially
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