

Vision as an Impetus for Success: Perspectives of Site Principals

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To what extent do school principals know, understand, and act upon research-based principles for English Language Learners and their intersection with the California Professional Standards for Educational Leaders related to promoting ELL success as they apply to the vision of learning?

INTRODUCTION

Schools have a greater opportunity for attaining measured success when principals collaborate with students, faculty/staff, parents and community to create a school educational vision that is unambiguous, persuasive, and undeniably linked to teaching and learning (Block, 2003; Bolman & Deal, 2000; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Elmore, 2003). This shared vision then serves as the locus of everyone's attention, compels all to act, and enhances the collective sense of responsibility for student learning.

A well-articulated vision helps provide an image of what the school values, hopes and believes (Fullan, 2005; Marzano, Walters, & McNulty, 2005). The school's vision must promote the success of all students. When specifically considering advocacy-oriented leadership for English Learner success, the school vision must be developed to communicate the purposeful inclusion of English Language Learners. The principal, acting as steward of that vision (Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, 1996), must then be able to identify and address any barriers to accomplishing the vision relative to ELL success, must shape school programs, plans, and activities to ensure that they are integrated across the grades and are consistent with the vision (Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2000). Equally as imperative, the principal must appropriately influence and position sufficient resources, including technology, to implement and attain the vision for ELL's (WestEd, 2003; Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2000). These shared school tenets inevitably establish how people allocate time and effort around ELL's, what issues they address, and how resources are apportioned. These shared tenets manifest themselves, or become concrete, via the individual and collective actions of each member of the school community.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

The PROMISE Initiative¹, in its initial phase, is a three-year pilot study (2006-2009) designed in collaboration with six Southern California county offices of education (Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, and Ventura). The initiative's research and evaluation component addresses three questions: (1) what is the PROMISE model, (2) what has occurred in the schools as a result of engagement in the PROMISE model, and (3) what has been the impact of PROMISE on student learning and participation?

One study within this overall research and evaluation component looked exclusively at the participating school site principals. This specific study was designed to generate an evidence base for powerful and transformative advocacy-oriented

leadership for English Learners. Participants included school principals at fifteen sites within the six-county collaborative. The Protocol for Advocacy Oriented Leadership and Administration² is a research-based tool used to assess site principals' perceptions of their current knowledge, skills, expertise, and orientation for advocacy-oriented leadership. This protocol invited participants to quantitatively self-report leadership capacity against indicators aligned with the PROMISE Core Principles (PROMISE Core Principles, 2006) and the California Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (California Professional Standards for Educational Leaders, 2001) and qualitatively to provide examples of implementation and/or application of stated indicators. Focus group interviews were also conducted.

This leadership study was part of a three-year pilot study and all data collected and accompanying analyses are preliminary and based exclusively on Year 1 and Year 2 findings. Survey participants³ were assured that individual responses would remain confidential and would be reported in summary. During Year 1 (2006-07) of the study, a total of 14 participants (8 female) completed the PAOLA, and 11 participants (6 female) completed the PAOLA in Year 2 (2007-08). Interviews/Focus Groups were conducted only during Year 2 and a total of 12 administrators participated in this phase of the study. Two of the participants were early childhood administrators, 4 elementary administrators, 2 middle school and 3 high school principals. Participants' ethnicity included 5 Latina/o administrators, 4 Caucasian administrators, with 2 declining to state their ethnicity. The age of the year 2 participant administrators ranged from 26 to 65, with the highest percentage of administrators self reporting in the 36-40 age range. All administrators listed being an administrator at their current site for 1-5 years, with the majority, 8, of participants listing having 10 years or less of administrative experience, with an average range of 11 to 20 years in the field of education.

PAOLA (SURVEY) METHODOLOGY

A mixed methods approach was used, incorporating both quantitative and descriptive methods. Descriptive data was collected through anecdotal records, interviews/focus groups, and responses to open-ended survey questions. Descriptive responses were analyzed through content analysis approaches; Merriam (1998) constant comparative method, in order to generate the themes, patterns and trends and to report on changes over time.

Using a 5-point Likert scale; (5= Very Knowledgeable, 1= No Understanding/Knowledge), participants were asked to indicate the degree to which they knew, understood, and acted upon the PROMISE Core Principle and its intersection with the California Professional Standard for Educational Leaders as related to the Vision of Learning. Participants reported around three indicators: (1) Display of values, beliefs, and attitudes inspiring work for ELs, (2) Emphasis on addressing needs of ELs as a learning community, and (3) Leadership grounded in research-based principles for EL instruction and biliteracy development.

PAOLA SURVEY RESULTS: VISION (QUANTITATIVE RESULTS)

Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations and the range for all indicators of the CPSEL Standard One Vision of Learning results are listed for Year 1 and Year 2 in the table below. In both Year 1 and Year 2 study participants rated themselves highest on Indicator 2 and lowest on Indicator 3. At the school level, Indicator results remained relatively constant from Year 1 to Year 2, except for early childhood principal participants, whose scores dropped considerably on Indicators 1 and 2 from Year 1 to Year 2.

PAOLA YEAR ONE AND YEAR TWO CPSEL STANDARD ONE (VISION OF LEARNING): Range, Means and Standard Deviations

	ALL SCHOOLS		EARLY CHILDHOOD		ELEMENTARY		MIDDLE SCHOOL		HIGH SCHOOL	
	Year 1 n=14	Year 2 n=11	Year 1 n=2	Year 2 n = 2	Year 1 n=5	Year 2 n = 4	Year 1 n=3	Year 2 n = 2	Year 1 n=4	Year 2 n = 3
INDICATOR 1	4.43(.50)	4.0(1.1)	4.0(.00)	2.5(2.1)	4.8(.45)	4.3(.5)	4.0(.00)	4.0(.0)	4.5(.58)	4.7(0.6)
INDICATOR 2	4.54(.52)	4.2(1.2)	4.0(.00)	2.5(2.1)	4.6(.55)	4.8(.5)	5.0(.00)	4.5(.7)	4.5(.58)	4.3(0.6)
INDICATOR 3	3.64(.84)	3.8(1.0)	3.0(.00)	3.0(1.4)	4.0(1.00)	4.3(.5)	4.0(.00)	4.0(.0)	3.3(.96)	3.7(1.5)

*Possible Range is 1 to 5

ANALYSIS OF PAOLA SURVEY: OPEN-ENDED PROMPT; EXEMPLARS OF VISION INDICATORS (QUALITATIVE RESULTS)

Participants were asked to provide concrete examples using the aforementioned indicators. An analysis of their responses was conducted using both SPSS 15.0 (Nie & Hull, 2006) and a coding process. This analysis indicated that participants identified similar themes for both year 1 and 2; however there was a variation in the number of times a specific example was used. As

evidenced by their representative examples below, eight occurring themes emerged from the analysis of the open-ended prompt of the vision indicators: (1) learning environment, (2) pedagogy, (3) curriculum, (4) resources, (5) assessment, (6) professional preparation, development, and support, (7) family and community engagement, and (8) administrative leadership. The examples are reported holistically in the next section and categorized by theme.

CONCRETE EXAMPLES OF HOW VISION INDICATORS ARE OPERATIONALIZED AT SCHOOL SITES

YEAR 1	YEAR 2
Learning Environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop shared vision promoting bilingualism, schoolwide ideologies and practices Statements of collective responsibility; goals and action plan Schoolwide literacy focus and vocabulary development 	Learning Environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ELL issues not separate challenges; integrated schoolwide Increased vocabulary development and student dialog via schoolwide vocabulary rich environment
Pedagogy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training in research-based strategies Differentiated instruction 	Pedagogy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primary language used Research-based best practices for ELLs and all students Methodologies involve students in collaborative situations, encourage verbalization
Curriculum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dual Immersion, SEI 	Curriculum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dual Immersion, SEI, Alternative Bilingual Education
Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Common Meeting Time Each Pre-School classroom has a bilingual Instructional Assistant Culturally sensitive educational materials 	Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ELL counselor 60% of new hires speak some Spanish Full-time EL Specialist Part-time (half-time) EL Coach
Assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review and analyze ELL data and accomplishments in light of achievement gap with EO students 	Assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data Chats regarding ELLs with students and staff
Professional Preparation, Development, & Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training in research-based strategies; PROMISE Initiative, GLAD EL Secondary Leadership Training 	Professional Preparation, Development, & Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All teachers ELL certified via CLAD or AB 2913 Staff meeting discussed ELL student needs, deliver trainings GLAD Training
Administrative Leadership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Principal serves as role model for community at large and (b) custodian of shared vision. Principal's charge is to support, encourage, monitor, and ensure implementation of all theme elements. 	Administrative Leadership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Principal serves as role model for community at large and (b) custodian of shared vision. Principal's charge is to support, encourage, monitor, and ensure implementation of all theme elements.



**PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF YEAR 2 INTERVIEW/FOCUS GROUP:
OPEN-ENDED PROMPTS AND QUESTIONS AS THEY RELATE TO VISION**

Structured follow-up interviews were conducted in small focus group format on January 31, 2008. Interview questions were linked to the PAOLA and specifically based on the original survey responses. The researcher probed for additional in-depth explanations regarding (a) the affect that the PROMISE Core Principles have made on the principals' capacity to lead and corresponding schoolwide implications relative to vision, (b) needed continued professional development relative to vision, and (c) additional needs and/or recommendations relative to vision. This additional anecdotal information was used to formulate and support related discussion topics. The representative responses relative to vision are reported holistically in the next section and categorized by prompt. Participants included principals/directors from 2 pre-school sites, 4 elementary schools, 3 middle schools, and 3 high schools, for a total of 12 respondents.

In general, site principals identified several areas where the PROMISE Core Principles have served as a beacon of hope in promoting and validating critical conversations around a collective vision for success of ALL learners inclusive of English Language Learners, bilingual/biliterate students, and monolingual students. These new or redefined school visions were created based on a new found respect, a desire to create collaborative systems, a focus on improving communication amongst teachers of all students and all curricular areas, and an emphasis on schoolwide success. Clear and definite requests for additional, targeted professional development/workshops and the importance of holding all district-level key personnel responsible were noted. The following identified themes, in and of themselves, are not conclusive about PROMISE, rather, the participating principals' perceptions about their involvement with PROMISE.

Affect of PROMISE Core Principles on principals' capacity to lead and schoolwide implications relative to vision

- Beneficial regular meetings and professional development conducted by facilitator; training facilitated by Dr. Olsen.
- Initiative provided forum to demystify PROMISE. It was considered exclusionary; only applying to bilingual children. Initiative helped promote a vision that includes all students.
- Functioned as catalyst for unified vision, mission, and goals; empowered school population around biliteracy
- Provided roadmap and guidance; and afforded validation needed around ELLs, biliteracy and dual Language programs; provided personal focus on ELLs.

- Brought teachers together around ELLs, serving as vehicle for staff meeting discussions.
- Provided momentum to write PreK vision.

Needed continued professional development relative to vision

- Meetings, conversations, seminars and/or professional development will allow all administrators to develop cohesive, clearly articulated vision around PROMISE; ELLs, and biliteracy.
- Beneficial for PROMISE team and PROMISE Design Center to spend more time at sites, in familiarization of school culture and individual vision; provide targeted need-based professional development.

Additional needs/recommendations relative to vision

- Lack of understanding/support from district personnel for schoolwide vision of PROMISE.
- Need additional emphasis on modeling research-based strategies and best practices for ELLs; putting vision in practice.
- Concern voiced for facilitator sharing versus facilitators assigned to one site.

IMPLICATIONS: EDUCATIONAL AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The representative perspectives of the principals collected through the PAOLA and small focus group interview sessions render compelling images around the facilitation of the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school and district community with regards to the education of English Learners. The following are preliminary recommendations as a result of the findings.

Recruitment and Selection of Personnel and Professional Development

- *Examine the succession process in light of the principal at the school and district levels:* The succession process around the principal position has great influence on the sustainability of continued school and stated initiative success. School and district personnel must work in unison to select principals based on school/district-created criteria and in coherence with school and district vision, mission, and goals.

- *Work collaboratively in targeting and coordinating professional development linked closer to specific school needs:* Professional development in a school and district must be viewed as a vehicle to collaboratively engage in a cycle of inquiry and reflection; where meaning and knowledge are created together, and deep conversations lead to new learning. Professional development must have purpose, in that; it must be focused and targeted to the school's needs.
- *Establish a system for supporting new principals and providing on-going support for continuing principals:* Principals' individual and group leadership capacity must be addressed by purposeful professional development. This would help to ensure foundational base knowledge, skills and dispositions in line with the vision specific to any initiative.

Accountability, Communication and Support

- *Examine district and school understanding of their collective work with the stated initiative as it links to their vision:* A collective vision acts as the nucleus from which all school and district actions are born and ultimately results in school and districtwide coherence. If a shared vision is to guide action, then those of individual schools should be in congruence with that of their district. This does not mandate uniformity in vision statements, rather, that school and district personnel be aware of how they inform one another.
- *Examine district infrastructure to determine how to best support and monitor school site implementation of programs, beyond the submission of the written plan:* As part of an ongoing and reciprocal school district cycle of inquiry and reflection, program implementation and renewal must undergo regular discussions and review. This would create the opportunity for school and district personnel to discuss the alignment of their actions with their shared vision and goals. The reciprocal nature of this relationship, including more frequent interactions, two-way communication and mutual problem solving, will inevitably lead to program coherence.

UNIVERSITY-BASED PREPARATION PROGRAMS

Review program design to ensure that curriculum and candidate experiences are infused with advocacy-oriented leadership for English Language Learner success emphases, including:

- a coherence linking goals, learning activities and candidate assessment around shared values, beliefs and knowledge,
- knowledge of the systems that support the implementation and sustainability of a vision/mission-driven initiative,

- intensive, focused examination of learning and teaching, and
- distributing leadership and responsibilities across the school community

CONCLUSION

Achieving a collective vision is a revitalizing process for all schools and district communities. A shared vision serves as the glue unifying and strengthening the school, district, and its collaborative work. It is therefore imperative that the school principal facilitate the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning⁴ that beckons for English Language Learner success and that it be shared and supported by the school and district community at large.

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¹ More information on the PROMISE Initiative can be found at <http://www.promise-initiative.org/>

² There were a total of 32 questionnaire items on the PAOLA;

³ There was a change with Principals at two schools at the end of year 1.

⁴ This is one questionnaire item from the PAOLA survey.



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