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## A preferred vision for leading schools : a reflective essay

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## A preferred vision for leading schools : a reflective essay

### Abstract

An excellent leader understands that the life jacket of education for many of our students is often not given to students while they are out in the canoe of life. Many times schools have stood at the shore with the life saving apparatus, urging students to come to shore to access it. Yet all the while, children are sinking and drowning because no one has considered what would happen if educators dared to go out in the water and bring them in.

L.A. Butler (1997), a school principal in a poor minority school that transformed her school from a low performing school to a high performing school wrote, "There is nothing that will improve a student's self-esteem better than academic success. Engineering such success .. is a good teacher's obligation" (p. 30). We must equip our students with high self-esteem, which will allow them to rise above the circumstances they are born in. We must leave the shore and give students the life jacket of education.

A PREFERRED VISION FOR LEADING SCHOOLS:

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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A Research Paper

Presented to

The Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling,

and Postsecondary Education

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Masters of Arts in Education

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By

Tashona R. Marshall

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Dr. Decker, Advisor

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A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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In a world that is becoming increasingly more diverse and a society in which the traditional family has almost become extinct, schools are still required to educate every child and make sure that they find academic success. Schools are expected to do this while funding is continuously decreasing and while society has started to view the school system with suspicion. The situation becomes even bleaker because people within the system have decided that they can no longer make a difference and have left the profession. In the face of all of this, why would anyone want to be a leader at such a critical point in history? The answer for me is evident; it is because true leaders look at each challenge as a building block to reach the ultimate vision of having excellent schools. Therefore, I believe that education is a life-saving instrument, and that educational leaders must be visionaries who are willing to seek continuous professional growth, while believing that all students can be successful.

Education is a vital life-saving instrument. Like painters, educators begin with a blank canvas and use the brush of instruction to create masterpieces that can be appreciated by many. It is critical for leaders to understand this creative power, because unlike painters we cannot undo our mistakes by changing the color or redrawing the scene, nor can we be content if the painting just does not sell. Children cannot be put in storage until they are ready to be sold. Each child must receive the tools they need whether they are physically, emotionally, or

intellectually ready. Each student must find success. Consequently, education is our only mean of helping create good citizens who believe in life-long learning.

However, in order for education to be a vital life-saving instrument, the leaders within the system must be visionaries. Educational leaders must be able to see the end result in the midst of current issues, trends and controversies.

Elaine Wilmore (2000) in her book entitled *Principal Leadership* illustrates this point. She argues that educational leaders must know that,

We are not here to promote only the education of those who are easy to teach, who speak English fluently, who fit school in between before-school athletics and after-school fine arts, who are clean and well fed, or who behave nicely every day (p. 19).

Therefore, visionary leaders must realize that education is for everyone by envisioning success for every child regardless of their status in society.

Furthermore, I believe that educational leaders ought to realize that because our society is always changing they must be agents of change. Our changing society requires them to consistently strive for professional growth. They must model for their staff members the love of learning, and as a result they will develop a culture within their building that supports continuous improvement. Consequently, leaders of education must understand that they have a unique purpose. Therefore, every decision, action, and motive has a direct affect on the lives of students. Furthermore, I believe that leaders of education have to pursue their purpose with great vigor. Great vigor is accomplished by

understanding that their ultimate purpose is to make sure that children find success.

Finally, leaders of education must believe that every child, regardless of socio-economic status, culture, gender, race or ability can succeed. Leaders of education must believe that not only can every child find success, but they must also know that they are responsible for insuring that every child finds success. Students who have fought small battles just to make it to school will walk through the doors. While some will come happy and clean, others will not be as fortunate. Therefore, it is the job of the leader to make sure that they have cultivated a school community that produces opportunities for every student to find success. Educational leaders must cultivate a level playing field where every child gets what they need to succeed. The school building is the only place responsible for taking children from every walk of life and giving them an opportunity to fulfill their dreams. It is in the school that a child will learn that they can be anything they envision. Thus, it is important that the leader believes that a child can be anything they envision, and be willing to be committed to affirming every child, every day.

Leaders cannot afford to get lost in the rhetoric and minuscule problems of the day. Educational leaders have to stay focused on children finding success. Anytime one student is not successful, it must be viewed as a grave threat to their future. Leaders have to treat each school year, each school day and each school

hour, as if it is a matter of life or death. This must be done because it is a matter of life or death. An unsuccessful student's future dies every time education fails them.

It is apparent that schools are increasingly under more pressure, and society is searching for a place to lay the blame for unsuccessful students. Therefore, leaders cannot close their eyes and pretend as if they are not accountable to society, because if the school will not be accountable, who will? Consequently, I believe that the school system is responsible because education is a vital life-saving instrument. The important nature of education demands that leaders be passionate about their calling to education. This passion will not allow them to settle for the mediocre because they have a vision of excellent schools where every child finds success. Thus, my preferred vision for leading schools includes four critical elements that I believe all school principals must understand and possess. First, I believe that a school leader must be an instructional leader. Secondly, they must collaborate in order to build a cohesive team in which all students find success. Next, I believe that school leaders must rise to the challenge of educating all students regardless of their background. Finally, I believe at the heart of all educational leaders must be the understanding that for many students education is the only means for them to fulfill not only their dreams but the dreams of their ancestors who died in order that these same students may have an opportunity to succeed (Wilmore, 2000, p. 24).

### *Reflective Practitioners are Instructional Leaders*

In the age of accountability, the nation has demanded that public schools produce positive results, which highlight that all children are succeeding. In order to fulfill this task a new type of leader is needed, a leader who is courageous in the face of adversity, a leader who is informed and reflective. This new type of leader should see the challenges placed before him or her as an opportunity to show the world that every child can and will succeed, if given the right opportunities. Furthermore, this leader would have to be a reflective practitioner of education, because a reflective practitioner is first and foremost an instructional leader. Leaders who are reflective practitioners realize that according to the Iowa Standards for School Leaders (ISSL) a school leader is, “an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.” Therefore, they become a true educational leader.

It is difficult to define the meaning of a reflective practitioner without speaking about what it means to be an instructional leader. Immediately, the question arises, about what an instructional leader does? First, after the school has developed, articulated, and implemented its campus vision an instructional leader or a reflective practitioner must then become an advocate and sustainer of a positive school culture (Wilmore, 2000, p. 24). In order to do this, the staff members must develop personal and professional goals, which are encouraged by

the school administrator. Finally, the school administrator must continue to set high expectations for their students and staff members and for their own professional growth. As a result, the climate of the school will change and a culture will develop that allows for continuous school improvement.

Next, an instructional leader understands the difference between culture and climate. According to Elaine Wilmore (2000) in her book entitled *Principal Leadership*, climate is an important element because it relates to how the building feels. In contrast, the culture of the building pertains to how tasks are completed, within the school's walls. Consequently, a strong instructional leader will help develop a climate where students find academic success. Furthermore, the leader will create a culture in which teachers develop classroom activities with the vision of the school in mind, and use every opportunity to make the vision of the school a reality.

An instructional leader can develop and maintain a positive school culture and climate because they are consistently involved in reflective practices. I believe that reflective practices are the acts of consistently looking back at past successes and mistakes. Therefore, the leader is able to build checks and balances into their daily operations and use sound research to make decisions. The instructional leader is courageous, and realizes that students rely on the school's culture and climate in order to be successful (Wilmore, 2000, p. 24).

Jackson (2005) in her article, "Leadership for Urban Public Schools," states, "Urban school leaders must think critically and act courageously to ensure that the children they serve have access to public education at its best" (p. 1). Jackson's point illustrates that educational leaders have to make daily life altering decisions. They cannot make these decisions without knowledge and data to support their choices. Therefore, they constantly ask themselves how do we know that these practices work, and how has this process made life easier or more difficult for our students? They do what Lewis and Caldwell (2005) in their article "Evidence-Based Leadership," argues all reflective practitioners must do, "collect and report data and...internalize it at the right time for the right reasons for the right students" (p. 1). Lewis and Caldwell go on to argue that "Evidence-based leadership links how evidence is used to how well the school operates and improves" (p. 1). Reflective practitioners understand that leadership is not simply about their preferences or how it has been done in the past. Consequently, they are consistently making changes, examining data and adapting, in an effort to make their school a place where students can learn.

Education has been comprised of my favorite units, my creative lesson plans and my school rules for far too long. Now, in the age of accountability, the public has demanded that the concept of my, be eliminated, and our, be inserted in its place. The public demands that teachers and administrators be held accountable. I honor the public for its demands because school is about creating

life-long learners who are thoughtful and hopeful citizens, and how will we measure whether we are successful or not without sound data and reliable decisions that are always made keeping in mind what is best for our children. At times in history it appears as if some of our educational objectives have clouded the purpose of school. Jackson (2005) stated, “the purpose of public schooling in this nation—a nation founded on principles of freedom, justice and measure of happiness for all—is to educate the citizenry in understanding and abiding by these principles” (p. 1). It is the schools responsibility to produce citizens who understand and exercise their rights. Thus, it requires leaders who are willing to consistently ensure that they are providing the best practices to their students.

The question of what does it mean to be a reflective practitioner is not an easy question to answer. On the surface, it appears to mean that one is knowledgeable about the curriculum and consistently reviews it in order to adapt the curriculum. This is done to help their staff deliver the best instruction possible. However, the significance of the reflective practitioner’s role goes beyond these duties. In my opinion, a reflective practitioner is an administrator who is committed to their students and to making their school’s vision a reality. This is accomplished by consistently advocating for students, developing instructors, students, as well as, themselves, until the culture helps make every child successful. In addition the climate becomes one that values both children and their academic success. According to Jackson, “School administrators and

curriculum administrators in the central office should remain current on research and practices on student and adult learning, the academic content for which those in their charge have responsibility in organizational change” (p. 5).

Furthermore, reflective practitioners are always advocating for an instructional program that allows for student learning. They are aware that instructing all students the same does not meet the needs of every child. Thus, they examine any and all factors that students find de-motivating and stop using such practices. These leaders want their students to attain academic success, thus they become an advocate for their students. They realize that in order to create a school culture that is conducive to student learning they must speak for the students who are often times silenced by textbooks and test.

Advocating for children then leads a reflective practitioner to nurture their school by remaining mindful of the school’s vision of the school. Nurturing is accomplished by setting benchmarks that measure the success of the campus. Furthermore, these leaders set specific, measurable, realistic, action oriented and timely goals. Reflective practitioners celebrate the small victories, which helps encourage the students and staff to continue striving for excellence. Their decisions are based on the vision of the school, and they are consistently shaping the vision.

Furthermore, the job of a reflective practitioner is not complete until they become the sustainer of a culture conducive to student learning. This involves

setting personal goals for professional growth. They realize that they cannot rely on their antiquated knowledge to make the vision a reality. Therefore, they attend classes and model for their staff the benefit of not becoming stagnant. These leaders realize that in order for the culture to be sustained the best people must be involved in sustaining it. They lead with hope. They realize that the reality is that many of our students come to school from homes that are broken, and may even be below the set poverty line. However, they realize as Sergiovanni (2005) stated in "The Virtues of Leadership," "facing reality rather than relying on hope is to accept reality. Relying on hope rather than facing reality is to change reality..." (p. 1). It would be easy to look at the hurdles set before urban leaders and decide they seem insuperable. However, it is the school's job to alter reality. Therefore, the school's primary objective is to take students where they are and lead and nourish them to where they should be. This requires reflective leaders who are courageous and critical thinkers. These reflective leaders are those who use the data to make the best decisions, and at the same time hold the school community accountable, while holding themselves to an even higher standard. "The creation of reform agenda that will lead to success by all children requires leaders who can learn from past lessons, heed the findings of current educational research, and rely on the wisdom of their own experiences" (Jackson, 2005, p. 2).

The latest research states that a reflective practitioner is one who can examine the past, to make decisions for today, which will allow our children to

find success in the future. I cannot walk through the doors of any school without the belief that all children can succeed, but I also need to have the talent and ability to read and interpret data, study the latest research and apply what I am learning. Yet, simultaneously I can never take my eyes off of the ultimate vision of schools. That vision is to ensure that schools provide a place where students are safe to succeed and time after time they attain that success. Wilmore states it best when she reminds educational leaders that, “To give up is to take your eyes off the vision. We must keep our eyes on a vision of pure excellence and never, ever give up” (p. 35).

#### *Collaborative Leadership: A New Mandate on Schools*

The educational system, as we know it, is increasingly evolving. Latchkey, bi-racial and English language learner students have replaced yesterday’s students from “traditional” family homes. This is occurring while at the same time public schools seek public support so that they can remain a viable source for education. Therefore, schools can no longer pretend as if they do not need the aide of the community. Thus, several questions come to the forefront. How does the school restore public trust? How does the principal move their school into partnerships that are meaningful? Finally, how does the school involve parents, the student’s representatives, in the school’s vision? This all leads to one of the most important responsibilities of any school administrator. This responsibility is outlined in the Iowa Standards for School Leaders (ISSL)

standard four, “A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.” Therefore, schools need an administrator who is committed to collaborative leadership. Thus, the question is asked, what does it mean to be a collaborative leader? Based on the work of Wilmore (2000), it means that he/she is a leader who interacts with the community by responding to their interests and needs while utilizing the community’s resources (p. 35).

Standard four stresses the need for a collaborative leader. This standard assumes that every school leader will automatically seek to understand the community and its needs and then utilize that information to serve the students. However, this places school principals under a lot of pressure. Inconsequently, school administrators find themselves simply working to get the job done. Beckerman (2005) in his article “Building Blocks for the New Principal” argues that “the principal is most responsible for the climate of the school and for the outcomes of productivity and satisfaction attained by students and staff” (p. 1). The pressure to produce results can be so overwhelming that school administrators sacrifice the work that will build long-term success for short-term demands. Certainly, budgets must be balanced, textbooks ordered, a safe and secure environment maintained and meetings held. Simultaneously, however, students walk through the school’s doors as a composite of the outside world. If

they do not have food, will they read a book? If they have to baby-sit while their mother works the third shift, will they test well? Faced with this reality, the school cannot operate as an island. An administrator has to know the community's needs. Whether we like it or not the battle for education is not fought within the confines of the school campus, but out in the communities where our children live.

There is a significant difference between informing parents about the programs offered at the school or requesting volunteers for a fieldtrip, and actually creating true stakeholders in the decision-making process. Collaboration requires two-way communication. As Protheroe (2005) urges readers in her article, "Leadership for School Improvement," "Any collaborative effort requires effective communication among participants" (p. 2).

Where do we go from here? How does a collaborative leader operate? First, a collaborative leader recognizes the differences that make people diverse but does not allow those differences to separate people. Instead the differences become a means of bridging gaps. The leader seeks to understand other people's perspective, and as a result resolve conflicts while building teams and creating a sense of oneness. Consequently, the school's vision is continuously being shaped. A collaborative leader understands the importance of family; therefore, he/she operates under the assumption that every parent wants their child to succeed. By

doing this, the leader is able to collaborate with parents, thereby allowing parents to feel as if they have ownership in their child's school.

Next, a collaborative leader realizes that trustworthy relationships are essential. Oftentimes schools are involved in surface level collaborative relationships. These relationships thrive at building support for the school, but do not directly impact student achievement. At best, the community and the school will create an activity that allows the community to see what the school is doing. However, it never reaches to the level of shared decision-making, creating and implementing a school vision or effectively solving problems.

Creating and implementing a vision or shared decision-making cannot occur unless the school administrator is visible in the community. Being involved in organizations, attending activities and being proactive helps achieve visibility. Importantly, however, this is not done in order to receive free press. It is done because the leader knows that the only way to show people that one cares is by being involved in their lives, understanding their struggles and hearing their often silenced voices. A collaborative leader knows that it is impossible to respond to the needs of the community if you do not know what they need. By being involved, researching, conducting and analyzing surveys a leader will ascertain the community's needs. Once the leader knows the community's needs, he/she will be better able to respond to those needs and make an impact in the lives of students and their families.

Lastly, a collaborative leader understands the enormous task before them. The leader sees the money that he/she is given as a precious resource that many community members have labored to provide. Thus, a collaborative leader is a good steward of the school's resources. Consequently, every dollar is used towards the ultimate aim of creating schools of excellence. No longer does a collaborative leader simply stretch out their hands for the community's resources, but instead he/she understands the value of giving. A collaborative leader realizes that requesting a speaker is just as important as volunteering to be a speaker at a community event. Therefore, the leader is able to dissolve the one-way relationships that have penetrated our schools.

Ultimately a collaborative leader realizes that an educational leader must begin to repair fragmented relationships that have existed between schools and the surrounding community. A collaborative leader realizes that it is impossible to educate children without the assistance of the entire community. Many of our student's battles do not stem from school, but begin in the midst of their community. If schools want to help these students, it must be done outside the confines of school campuses. This requires educational leaders to be community leaders as well. In so doing, the vision of excellence will be realized.

### *Educational Leaders Must Rise to the Challenge*

Through our doors walk children whose only hope is the education they can attain through the walls of our institutions. For many children education is

their only hope to overcome the generational poverty they are born in, and for others this is their only means of escape from the hurting past that haunts their present. The school must therefore be an institution founded on integrity, mutual respect and the belief that all children can learn. To accomplish this task a leader must rise to the forefront. This leader must be committed to making the best decisions for children at all time and operate with fairness on a consistent basis. Thus, schools need an educational leader who is willing to rise to the challenge of creating effective schools.

According to Cotton (2003) author of *Principals and Student Achievement: What the Research Says*, “From the earliest research to the present day, the principal’s establishment and maintenance of a safe, orderly school environment has been identified as the most fundamental element of effectiveness” (p. 8). Thus, an educational leader who rises to the challenge creates an environment that is safe and orderly. The power of how a building feels and runs has long since been underestimated. For so many children disorder has marked their lives. To say the least they do not feel safe or valued. Then schools bring them into a building and a teacher requires that they participate in class. For these students this activity is intimidating because primarily it places them in a vulnerable position. A position that for a lot of urban students congers up the feelings of repeated victimization. An effective educational leader realizes that for some students it is a battle to survive each day and coming to school is

just one victory in the battle. Thus, a great work must be done. Children must feel like they are safe and allowed room to make mistakes and learn from these mistakes. This can only occur with first creating a school environment that is safe and orderly and the principal as the educational leader must ensure that this occurs.

An excellent educational leader understands that the life jacket of education for many of our students is often not given to students while they are out in the canoe of life. Many times schools have operated with a policy of standing at the shore with the life saving apparatus and urging students to come to shore to access it. Yet, all the while children are drowning and sinking because no one has considered what would happen if for a moment educators dared to go out in the water with them and bring them in. Butler (1997), a school principal in a poor minority school that transformed her school from a low performing school to a high performing school wrote, "There is nothing that will improve a student's self-esteem better than academic success. Engineering such success...is a good teacher's obligation" (p. 30). We must equip our students with high self-esteem, which will allow them to rise above the circumstances they are born in. We must leave the shore and give students the life jacket of education.

Hand and hand with helping students succeed and creating an environment where children are willing to feel vulnerable and where children attain success is a genuine passion for students. Cotton (2003) stated "the single most important

thing that principals model is love for the children in their schools” (p. 43). Love for children can be categorized by never allowing their students’ condition, the obstacles their students face and their students situations to dictate what they can and cannot achieve. Genuine love for children involves never demoralizing a child, or stripping a child of dignity. Genuine love for a child means doing the best you can for children at all times and being able to look beyond their present and see their future. Littky (2002) author of the book, *The Big Picture: Education is Everyone’s Business*, writes “As an educator, you do the best you can. You can’t always overcome all the other circumstances of students’ lives. But if you treat your kids with kindness and respect, you have not failed them...” (p. 52). We cannot take away the pain students live with, but we can help them, if for just a moment, realize that they have great potential. Littky (2002) further writes “That is what schools must be about: building safe, loving environments where kids can learn, grow, and experience life” (p. 52).

This is no small feat for an educational leader to accomplish, but I do believe that each task must be accomplished if we want children to succeed. We must create an environment where students know it is safe to let down their guards and where for a least six hours of the day they can lay down their burdens, forget about their past and just be a child. They deserve to be a child who loves learning, who loves their teachers and who loves coming to school. This only occurs with the direct commitment of an educational leader who is dedicated to

the success of all children and who will rise to the challenge of giving every child an opportunity to succeed. Michie (1999) author of the book, *Holler if You Hear Me: The Education of a Teacher and His Students*, makes a poignant argument that reminds educational leaders that school must be about creating hope for our students and rising to the challenge. What is the challenge? The challenge is taking students who come from the best homes and students who come from deplorable situations and giving both a chance to succeed; giving both the life jacket they need as they travel through life.

At the core of our work is the belief, despite the distressing signs around us, that the world is indeed changeable; that it can be transformed into a better, more just, more peaceful place; and that the kids who show up in our classrooms each day not only deserve such a world, but can be instrumental in helping to bring it about. Their voices are abiding reminders that there is something to hope for in spite of the hopelessness that seems to be closing in around us-something tangible, something real, something in the here and now (p. 180).

#### *A Dream to Guide*

Have our agendas, curriculum writing, and lofty vision statements somehow inadvertently put our primary focus, which should be the students, in the shadows of our schools' daily operation? Have we become so accustomed to everyone being allowed an education that we have ignored the countless men and women who were denied an education? If I am going to be a positive leader who impacts student's lives and helps cultivate a positive and successful school, I must

not forget that for many students success seems to be an elusive dream. This is because their current reality is harsh and overpowers their dreams. These dreams, however, guided their ancestors to fight and die in order to learn how to read. They are the same dreams that caused countless immigrants to leave their love ones, homes and possessions in order to give their child an opportunity to succeed. Thus, as I examine the meaning of being an effective educational leader, I must first wrestle with what it means to have only a dream guiding you. The question becomes, what does it mean to dream even when your reality appears hopeless and success seems unrealistic?

The ruling that changed our nation and created our present-day diverse schools, occurred in 1954 with the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in the legendary decision of *Brown vs. the Board of Education* (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954). This decision not only desegregated schools, it also struck down the notion of separate but equal. In addition, it provided a chance for countless Americans to receive adequate education by giving them the tool that truly enables individuals to enjoy their right to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," equal access. Knowing this makes me, as an aspiring educational leader, more sensitive to the fact that for many students, education is a fairly recent privilege. In fact, their grandparents were probably the individuals that protested, went to jail and took a dangerous stand in the face of segregation and dared it not to treat them equally.

Yet these same students may in some ways continue to be robbed. Have we taught a one size fit all curriculums that have ignored the issues of many of our students? Barton (2004) in his article *Why Does the Gap Persist*, writes “common sense as well as research tells us that hungry, malnourished children are harmed in cognitive development” (p. 1). For educational leaders, this means that we have to understand the battle that students fight just to make it to school. Homework may not be a priority, typing an assignment at home may be unrealistic if the location of their next meal consumes their thoughts. On the other hand, I must envision their future and see them as happy, productive citizens despite their present circumstances. I must realize that for many of these students school is the second parent, and the caregiver that nurtures them. This knowledge must drive my decision-making. According to Barton “just 38 percent of black children lived with two parents in 2000, almost one in ten lived with neither parent. Among Hispanic children, 65 percent lived with two parents...” (p. 2). Barton further argues “struggling single-parent mothers, and sometimes fathers need all the help they can get from the community and from the school” (p. 2).

Thus, a reflective practitioner of leadership, that impacts the lives of children by leaving a lasting positive legacy, realizes that although students have dreams, these same students wrestle with so many other areas. Therefore, we must understand that they need food, safety, love, support and encouragement. Providing these things does not occur through my oratorical skills, by my charm

or by pedagogy. If I am to be an effective leader then I must first realize that for many of my students fifty years ago they would have been denied an opportunity to sit in some of their classes or live in their present neighborhoods. In these students, their parents' dreams are realized. Thus, as Barton argues and I concur, "educators must hold ourselves responsible and accountable for improving schools when and where we can" (p. 4).

Where do I go from here? Does the work begin with the climate of the school or with my well-defined vision and mission statements? Is the next step one of a political nature or more of an ethical one? There are no easy answers to these questions. As an educational leader I want to meet every standard of leadership and handle the pressures of my multifaceted position. Yet, I think my work must begin where Deschenes, Cuban and Tyach (1999) begin their article *Mismatch: Historical Perspectives on Schools and Students Who Don't Fit Them*. I must "change (my) school to match the student, it is a more promising strategy than trying to fit the student to the school" (p. 8). My school must be a place where the little boy who carries the burden of hunger, poverty, discrimination and racism can exchange his load for education. My school must fit the little girl who is a part-time mom for her siblings and a part-time employee, and allow her a chance to be a little girl. As Deschenes, Cuban and Tyach further stress I must "acknowledge and address social inequalities..." (p. 8). I am compelled to acknowledge the inequalities that make it easy for some of our students to slip

through the cracks. I cannot ignore the invisible barriers that do determine academic success.

In conclusion, some would argue that by addressing these issues that somehow students may interpret this process as one that excuses them from high expectations, and thus we perpetuate the problem. I, however, argue quite the opposite. To treat the problems of some of our students as if they are nonexistent or not factors in the equation of success, is to once again say that separate can somehow be equal. Has not this country proven that separate can never truly be equal? I believe we must hold every student to high standards, encourage every student to further his or her education, and envision every student succeeding. Yet, we must acknowledge that for some, school is the process and there is never a thought of dropping out or considering whether you should go to school or work. Yet, for others education is the only means that will help them overcome generational poverty, addiction and abuse. However, simultaneously they have so much to cope with that sometimes they make bad choices. It would be easy to say that it is not the educational system's fault that some students are born in these conditions. However, if we do not begin to right wrongs then yes it is our fault. I am convinced that an educational leader acknowledges and addresses the inherent biases in our system and dares to help cure the ailments our students face.

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