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Organizations in education, business, and communities typically write mission and vision statements that declare and focus the intent of the work by the contributing individuals. These mission and vision statements reflect the core values of the organization. As an educator I have shaped core values personally that guide my own decision making and efforts toward school reform in the work with schools and the state department of education in which I am involved. My core values include the belief that all students can learn. I differ with some on setting goals for the level and rigor to which all students can learn. I value a comprehensive education where students are provided an education that includes liberal arts, foundational academics, science and social science, humanities, technology, and health. I also believe all students should have their spiritual and emotional well-being nurtured and guided. Expectations should be high for students and teachers in both academics and character. A focus on foundational skills such as collaboration, problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, innovative thinking and citizenship should be targeted in all classes and courses to reach beyond the classroom and help to foster life-long learning in students. Oblinger wrote “As individuals, we seem to have forgotten the core values of education: sharing, giving, and generosity....And to the degree that we have deserted the principle of openness, learning has suffered.” (Oblinger, D. 2006) I too believe sharing, giving, and generosity are core values that have been stifled due to capitalist pursuits. Sharing lessons learned, content, knowledge for the good of all should carry a value that goes far beyond monetary compensation. I think we see this value beginning to surface as educators begin to use, promote, and contribute to open education resources and creative commons.

Based on these core values I am better able to pinpoint what I believe are the aims of education although I recognize that the aims of education somewhat reflect the culture and the

time. Aims of education therefore are constantly changing. Anthony Flood is quoted, “The mind is never passive; it is a perpetual activity, delicate, receptive, responsive to stimulus. You cannot postpone its life until you have sharpened it. Whatever interest attaches to your subject-matter must be evoked here and now; whatever powers you are strengthening in the pupil, must be exercised here and now; whatever possibilities of mental life your teaching should impart, must be exhibited here and now. That is the golden rule of education, and a very difficult rule to follow.” I remember the catch phrase, “teachable moments.” In education today we seem to have drifted away from the idea of “teachable moments”, I believe, as a result of the rigid accountability measures mandated by No Child Left Behind and standardized testing weight. However, my personal belief concerning the aims of education would be to foster a desire to discover and learn without ceasing. Again, this relates back to one of my core values of creating life-long learners.

What is School Reform?

“School reform is a catch phrase that includes a number of programs and policies. Reforms usually change some procedure or rule that affects how the school operates. Terms like “reform: and “renewal” can be thought of as small steps toward change.” (Project Appleseed, 2011) My definition of school reform is based on the reading and research conducted over a period of time. In every society there are norms and expectations regarding performance and behavior. Schools are judged by the achievements and outcomes of testing, grades, skills and other accountability measures designed to indicate the success of educational institutions. When the desired outcomes and achievements are not being met, stakeholders rise up and call for a change. The demand for change in schools and the programs put in place to direct that change make up my definition of school reform.

The goals of school reform should be clearly articulated, and measurable. However, I think it is important to be especially careful when determining the accountability portion. Richard Rothstein wrote, “Schools are accountable for teaching math and reading, but also sciences, history, social studies, arts, music, physical education, character development and civic participation. If you say that we’re going to hold you accountable for only your math and reading scores, you set up incentives for schools to minimize the attention they pay to all these other areas in order to do the things for which they’re held accountable.” This is a pitfall witnessed as a result of No Child Left Behind and often known as “teaching the test”. It is possible and important to set goals. Following closely in line with high school reform goals I believe school reform goals should include an increase in academic achievement level of students, and increasing high school graduation rates. In addition to these, another goal should be to foster a love for discovery and learning. Teaching students to learn how they learn, understanding how to self-evaluate, and where to find answers is critical in today’s global market and increasingly diverse culture.

Roles and Responsibilities

For change or reform to happen specific, clear roles must be established, assigned, and held to accountability. A top-down approach is written here, starting with the federal government’s role and working toward the role of students, parents and other stakeholders. The federal government has a vantage point of the larger perspective at a national level. Because of this vantage point the role therefore should include creating overarching policies and to ensure that those policies are fair, flexible and focused. (Johnathan, 2011) Funding must accompany the policy expectations and provided as needed.

The role of the states is to serve much like routers with additional systems to alleviate the burden of unsustainable expense. States are creating systems such as the Longitudinal Data System, Instruction Improvement System, Online Individual Educational Programs, etc. Developing these systems at the state level will help alleviate the expense and create a focus to deliver to local educational agencies providing greater support to accomplish changes determined by the federal government as needed.

The role of local school districts and local educational agencies is to provide leadership and to ease the burden of high level administrative duties from the schools. Instructionally-focused leadership from the superintendent down places a greater emphasis on student achievement and improvement in teaching and learning, the establishment and enforcement of district goals for improvement, district-wide curriculum and textbook adoption, district advocacy and support for use of specific instructional strategies, deliberate selection of principals with curriculum knowledge and interpersonal skills, systematic monitoring of the consistency between district goals and expectations and school goals and implementation through principal accountability processes are all portions of the district role. (Anderson, 2003)

The school role is to provide the training, the environment, and to serve as the liaison from the district to the teachers on policies and initiatives. Principals are the primary leader and must be held accountable for implementation at the school level. School administrators provide leadership, modeling and support to ensure reform initiatives are understood and taking place.

The teacher's role is to follow through on best practices, professional development, and to do the best they can at implementing the reform with integrity and fidelity as much as possible. Teachers serve as the front line for implementation, reporting, and collaboration. The teacher's

role is difficult because they often have not had a great deal of input in the decision making process yet must often be the ones to answer for how and why the reform is taking place.

Students, parents, and stakeholders also have roles in school reform. These roles include active participation, seeking out understanding and clarification, awareness of the goals and the aims, and buying in to the core values. Students specifically must follow through and do their best to meet expectations. The role of parents includes supporting administrators and students, making sure the student follows through with activities, and school attendance. Staying informed and staying involved is another role of the parent and now crosses over to stakeholders. Stakeholders must be aware of the reform goals, donate time and money. The role of stakeholders includes participation, staying involved and keeping informed in order to hold schools and districts accountable.

School reform is not easy. Any change is hard. However, just because something is hard does not mean it should be abandoned or that it is not worth doing. In this case school reform affects the lives of our students and our nation. Certainly, the creation of lifelong learners involved in discovery, supported and held to high expectations could reform more than just a school but eventually a community, a state and a nation.

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