

A Message from the Superintendent of Public Instruction

I'm Deborah Delisle, Ohio's state superintendent of public instruction, and like many of you, I've devoted my entire career to public education and to being an advocate for kids. It is more important than ever for us, as educators, to focus on improving instructional practice and student performance as our students and our world face tough challenges.

We must equip every student with the means to achieve his or her greatest potential in an increasingly global, competitive community. It is our job to give every child the content knowledge and innovative skills to enter today's world with heads held high, ready to take on the most demanding of challenges. We must do whatever it takes at every level of our public education system to give our students what they need in the classroom - where it matters most.

For that, we need leadership.

I'm not talking about leadership that resides in one individual or one role in a school district. Rather, I'm speaking of a set of shared leadership practices that are exercised at every level from the school board to the classroom teacher. There is a great deal of research data pointing to the specific leadership behaviors needed to improve student achievement.

For example, an important study done by McREL — the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning — shows a direct relationship between school district leadership and student achievement. McREL's finding confirms my own deep conviction as a former teacher and district superintendent: District leadership matters—and any school district's strength lies in its ability to nurture and support a cadre of courageous leaders who are passionate about their work and serve as tireless advocates for all children.

Thanks to the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council, a good foundation has been laid for an improvement process for Ohio school districts. The Leadership Council is a joint undertaking of the Ohio Department of Education and the Buckeye Association of School Administrators—BASA. The Council's job has been to define the leadership practices needed at all levels to support continuous improvement in instructional practice and student achievement.

I thank the BASA leaders who share ODE's vision for developing leaders at every level of Ohio's public education system. Together, our organizations are grateful for the commitment and participation of key stakeholder groups, such as the:

- Ohio Education Association;
- Ohio Federation of Teachers;
- Ohio Association of Elementary School Administrators;
- Ohio Association of Secondary School Administrators;
- Ohio Association of School Business Officials;
- Ohio School Boards Association;
- Ohio Educational Service Center Association; and
- Ohio Council of Professors of Educational Administration.

These professional organizations have worked alongside us, eager to help lead and sustain improved instructional practices and higher achievement for all students.

One critical element of the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council is that it's practitioner-based, with the majority of members being school district personnel. The experiences of these individuals have enriched many initiatives, including the development of standards for superintendents. These standards can be used to help new superintendents understand the scope of their jobs. The standards also can guide school boards in superintendent hiring and development, and aid institutions of higher education in preparing aspiring superintendents.

At the same time, OLAC believes that all educators—not just superintendents—have the capacity to lead. Essential leadership practices must be implemented continuously, collectively and collaboratively by adults at all levels of our education system to achieve and sustain improvement in student performance.

- Exercising leadership at all levels means that school boards play a critical role in making student achievement the top district priority, and ensuring that instruction and achievement remain the primary focus of the district's work;
- Leadership means that the district superintendent collaborates with others to align and focus the work of the district around district goals for achievement and instruction; and
- Leadership means that we build effective leadership teams at the district, school and teacher levels to see the work through.

As you begin this module on *Ohio's Leadership Development Framework*, you will see that the framework clarifies leadership roles and responsibilities at all these levels. The framework validates the leadership team structures needed to:

- Break down programmatic silos and encourage open and honest conversations about a district's critical needs;
- Help the district focus on a limited number of meaningful goals and strategies, and implement them across the district;
- Provide the valuable service of monitoring implementation for improvement—instead of monitoring compliance—and tracking how implementation brings about positive changes in adult practice and student performance; and
- Hold each other accountable for following through on commitments to each other and to our kids.

Michael Fullan, a well-known writer and researcher in educational leadership, reminds us often that it is difficult to sustain change at the classroom level when the corresponding school, district, regional agencies and state agency fail to make changes that enhance coherence, alignment, connectedness, synergy and capacity for continuous improvement. The leadership model proposed by OLAC provides this cohesiveness in expectations, practices and culture. It provides cohesiveness in redefining roles to focus on improving

the capacity and performance of all parts of the system, and it provides cohesiveness in fostering communities committed to instructional improvement and student success.

We recognize that districts need ongoing support from state support team (SST) and education service center (ESC) regional facilitators to help them sustain their implementation and self-monitoring efforts. As state superintendent, I can tell you that we are deeply committed to building a statewide system of support for continuous improvement—a system that requires schools, districts, regional service providers and our state personnel to work together in a focused, coherent way.

Already there are teachers, principals, central office personnel, superintendents, community partners and families working together to improve outcomes for students. You'll see some of them in the OLAC's online modules. While we commend these individuals for their outstanding practices and performance, we must acknowledge that these practices are not found in every classroom, in every building, in every district in Ohio. Our work will not be finished until they are.

Now is the time for effective leadership. As adults and educators, we have a moral imperative to strive for continuous improvement in instructional quality and student performance so our children can be leaders and innovators in a changing world. We must strive for continuous improvement so we are producing educated workers who can welcome and embrace change. We must also strive for continuous improvement so Ohio can continue to be a good and vital place for all generations to live and work as the 21st century unfolds.

Thanks to the work that has already been done by OLAC, we have a solid foundation on which to build a statewide system and culture of education improvement. I want to thank you for the unique and critical leadership role that you will play in improving education and quality of life for tomorrow's Ohioans.