

## Creating a Dream Mentor Culture

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Based on my Change Matrix for Educational Change the following needs to be understood about the need for Change in order for Dreams to become a reality.

Determining *how* to change the school once all involved understand and accept the *why* and the *what*. This final stage involves:

- How to create a strategic, collaborative plan
- How to manage change

Unfortunately, like business many schools begin their improvement efforts in the reverse order — by first deciding how to do things differently. That is, they find a “solution” without defining the need or problem/opportunity statement. Plus, if Administrators, Teachers, Parents and Support Staff do not believe the school must change or understand what needs to change, the suggestion for *how to change is likely to be unsuccessful or rejected, because it is, in effect, an answer to a problem that has not been acknowledged or one that has always been around and it is a fact of education life.*

### I. WHY We Need to Change

Cabrini schools (not just Cabrini) changes will require the desire and passions to come from leadership and at least an enthusiasm of others to be led — to change what currently exists. We as leaders administration and staff must accept change as a team and challenging rather than intimidating and threatening to those who look to us for guidance and leadership.

As I traveled back and forth across the country when I worked for AT&T I wanted to know if it was a local problem or more systemic across the country. Talking with peers in different regions of the country I found them all to have the same problems as we faced in the central region (MI, OH, IL, IA, Wisc). In fact I did a study based on what I saw in North Carolina and determined that our reading and writing level was at the 8<sup>th</sup> grade level for many of our employees (including some that attended college).

While on the road I often attended local high school board meetings in different states to listen to what was going on in their schools, looking for ways they were preparing their students for the future. I found some good ideas for the times but mostly the common thread that most had in common were the problems they faced. For example these were the most prevalent between 2000 and 2004:

- Lack of funds
- Overcrowded classrooms
- Discipline problems
- Federal & State Laws & Regulations (NCLB)
- Lack of synergy between teachers, grade levels and schools
- Rapid changes in the digital world
- No synergy between parents, teachers and administrators
- Our Educational System is falling behind the rest of the world

Now that I have been working in the Public School System for the past four years I would still say the problems I found eight years ago still exist today with the exception of the last one because we are now behind many nations of the world in our educational policies

*I have been known for many years as a Systems Thinker who challenges “Conventional Wisdom”, the “Status Quo” and the “Balance” within a system. I ask many questions.*

We educators have to understand that what exists in schools today needs to be updated to keep pace with the local, state, national and global societies. We need to recognize that students, admin and teachers must continually learn new things and that some of the skills we teach and use today will soon be as outdated as the technological and social skills continue to change for our students to be successful citizens and life long learners.

### **Changing the Paradigm**

I have often stated that our schools follow an agricultural calendar and was designed for the industrial age of the mid 1800s that has created a poor match with preparing students for the technological digital age. In many districts, schools are not designed to deal with today’s technology, the global and media-driven world we live in, or the equity issues facing education. The rules and regulations under which these schools operate are held over from a time that has passed.

## **II. Determining WHAT Changes Need to be Made**

### **Creating the Dream**

A Dream Mentor awareness presentation needs to be presented and shared (Found on this site) with all involved in the Cabrini Parish and School System. The awareness must explain the educational, economic and social reasons why education programs must change, the schools must use that knowledge to develop a student-focused dream (vision) and common focus that helps to identify what changes will be needed (data collection techniques to be developed). The dream helps create a mutual spirit among school and parish communities. The purpose of the school has to be clearly defined. Priorities will begin to appear and roadmap action plans will guide the changes for the school.

Today, there is common agreement about four roles of education:

1. Fostering academic (thinking) development
2. Preparing students to be informed, caring, and productive citizens of society
3. Preparing students for higher education
4. Preparing students for the world of work.

Nice words and found in many schools vision and mission statements. However, what does not exist is the means of how to bring these words alive, to make them real, to internalize them into the day-to-day learning’s of the school. It cannot be done without “active” leadership and the plans with associated measures to monitor progress.

### **III. Determining HOW to Change**

Schools that have first gone through a process of discovering why they must change followed by an analysis of data which identifies what they must change are far better positioned to determine how they need to change.

Creating a DREAM MENTOR CULTURE in which educators at every level and students feel safe in questioning current practices and procedures is an important component in the processes that the successful schools use to stay on a path of continuous improvement.

I have found in my work and studies that found that change leaders look at the process of how to change quite differently from many other leaders. These leaders are willing to take risks as necessary because they believe there is no choice but to change (Dr. Deming – “No one has to change, Survival is optional”). They understand that playing it safe is more dangerous than taking a risk and that there is no protection from the wave of changes facing our students today and tomorrow. Consequently, they take control and lead example with humility and confidence, rather than simply trying to hang around.

#### **Creating the Plan**

My experience in Change and Creating Action Plans for transformation in business and education comes with the realization that leaders in the high-performing (Baldrige Results) schools and businesses seem to recognize that if they wait to get everyone on board and fully accepting of all requirements of a school improvement plan, they will never move forward. So instead, many accept the concept that one-third of the faculty and staff will be excited about a new plan, one-third will be watchful but somewhat open-minded, and one-third will say, in effect, “any changes will be made over my dead body.”

One approach I have found through painful experiences is that everyone needs to understand through open and honest communication (i.e., Dream Mentor awareness package ) that any plan laid out is not perfect and that, moreover, there is no perfect model or plan. Any plan will need evaluation and adjustment constantly. The admission up front that the plan will need to be personalized as the school moves forward is critical to bringing the mindset of nay Sayers and those who like to sit on the fence and fall which ever way the wind is blowing.

Another hurdle that many schools and businesses I have worked with and for are the problems of dollars and time. Funding will always be an issue; but one must ask what is the cost of not doing changes, can we put a price tag on making sure our students are prepared for the environment they face after high school?

The biggest single deficit schools face is lack of time, how do we fit another project or effort into an already crowded workday. Everyone has their own priorities as to how things should be done; everyone protects “What’s in it for me,” instead of “What’s in it for the good of the whole school.”

*We must envision our dream as a completed product and build from backwards from there. There are tools to help us (SIPOC + CCCC) see this ending and the priorities that are required to make it happen.*

## **Managing Change**

While managing change is difficult in all organizations, Father Joe has reminded me that it is especially problematic in institutions with long and rich traditions, like the Catholic Church. I also found this to be true in 1980 when I was part of the massive change of the Breakup of the AT&T phone monopoly. Father uses the analogy of taking a bite out of the elephant one mouthful at a time. I use the analogy of trying to turn a battleship on a dime. We must realize that traditions, and the rules and regulations that surround them, become anchors that are difficult to pull up so that the “ship” can be redirected.

By nature, many of us are not risk takers. Therefore, we want to make sure that any change being contemplated is well thought out, carefully planned, and clearly better than what currently exists. In effect, we will not change unless the pain of not changing is worse than the pain of a new change (like losing a job).

If we don't, as a team believe that the present system can be changed for the better it will be a long haul. However, I believe the haul can be fun and it can be exciting to lay the groundwork and build what others are afraid to do. I have found since I retired when I look back and see what was, it makes me feel old. However, the way to feel young and invigorated is to look forward and to “Dream” for a better future through hard work and a passion for educational excellence.

To manage change in a school system (Catholic Church) with entrenched traditions and well-known fear of change requires a team of special and charismatic leaders. We as leaders need to recognize that avoiding dreams, passions and risks actually puts our school and students in greater risk of not succeeding than not attempting change at all.

A Transformation is required and we can no longer wait for someone or the government to come up with the ultimate plan. In order to compete, and bring balance to our academic successes along with our athletic successes, we must Dream and build a plan for today and tomorrow.

**“No one has to change. Survival is optional.”**