

## What Your Colleagues Are Saying . . .

“Lyle Kirtman not only has deep experience in many facets of education, but he also has a unique ability to think both quantitatively and qualitatively. In *Shaping the Future*, Kirtman provides actionable strategies for creating sustainable student success and empowered educational teams.”

**Peter DeWitt**

Author, Facilitator, Coach, Instructional Leadership Collective  
Albany, New York

“*Shaping the Future* is a powerful guide for educators seeking to create a culture of high expectations. By focusing on individual student needs, fostering a supportive environment, and building community partnerships, Kirtman provides a practical and inspiring road map. This book is a must-read for education leaders committed to student success.”

**Tom Vander Ark**

CEO, Getting Smart  
Former Executive Director, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation  
Federal Way, Washington

“*Shaping the Future* provides educational leaders with sound and practical advice on how to shift their work so that they can meet the needs of their students and staff and stay relevant. For leaders who seek to lead rather than react to change, this book is essential reading.”

**Pedro A. Noguera**

Dean, Rossier School of Education  
Distinguished Professor of Education  
Los Angeles, California

“Kirtman makes the thoughtful and crucial case for shifting our thinking and practice for the good of all students. It is not for a lack of trying that American public education has not moved the needle on student success—but we need a new north star and this book is a great beginning.”

**David P. Driscoll**

Former Massachusetts Commissioner of Education  
Melrose, Massachusetts

“Kirtman cuts through the noise of the times, providing us with very relevant, practical, researched-based steps to help lead and shape the futures of those we serve. He captures the moment we are in and gives us a roadmap to rediscover our north star, thereby guiding us to lead our schools through these rough seas to safer shores.”

**Kevin Brown**

Executive Director, Texas Association of  
School Administrators (TASA)  
Austin, Texas

“Kirtman focuses on two things that matter the most to educators, simplifying the work and empowering, collaborative leadership. This book is an excellent resource for school leaders seeking a path to success. By pivoting as he suggests, everyone wins.”

**Kate Dias**

President, Connecticut Education Association  
Hartford, Connecticut

“*Shaping the Future* challenges us to rethink what effective leadership looks like and who we trust to lead. By uncovering biases that limit innovation and emphasizing traits like persistence, flexibility, and intrinsic accountability, Kirtman offers a bold framework to align leadership with student success. This book isn’t just a guide—it’s a wake-up call to build schools where everyone rises.”

**Sherida Britt**

Education Strategist  
Upper Marlboro, Maryland

“Kirtman is a genius. He gets inside the weeds of organizational change. Not only does he extricate us from the constraints for change, but he also liberates us from the daily grind. If you want novel, high leverage levers for changing cultures using existing hidden forces this is the book for you.”

**Michael Fullan**

Professor Emeritus  
Ontario, Canada

*“Shaping the Future* empowers educational leaders with practical and equity-driven guidance to transform their work in ways that address the diverse needs of students and staff. The insights offered are both compelling and actionable, reflecting Kirtman’s deep understanding that effective leadership requires clarity, preparation, and a willingness to rethink traditional approaches.”

**Sinthia Sone-Moyano**

Deputy Commissioner, Educational Supports and Wellness  
Connecticut State Department of Education  
Hartford, Connecticut



# Shaping the Future

## Dedication

*I am dedicating this book to Dr. Robert S. Peterkin, who recently passed away. Bob was my first real mentor and taught me about leadership at an early part of my career. He showed me that leadership was about commitment, courage, humility, and learning how to navigate politics. He said as a young educational leader, I had talent but did not understand politics. He said lucky for me that he could teach me politics. Those lessons saved my career many times, and I have passed on his coaching to many other young leaders. Thank you, Bob, for launching my career along with so many others.*

# Shaping the Future

Four Leadership Pivots for  
Lasting Educational Impact

Lyle Kirtman

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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Lyle Kirtman** has been a leadership development consultant for more than thirty years. As CEO of Future Management Systems Inc. he has worked on developing leaders to increase results for students in 350 school districts in fifteen states. Kirtman's publications are influencing educators nationally and internationally. His books, *Leadership and Teams: The Missing Piece of the Educational Reform Puzzle*, *Leadership: Key Competencies for Whole System Change* (with Michael Fullan) and

*Coherent School Leadership: Forging Clarity from Complexity* (with Michael Fullan), have influenced educational practice throughout the United States.

Kirtman's focus on innovation in education is a key element of his presentations, keynotes, and publications. He helped former Governor Patrick in Massachusetts by chairing the governor's strategic planning task force on innovation in education. Kirtman brings a unique background to his leadership work in education through his consulting experience in the federal government (EPA), health care (Massachusetts General Hospital), universities (Harvard University), and corporate (Cisco Systems) and nonprofit worlds (United Way). He has also worked as a senior administrator in central office for the Boston Public Schools in the organizational development and leadership field for school operations.

Kirtman's field-based research has already made major contributions to the educational leadership arena through his seven competencies for educational leaders, the use of leadership assessments for

self-reflection and hiring, and the importance of getting a “C” in compliance to increase focus on results for student achievement.

Kirtman earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology from the State University of New York (SUNY) and a master’s degree in counseling with a concentration in career development from SUNY and Fairfield University, Connecticut.

# INTRODUCTION

## *Why Your Leadership Must Change Now*

Education must change, or potentially what we call public education may not exist in the near future. This may seem alarmist, but the signs are clear. Educators are exhausted. The best and brightest are leaving the field at overwhelming levels (Barnum, 2023). The leaders who are supposed to be motivating people to stay are weary and also looking to leave and find a better work-life balance. The public is so divided that every situation gets polarized and escalates to distract everyone from the purpose of why education exists. According to Katherine Norris and Kathryn Wiley (2023), “With low teacher pay, challenging classroom and school conditions, and long-standing underinvestment in education, coupled with the new anti-critical-race-theory and anti-everything-equity movement, teachers are under greater strain. These factors have led to a crisis in our nation’s classrooms, unlike anything we have seen in our careers”(p. 3).

The opportunity for positive change requires leaders to pivot to a new mindset to be proactive leaders. The opportunity for courageous leaders is extraordinary. Robert Jokela, executive director of the Crest Collaborative in Massachusetts, visits Finland frequently to reconnect with his family. I asked Bob one day what the Finland educators say about why they are able to succeed when the United States has struggled. What Bob hears is that they do not focus on compliance, assessment, and accountability as much, but they do learn from the U.S. education system. They say that they take many of the great ideas

from the United States that have never been implemented but have proven to improve student achievement.

The goal of this book is to place the focus of education back on student achievement. To that end, the reader will find strategies and tools to help them develop a *positive results culture* that will attract a highly skilled and diverse staff. We know that student results are critical. We also know that a positive culture and high morale are needed for staff to feel satisfied that they are making a difference in student and family lives. Now we must combine both to create a positive results culture.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF A POSITIVE RESULTS CULTURE

- A feeling of ownership for outcomes by staff and faculty
- Staff and faculty practicing a strong voice in setting goals
- High interdependence and communication
- Intrinsic accountability
- Continuous improvement
- Broad-based leadership, not by title
- Sustainable results
- Less impact by a change at the top
- Celebration of success

This positive results culture will help educators better prepare students for postsecondary education and life. The fact that many of our current educational strategies are not aligned with student achievement is the core disconnect in education. To become aligned we must pivot and shift our leadership. We have defined *four pivots* to make in leadership to build a positive results culture.



# Four Pivots in Leadership to Build a Positive Results Culture

## THE FOUR PIVOTS

1. Identify a clear North Star that defines what student success looks like.
2. Develop a new approach for hiring, developing, and retaining all staff.
3. Implement a system where employees self-assess their progress toward enabling student success.
4. Establish and commit to high expectations for all students and staff—all the time.

These *four pivots* in leadership mindset and practice will be discussed in Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7. The reader will learn how to develop actions for change with examples from leaders at all levels. This book will reach beyond our traditional hierarchy of administrative leadership to teachers, support staff, parents, and even students. We truly do need a village to educate a child.

## Book Overview

**Chapter 1: Our Findings and New Leadership Approach—It's Research Based.** The four leadership pivots are based on our research, data, and experience in building leadership capacity in districts nationally. This data can be used to add credibility for these proposed leadership pivots and to inform the strategies for implementation. I conducted a two-year research project in 2011 and 2012 with the support of Pearson Publishing and Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) studying high-performing leaders and their skills and competencies. Using this data we have looked at more than 9,000 leadership assessment reports and found some clear trends for administrators' and teachers' behavior nationally. The most prominent data indicate a lack of focus on student achievement and success.

**Chapter 2: Integrate, Don't Separate—A New Leadership Mindset.** This chapter will show readers how to change silo mentality and stop the pressure to develop a myriad of stars that distract from the goal of student achievement. Integration will calm your environment and allow for more focus and fewer frenetic reactive actions.

**Chapter 3: Finding Your North Star.** Education has allowed its North Star to drift. The North Star is the clear definition of what success looks like for students. Education needs to step back and focus on the reason it was created: to provide an academic education, as well as a common political and social philosophy, to all young people regardless of social class.

**Chapter 4: Moving From Human Resources to Talent Management—Solving the Workforce Crisis.** The number of candidates for almost every position has decreased dramatically. Superintendent searches are lucky to have twenty candidates. Eighty-six percent of school districts reported challenges in hiring teaching positions in 2023-2024 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023a). Other industries have changed their hiring to look at skills, experience, and who people are; education has not made that change.

**Chapter 5: Setting High Expectations for All Students and Staff.** If students and staff are treated with respect and coached to success, most people will rise to the occasion. We will outline how we can treat people like professionals. This also means classified staff. All staff can control their own narrative for performance as long as we achieve results.

**Chapter 6: Intrinsic Accountability—Student and Staff Agency.** We need to demystify this process by allowing those who are being evaluated to have a voice in the process, thus increasing buy-in and accountability. Using an intrinsic accountability system for evaluation will motivate staff to sustainable improvement.

**Chapter 7: Call to Action—Rediscover Your North Star.** The final chapter will motivate the reader to act by focusing on the four leadership pivots. Most leaders have lost their focus and the ability to ensure that the North Star is a guide through the storms of change. This chapter will bring all aspects of this book into a clear and simplified plan of action. Acting now before it's too late is essential for students, staff, parents, and the community.

## Features and Benefits

Although each chapter covers the different pivots, they are not separate strategies. You will see different topics covered in multiple chapters because they are interconnected with the strategies. We will dive deeply into many aspects of these topics using the different pivot areas and strategies.

Each chapter will provide the following features.

- ▶ **Learning Intentions:** a summary of what the reader will take away from the chapter.
- ▶ **Statement of the Problem:** a description of the problem we are trying to solve (problems that districts and schools are facing nationally)
- ▶ **Proposed Practical Solutions:** solutions the reader can implement to solve the problems districts face
- ▶ **Suggested Steps and Strategies:** how to begin and implement the solutions
- ▶ **Vignettes and Examples:** examples of either the problem or solutions of the chapter focus
- ▶ **Chapter Summary:** key takeaways and steps the reader can use right away for real-life problems

## Why This Book Is Unique and Important

As a person who does not come from the pre-k-12 world, I have been informed by my observations, data, research, and experience that have resulted in conclusions that may be different from those in the education field. I believe in the importance of education and respect people who have chosen that path for their life's work. I know educators are frustrated with outsiders criticizing education. I have a different path. I chose to work within education based on my personal values of commitment to students and families as the basis for positive change in society. What is different in this book is that I am speaking from both theory and practice. I have worked side by side with a state commissioner, superintendents, central office leaders, teachers,

parents, support staff, and educational partners in 500 school districts and 1,000 schools. I provide both an outsider and insider viewpoint developed through playing a direct role in implementation with districts across our country. I have additional experience in business, health care, government, and the nonprofit world that I integrate into my work and research.

Other people have discovered many of the same issues based on experience and expertise. However, this book will provide a framework with specific examples of how to be successful that you will not see in other leadership books. As Michael Fullan (2023) has said, often I focus on practice and am informed by the theory. The outsider-insider viewpoint allows me to see the whole system from the student to the policymakers. This book will help the readers align their day-to-day work to student achievement and stay the course without being distracted by all the noise.

# OUR FINDINGS AND NEW LEADERSHIP APPROACH—IT'S RESEARCH BASED



## Learning Intentions

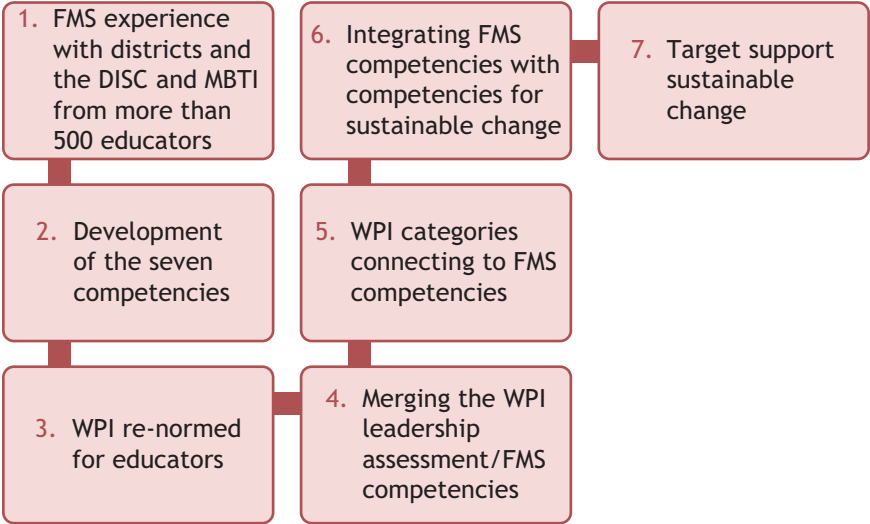
1. Review the data, research, and findings that support the reasoning for why leadership needs to pivot in education.
2. Understand and begin to apply the Seven Competencies for High-Performing Leaders.
3. Consider the Four Pivots education needs to undertake.

## *The Context of Why We Need to Pivot*

The purpose of our research was to determine if our data and experience on leadership would be supported with evidence. Our intention was to deepen the leadership development conversations and help inform educators on how to focus their practice to maximize student results.

Following is the description of the methodology of how the research was conducted and how it can be used in leadership development work in districts. Figure 1.1 illustrates the process Future Management Systems (FMS) and Pearson went through to align the Workplace Personality Inventory (WPI) and my Seven Competencies for High-Performing Leaders.

**1.1 The Description and Methodology of the Future Management Systems/Pearson Research Study**



In 2011 I developed the Seven Competencies of High-Performance Leaders based on a combination of my experience working with and coaching leaders in more than 700 school districts and 1,000 schools, the DiSC inventory, and a nationwide Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) database on education leaders. I believe that “high-performance education leaders have a range of leadership skills, competencies, and personal attributes. Although the core service in education is instruction for students, the leader’s role is to ensure that the highest quality of service is provided” (Kirtman, 2014). I believe that “our most successful leaders in education are results oriented” (Kirtman 2014).

Based on the Seven Competencies of High-Performance Leaders, Pearson and TalentLens wanted to conduct a study to re-norm the WPI, a self-assessment inventory, for school principals and to correlate the WPI traits to the Seven Competencies of High-Performance

Leaders. To do this study, TalentLens reviewed WPI results from 200 principals. The superintendents of the participating districts rated the principals using a Likert scale on their effectiveness (school success) and rated the principals' leadership using the subsets of the Seven Competencies (see "Seven Competencies for High-Performing Leaders"). The principals then all took the WPI. As hypothesized, the WPI scales significantly predicted a number of competencies that had been identified as important for successful performance as a principal.

The WPI is a highly effective, valid, and reliable tool. The WPI traits correspond with the workstyle job requirements listed in the ONET\* system for the Department of Labor. Using the results of the WPI and the superintendents' ratings of each principal on the Seven Competencies, TalentLens and I drew correlations between the Seven Competencies and the WPI traits. We then mapped the traits to the competencies. Additionally, the results of the study provided a range of scores desirable in school leadership, which are outlined later in the chapter with the trait definitions. These scores are not good or bad but rather reflective of behavior at work. Finally, we drew themes from the study, which resulted in significant research findings (see "Key Findings From Our Research"). Subsequently, our database has expanded to more than 9,000 WPIs from superintendents, central office administrators, principals, and more 2,000 teachers. The original results of the research have held true through the expansion to other groups beyond principals.

Since this research, we have been working on redefining results for students through the development of a clear North Star, which combines standardized tests (hard skills) and soft skills through the process of developing a portrait of a graduate. This new concept of developing a North Star is defined and outlined in Chapter 3.

You can find the description of the research tool and the data from the study in Appendix F. It was my opinion that it was important to explain the research findings and lessons learned from the data to the reader without the complications of understanding leadership assessments. The specific results in Appendix F will be helpful for people who are familiar with these leadership assessments or are interested in pursuing their use in their district.

## SEVEN COMPETENCIES FOR HIGH-PERFORMING LEADERS

A High Performing Leader . . .

- 1. Challenges the Status Quo**
  - ✓ Delegates compliance tasks to other staff
  - ✓ Challenges common practices and traditions if they are blocking improvements
  - ✓ Is willing to take risks
  - ✓ Looks for innovations to get results
  - ✓ Does not let rules and regulations block results and slow action
- 2. Builds Trust Through Clear Communications and Expectations**
  - ✓ Is direct and honest about performance expectations
  - ✓ Follows through with actions on all commitments
  - ✓ Makes sure there is a clear understanding based on written and verbal communications
  - ✓ Is comfortable dealing with conflict
- 3. Creates a Commonly Owned Plan for Success**
  - ✓ Creates written plans with input from stakeholders
  - ✓ Ensures that people buy into the plan
  - ✓ Monitors implementation of the plan
  - ✓ Adjusts the plan based on new data, and communicates changes clearly
  - ✓ Develops clear measurement for each goal in the plan
  - ✓ Creates short- and long-term plans
- 4. Focuses on Team Over Self**
  - ✓ Hires the best people for the team
  - ✓ Commits to the ongoing development of a high-performance leadership team



- ✓ Builds a team environment
  - ✓ Seeks critical feedback
  - ✓ Empowers staff to make decisions and get results
  - ✓ Supports the professional development of all staff
- 5. Has a High Sense of Urgency for Change and Sustainable Results in Improving Student Achievement**
- ✓ Moves initiatives ahead quickly
  - ✓ Can be decisive
  - ✓ Uses instructional data to support needed change
  - ✓ Builds systemic strategies to insure sustainability of change
  - ✓ Sets a clear direction for the organization
  - ✓ Deals with and manages change effectively
- 6. Commits to Continuous Improvement for Self and the Organization**
- ✓ High sense of curiosity for new ways to get results
  - ✓ Is willing to change current practices for themselves and others
  - ✓ Listens to all team members to change practices to obtain results
  - ✓ Takes responsibility for their own actions—no excuses
  - ✓ Has a strong self-management and self-reflection skills
- 7. Builds External Networks and Partnerships**
- ✓ Sees their role as a leader on a broad base manner outside the work environment and community walls
  - ✓ Understands their role as being a part of a variety of external networks for change and improvement
  - ✓ Has a strong ability to engage people inside and outside in two-way partnerships
  - ✓ Uses technology to expand and manage a network of resource people

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, education had faced the need for change based on the challenges of educating students in a quickly evolving world. However, the pandemic has put a spotlight on the need to change to improve student achievement. Additionally, the current workforce crisis has created ongoing concerns regarding student achievement, and a volatile political environment has increased the pressure to change quickly. A district problem that took months to escalate in the past can move to crisis level in days or even hours. As one teacher told us, “The pandemic put the change process on steroids!”

Challenges the Status Quo (Competency 1) was important pre-pandemic; now it is a necessity. Our current education system has maintained strategies and practices that do not work in today’s world. “Why has the 200-year-old current system in Western societies not transformed when the majority of people have known for at least 50 years that it does not work?” (Fullan, 2023, p 2). People know that we need to change our education system but fear the criticism they may receive from all sides when they try. My leadership research provides objective data to help us understand what needs to change, why we tend to maintain the status quo, and information on how we can move forward.

## KEY FINDINGS FROM OUR RESEARCH

- District and school leaders need leadership skills and competencies beyond instructional leadership.
- Top-down leaders do not create sustainable change.
- Most leaders are cautious and don’t have a high sense of urgency for student achievement.
- External networking and partnerships increase results.
- Motivating staff gets better results than the traditional evaluation process.
- Stress and defensiveness from data and critical feedback decrease positive results and improvement.
- Leaders who are overly concerned with others are less able to give feedback and often get lower results.
- Focusing on compliance and rule following decreases positive results.

My book with Michael Fullan, *Leadership: Key Competencies for Whole System Change* (Kirtman & Fullan, 2017), provides more depth on the Seven Competencies. In addition, my second book with Fullan (Fullan

& Kirtman, 2019) connects the Seven Competencies to his framework for creating coherent districts and schools.

The Pearson/TalentLens study provides data on leadership for administrators and teachers and the traits that are most critical for thriving in today's educational environment. The data also show how some traits that leaders have are not conducive to success.

Teachers prioritize the work that their principal and the district leadership deems must be completed. The data show that most teachers focus on completing those tasks rather than doing what they believe is best for students. To succeed the teacher who is closest to the student needs to focus on student learning, not task completion and compliance. For example, if a teacher is asked to use a new lesson plan because the central office thinks it is better, a high-performing teacher may resist because they believe the students are learning with the current lesson plan, especially if the reason for the change is not clear. Conversely, a teacher who is task oriented and compliance driven will do what they are told and follow the directive from central office and the principal. This task orientation can be a problem when student achievement does not improve. The teacher may not feel responsible because they did what they were told to do. This can result in a teacher believing that it is the principal's job to improve student achievement, not theirs.

Another key point derived from the data is that the superintendents are focused on behaviors that relate to achieving results. These behaviors show results orientation and a high sense of urgency (Competency 5). The superintendent may also use other leadership traits such as innovation, analytical behaviors on how data can help focus on improving results, independence, and persistence. However, their leadership teams, comprising central office leaders and principals, are generally more focused on implementing and not leading improvement efforts. Therefore, the traits of this team may be lower in the leadership traits exhibited by the superintendent.

This major gap between many superintendents and the central office and school leadership has several implications. The superintendent can lead change but must encourage their leadership teams, including teachers, to not only implement goals and initiatives but be partners in the leadership efforts. Closing this gap will enhance the change and improvement effort and create more sustainable change (Competency 5).

The research also confirmed our concern about educator stress, especially teachers. Most educators' results indicated a high level of stress and a potential to be defensive when sharing data on improvement

strategies. Our study showed that defensive behavior, and lack of focus on data, is directly related to stress along with the pressure of completing an overwhelming number of disparate tasks. This teacher stress can affect the students, and we will reference data confirming this result from a leadership assessment called Indigo, which can be completed by students and adults (see Chapter 5).

Stress can also be related to a lack of self-control behaviors by several leaders and especially teachers. This lack of self-control manifests itself in frustration and resistance to change. The use of data to prove the importance of change tends to increase the defensiveness of educators in most cases. The ability to discuss how changes will improve results and address teacher concerns is more effective than showing data on students' low performance and failure. When I discuss data, I use the phrase *data informed* rather than *data driven* to decrease defensiveness. *Data informed* shows more respect and value for the teacher's viewpoint and brings them into the conversation. *Data driven* highlights an external factor that distances a teacher from the data you are trying to use to get their attention and commit to change.

Innovation is important in today's world. We can't solve today's challenges with yesterday's solutions. We also need to help students develop their innovation skills for the workplace. Innovation is a relatively strong trait for administrators and teachers. However, the pressure on compliance and rules decreases innovation. Our data show how innovative people can become frustrated and blocked from pursuing new ideas for fear that they will find themselves in trouble if they do not follow the rules. Some innovative people can decrease their initiative over time because they meet resistance and are discouraged from trying to challenge the status quo. We have also found that educators can become less flexible because of the focus on compliance. This lack of flexibility can have an adverse effect and result in less innovative and affect a teacher's openness to change. Concerns about stifling innovation show up in our disaggregated data on race and gender. Leaders of color tend to have a desire to be innovative but show a decrease in initiative from feeling a lack of support.

One more result from our research is that caring and concern for others, which tends to motivate many to become teachers and administrators, has become a strength *and* a weakness. Caring for students and colleagues is important. However, caring (i.e., avoiding hurt feelings) can prevent an educator's willingness to be open and honest with others. The ability to be direct with caring is important. Educators

need to be direct and identify issues early to make sure that their and their colleagues' work and behaviors are focused on results. As some people say, clear is kind, and this is a theme that we will refer to in future chapters.

The implications of the data on educational leaders will be woven into each chapter. The data have also been disaggregated for race, gender, and age, which will be referenced in Chapter 4 on talent management.



## SETTING A GOAL TO STRATEGICALLY IMPROVE ACHIEVEMENT SCORE

Danielle Hinkle, a member of the school leadership team who coaches and supervises principals in Modesto School District in California, has been working on increasing her achievement score for two years. She was an excellent member of several teams in student support services and was known for her ability to get tasks done on time. Everyone wanted Danielle on their team. Her achievement score, which reflects results orientation, was low, and her leadership score was also low when she took the WPI for the first time. After gaining self-awareness of her personality traits and their impact on her work performance, she set a clear goal to improve her achievement score. She recognized the need to shift her focus from detailed, task-oriented project management to addressing broader challenges and solutions. This meant starting with focusing on the desired outcomes and strategically determining the steps to achieve them, allowing her to align her work more effectively with high-impact results. By adopting a strategic, outcome-focused approach, she has seen significant improvements in the results of her work and the work of the school leadership team. This shift has enhanced her project execution, ensuring initiatives align more closely with the district's strategic goals. The impact on student achievement has been evident through more cohesive program implementations, streamlined processes, and the fostering of a learning environment that prioritizes both academic rigor and student engagement. These improvements have translated to more targeted support her principals and her colleagues and, ultimately, a more effective

*(Continued)*

(Continued)

pathway for student success. The outcome-driven mindset has reinforced alignment between district strategies and measurable student outcomes, creating a more unified and impactful educational experience.

### *Detailed student data with improvements:*

- Increased graduation rates
- Decreased dropout rates
- Successful implementation of a college and career readiness platform designed to support students in a greater level of career awareness and how high school course plans can support postsecondary goals for college and career

As part of our leadership development work, we disaggregated the WPI data based on race, gender, and age. I found several themes in our leadership development work. There will be some references to these themes throughout the chapters of this book. This data have been reviewed by the Pearson research team and are aligned with our research study. Although the data have not been peer reviewed or published, they have been integrated into the work with school districts nationally. The following are some of the most applicable themes that have implications for how leaders need to pivot their leadership approach:

1. Young leaders (ages 25-30) have high focus on results, which decreases as they get older and gain more experience. One cause may be that culture in education drives leaders to be more focused on tasks over results over time.
2. Leaders of color have high scores in many of the traits we are looking for to lead and manage in today's educational environment. These include high scores in results orientation, analytical thinking, innovation, and persistence.
3. Leaders of color tend to be able to manage stress relatively well and are open to critical feedback on how to improve.
4. Leaders of color, although having several strong leadership behaviors, tend to have low initiative. The culture in education seems to frustrate leaders of color, and they tend to decrease their initiative over time.

5. Women have high concern for others. They also have low stress tolerance and can struggle with hearing critical feedback if it is not presented constructively.

While I will be expressing my opinion based on extensive experience, the data support these thoughts and recommendations.

## How This Research Informed the Four Pivots

**Pivot 1—The North Star:** The data show a lack of focus and understanding of what the outcomes are for students. This confusion over outcomes can be an aspect of why educators are more task oriented than results driven.

**Pivot 2—The Movement to Talent Management:** The workforce crisis has many causes. One is that the skills and competencies of the past do not serve us as well in today's educational environment. We must define our North Star and recruit, develop, and retain a workforce that has the skills for now and the future (not the past).

**Pivot 3—High Expectations:** This pivot is informed by our data that show how compliance, task focus, and rules have prevented educators' ability to focus on results for students. The pressures of today to implement separate initiatives not tied to a clear measurement of success has resulted in lowering our standards for staff and students. Even initiatives such as social emotional learning (SEL) and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), which are important to understanding who our students are and what challenges they face, can result in lowering standards because they are not integrated into the high expectations of all students.

**Pivot 4—Intrinsic Evaluation:** This pivot is directly informed by our data. The stress and frustration of a more top-down system of driving change can be demotivating to the educators we need to lead. Our understanding that there is no data that extrinsic evaluation improves performance is a driving force to focus on driving a teacher's improvement to the understanding of the results we want to achieve.

The four pivots are grounded in the data and research and offer a package of pivots that will broaden student achievement efforts of all

educators and reduce the stress that is resulting in the best people leaving education.

As one union leader said to me, “I can get behind your pivots because you are helping us focus and simplify our work.”

## Proposed Use of the Data

### SHIFTING YOUR DISTRICT’S WORK

1. Each staff member must learn how to define results for themselves and the district first before completing tasks. The result is never the task; the task, if done correctly, gets you to the result. This connection between task and results is effective management and argues for more training and coaching on management to improve implementation. Kate Dias, president of the state teacher’s union in Connecticut, agrees that we need to increase the management skills for educators.
2. Increase persistence on completing goals, not a list of tasks—lack of persistence is an indicator of stress because educators are constantly distracted by less important tasks that are not connected to results for students.
3. Distribute leadership throughout your district; don’t simply delegate tasks. There is a need to raise the leadership of all staff, not only formal leaders.
4. Coach educators on developing a new set of skills and behaviors with a focus on achievement, persistence, leadership, innovation, analytical thinking, and flexibility.
5. Address the stress and self-control data by giving all staff a voice. We need our educators to be owners, not renters.
6. Coach and train all staff to have regular, direct conversations—people who score too high on concern for others may not give constructive feedback. When cooperation and concern for others traits on the WPI are too high, this indicates a reluctance to give clear, actionable feedback.
7. Because analytical behavior is low for most educators, switch from *data-driven* to *data-informed* in meetings. When a teacher who scores low in analytical hears *data-driven*, they can believe that the data are more important than they are. The *phrase data-informed* opens the conversation to acknowledge what the teacher believes is working or not working in their classroom.



Their voice is valued, and then the shift to how data can provide another viewpoint to inform their practice will be perceived as less combative or punitive. Analytical scores need to be higher but not too high, or people can become paralyzed from action for fear of making a mistake.

8. Build the capacity of instructional coaches to lead change in both content and organizational behavior for teachers to improve student achievement. I was part of a research study into the correlation between effective instructional coaches and WPI scores. This study found a positive correlation between high scores on the traits of achievement, self-control, and concern for others to effective coaching for student achievement. The most effective coaches are those who can define a clear result, follow a rigorous process for defining what is getting in the way, and provide direct, actionable feedback to teachers on improving their practice (Kutz et al., 2020).
9. Increase time and support for networking to improve social scores. Coach people to do more in person, on the phone, or virtual face-to-face communication, not only texts and emails. Texts and emails are better to provide information and get quick answers, not solve problems.

## APPLY DATA AND RESEARCH

Leadership teams at the district and school levels need to discuss the findings provided in this chapter and assess their strengths and areas for improvement. This can be done by completing the self-assessment tool on the Seven Competencies in Appendix A. Leadership assessments, such as the WPI, can also be helpful in this process.

1. Each individual and team should identify one or two strengths and one or two traits for improvement or development based on the WPI data provided in this chapter.
2. After reflecting on Kirtman's Seven Competencies, ask each member of a district or school leadership team to complete the self-assessment in Appendix A and identify their strengths and weaknesses in each of the Seven Competencies. Then ask everyone to identify one competency that they want to develop over the course of the academic year (Appendix E). Have everyone come up with a plan for how to develop their competency of focus, and then have the team meet and share their plans with each other.



## CHAPTER SUMMARY

The data and research outlined in this chapter provide a foundation and a rationale for pivoting your leadership. Educational leaders and teachers have grown frustrated with the environment. I have outlined what has caused this decline and the subsequent frustration and stress that are causing educators to leave the field they were so passionate to join. The data explain how the lack of results focus is a core factor in the decline. The leadership directives coming from above without the genuine commitment to develop leadership capacity for all educators has resulted in a feeling of helplessness. The compliance requirements have become overwhelming and prevented educators from focusing on the students' learning. The hope is that the inherent innovation that still exists in our educators can be rekindled and the clarity of the North Star and the other leadership pivots can bring back the reason people enter the educational field. Use these conclusions from our research to gain the courage to shift now and stop the decline.



## CHAPTER TAKEAWAYS

- It is important to have discussions on the data trends and themes from the research about adult leaders and students and faculty.
- Teachers need to have training and coaching on how to connect better with their students to engage them in learning.
- Begin to discuss the Four Pivots for leadership and the data that support the new leadership approach.
- Talk to teachers and students about how the educational process connects to their needs and lives.
- Decrease the focus on compliance and tasks, and tie all your work to outcomes for students.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION



1. Do the data trends for leaders, faculty, and students resonate with you? Why or why not?
2. How can you engage in connecting with students and staff to help them focus on results?
3. Are there one or two themes that you believe are relevant to your district, school or a specific class? Why?
4. Have an honest conversation with a colleague about why the disconnect among administrators, teachers, and students occurs in your district.
5. How can you explore this data without feeling defensive or attacked for true learning and insights?

