

INTEGRATING THE SUPERINTENDENT AS AN INDIVIDUAL INTO LEADING A SCHOOL SYSTEM

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GSSA's SPDP

GSSA's Superintendents Professional Development Program (SPDP) is the state of Georgia's premier learning community for those aspiring to the superintendency. Biannually 25 school administrators are selected from a larger pool of nominees to participate in this 2-year, 280-hour leadership development opportunity. Within the context of the Professional Standards for the Superintendency, the four integrated components of the program are:

1. Personal Assessment - getting a better understanding of one's own leadership skills
2. Purposeful Leadership - developing the capacity for leadership as the school district's Chief Educational Officer
3. Practical Administration - acquiring the practical knowledge and skills required to manage the educational enterprise
4. Professional Resources - developing skills to navigate the complexities of the changing school environment through networking, coaching, current research and changing knowledge.

Participants in SPDP are strongly devoted to the public education of Georgia's school children and to the continuous improvement of the system that supports this public service for Georgia's school children. As school administrators, they are accountable to the children and parents they must serve regardless of these stakeholders' socio-economic status (SES), ethnicity, ability sets, motivation, etc. Of course, they are also accountable to their local communities (residents, taxpayers, boards of education (BOE)), federal and state laws (e.g., No Child Left Behind), regulations and requirements. From every angle they are held accountable for focusing on others (children, parents, teachers, BOE, community).

The Personal Assessment and Purposeful Leadership components of SPDP provide participants opportunities to carefully consider themselves - their talents and blind spots, their personal and problem solving styles, their communication strengths and weaknesses and their own personal vision as they prepare for the top leadership positions in Georgia's public school systems. While there are many objectives, the

primary goal of these two components is for school leaders to learn to acknowledge and use their individuality talents and skills to help them succeed in their jobs. Participants first learn to recognize their talents and are then encouraged to consider the environment that would optimize the use of those talents. In other words, participants are encouraged to know themselves well enough to consider "fit" when considering future positions and to look for staff that "complements" their leadership talents.

For the past 11 years, Dr. Stiles has conducted assessments and workshops related to the Personal Assessment and Purposeful Leadership components. Among the assessments she uses is the Highlands Ability Battery, and one of the workshops she conducts is Personal Leadership. The combined experience allows participants to take time to focus on themselves.

The HAB and Personal Leadership Workshop As The Foundation For Purposeful Leadership

The foundation for Personal Leadership is creating a personal vision and then applying that vision to one's career. An important element of creating a personal vision is knowing one's natural abilities and the difference between those abilities and learned skills. Dr. Stiles uses the Highlands Ability Battery to help participants make that assessment.

As part of the first session for each of the past 5 SPDP cohorts, Dr. Stiles conducts a half-day workshop introducing the concept of job fit and many of the elements that go into creating it. Participants enjoy jumping into a review of their careers and sharing their career progression with their new colleagues. She introduces them to the difference between abilities and skills and sends them off with instructions for completing the Highlands Ability Battery (HAB) and other homework to complete before returning for the Personal Leadership workshop the following month. Dr. Stiles conducts individual debriefs with each participant before the workshop.

As she does with each workshop, Dr. Harden discusses the connection between the Personal Leadership workshop and the Professional Standards for Superintendency. In fact, she posts the relevant standards on the walls as a reminder. She also explains how the workshop addresses two of the four core program components. In part, her experience as a superintendent, her current state-wide perspective, and her insight regarding the importance of the topic garners active participation in the workshop. However, the individual debriefs provide a strong foundation for further exploration into and application of one's abilities and skills.

During the 2-day workshop, Dr. Stiles reviews the HAB information and shares an aggregated group profile. Participants see how their particular class compares to all other previous SPDP participants. While the individual debriefs focus on each individual participant, the group review focuses on how abilities impact working with/managing others. Participants also focus on how they can identify elements of a work environment that fit with their talents.

After all, the 180 school districts in Georgia vary widely in size (some with less than 300 students and others over 160,000 students), population density (rural, suburban, urban), economy, ethnicity, etc. Each district has a governance team of elected board of education members and a superintendent appointed by the board. Superintendents and boards continuously confront changing conditions that create a myriad of situational leadership demands. Can there really be a single "way" to be an effective superintendent? Absolutely not!

The rest of this highly interactive workshop allows participants to explore their skills, interests, personal style, family background and values to create a personal vision. After sharing their personal vision with the group, participants explore their organizations' values and their personal and professional goals. As a culminating activity, participants create and share this Focused Vision with the group.

Equipped with a solid understanding of their own talents and personal vision, participants more fully understand the need for Purposeful Leadership - "developing the capacity for leadership [in others] as the school district's Chief Educational Officer". In other words, they also have a better understanding of how to foster the talents of those on their staff.

What Participants Say

Participants consistently report that spending the time on themselves is valuable and "a welcomed change". Overall, the experience of taking the HAB and attending the Personal Leadership workshop is rated a 4.7 on a 5-point scale. On formal evaluations, participants report they will be able to apply what they learned to improve their performance as leaders and that the experience enhanced their preparation for the superintendency. All recommend it should continue to be used with future SPDP cohorts. A handful of more specific comments follow.

"The session was most enlightening! The opportunity to focus on myself was a welcomed change."

"Clarifying my values and doing the other activities that led to the personal vision were engaging."

"I enjoyed sharing information with my small group and then hearing from the larger group as a whole."

"This provided me a wonderful opportunity for self reflection and goal setting."

"I know myself better as a leader!"

"What was most valuable to me was working on writing new vision statements."

"The individual feedback and overall review of the Highlands Battery was most valuable to me."

The Georgia School Superintendents Association (GSSA) serves 180 school districts as the chief advocate for Georgia's public school students. GSSA provides leadership and representation on public education issues at the state and national levels and provides professional development opportunities to school superintendents (CEOs of school systems). For the past 11 years, Highlands affiliate Dori Stiles, Ph.D. has partnered with GSSA's Debra Harden, Ed.D. to provide workshops throughout their 2-year Superintendents Professional Development Program for aspiring superintendents, their District Office Professional Development Program for the district office leadership that supports the superintendent, and their Executive Coaching Program. A key tool she uses is the Highlands Ability Battery, Leadership report, and her Personal Leadership workshop.

This second article focuses on the application of the HAB and her Personal Leadership workshop in the Superintendents Professional Development Program.