







## Student achievement surges after Sioux City doubles down on Balanced Leadership®

### Sioux City Community School District

-  20 schools 
-  14,600 students 
-  Serves Woodbury County in western Iowa 

### Collaboration with McREL included:

- ❖ Traditional Balanced Leadership training in 2005 and 2016
- ❖ Enhanced coaching and technical assistance in 2017
- ❖ Built internal capacity to sustain BL program on their own
- ❖ Began using McREL Personnel Evaluation frameworks

### Results: A deeper commitment

- ❖ In 2017-18, 10% more K-3 students passed the state literacy test in SSCSD, versus 0.8% more statewide.
- ❖ The district no longer has any schools in state's lowest achievement category.
- ❖ New appreciation for leadership's impact on student learning.

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– Dr. Paul Gausman, superintendent, Sioux City Community Schools

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– Dr. Kim Buryanek, associate superintendent, Sioux City Community Schools

# Iowa superintendent discovers the missing piece to school reform: leadership training

## The Challenge

Paul Gausman, superintendent of the Sioux City, Iowa, school district, is a fan of his state's school reform plan. But when he realized in 2015 that a piece was missing, he didn't just fire off an email and move on. He did what effective leaders do: assembled a team to push reality in the direction he thought it needed to go.

"School reform in Iowa was not the same as reform we've seen in some other states, where they really meant they were reducing programs," he said. "School reform in Iowa meant they were going to funnel about \$150 million statewide into the Teacher Leadership and Compensation initiative. The mantra was that we needed to do more to empower teachers to become leaders, and we needed to provide coaching for teachers to improve instruction in the classroom.

"We were one of the first districts into the initiative and we firmly agreed with it. The one thing we noticed, however, is that it talked about teacher leadership but stopped short of building-wide leadership. So we started looking for a partner that would bring that added support to our district."

## Strategic Solution

McREL had already been to Sioux City, 10 years earlier, to deliver a three-day Balanced Leadership (BL) workshop to district administrators on the 21 leadership responsibilities that research shows have the strongest connections to higher levels of student success. But Gausman and associate superintendent Kim Buryanek said there hadn't been adequate follow-through last time around and, now, three of their schools had landed in the lowest of three state achievement tiers. The two leaders thought a renewed focus on BL would be a great complement to Iowa's plan.

After hearing the district's context and needs, McREL embarked on a deeper level of coaching and assistance for the district. Instead of only gathering principals for traditional seminar-style learning, McREL's expert coaches visited all 20 schools during each of six week-long visits to the district.

During these onsite visits, McREL's staff spent 30 minutes with each principal followed by 90 minutes with their school leadership team, entering into a deeper study of each component of BL. The coaches also focused on helping principals and their teams learn when, why, and how to effectively share leadership responsibilities across their team for maximum effect—rather than trying to have the principal do everything themselves.

It took time for some principals to embrace the shared leadership concept, Buryanek said. "But once they do and

leverage the power of other leaders on the building leadership team, they move farther, faster. They're alive and excited and sharing their ideas and successes. It's pretty amazing, just how they're enjoying the job more."

"It's become one of the most successful Balanced Leadership programs we've had," said McREL leadership coach Mel Sussman. "The program is good on its own, but if you have district leaders like Paul and Kim who are willing to not only talk the talk but walk the walk, the potential for success is incredibly good."

Knowing they couldn't keep bringing McREL experts to Sioux City forever, Buryanek and three other administrators got additional training to become authorized to deliver BL training and coaching themselves, building internal capacity to sustain the effort long-term.

## Results

One of the first tangible changes Buryanek noted was principals allowing teachers to deliver professional development: "It's not just the principal standing before the staff and delivering PD." Then the literacy results started rolling in, showing Sioux City gaining far more than other districts. Those three low-ranked schools? Make that zero.

"All successful groups, in whatever industry, they perform the best when they focus on a common goal to work toward and a common challenge to work against. That's what Balanced Leadership has done for us," Gausman said. "It helped us define what our common challenge is. It's not the individual students, it's not the parents—our challenge is that our literacy scores are where they are and need to increase. When you bring everyone together around a common challenge like that it's energizing, it's refreshing.

"I think our principals are enjoying their work more because we've pushed them to become instructional leaders and it's far more rewarding to succeed. I think there's a certain amount of power that is gained by giving power away. By distributing power among the team, I think they realize that we're far more powerful as a collective."

## Next Steps

Gausman and Buryanek have become BL champions, sharing their success—and what they perceive to be the reasons for it—with other district leadership teams around Iowa. "Balanced Leadership works," Gausman often tells other superintendents.

McREL is now working with Iowa's Area Education Agencies to deliver a statewide series of Balanced Leadership sessions in 2019 and 2020.