Superintendent Leadership Series

Leadership Associates
2020-2021

Uncharted Territory:
Improvisation, Swing & The Blues

Session I - Part A

Jazz is democracy in music.
-Wynton Marsalis
Welcome to the Superintendent Leadership Series

2020-2021

As the communities we serve face increasingly complex issues that challenge and divide us, the work of Superintendent Leadership is more critical than ever. This leadership series brings us together to increase our knowledge, hone our skills and bolster our courage. Our most important job is to convene the conversation for change. This time, space and attention is dedicated to the highest level of Superintendent leadership that makes a difference in the lives of all students. Although this series will include high quality resources, texts, videos, etc. it is true that the most essential element of this time together is the opportunity to interact with colleagues to face challenges and realize goals. Please join with us and with your colleagues to make a difference through our “simple, honest, human conversations.”

Leadership Associates
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Sandy Thorstenson
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What Question are We Trying to Answer?

In the face of an unpredictable and rapidly changing environment how might we lead effective responses to current challenges that range from basic to life and death?

We will:

Share experiences that build our Superintendents’ community.

Explore the complexity of leadership in responding to current challenges in operations, teaching and learning, communities, and politics.

Inform our thinking about leadership options and effectiveness using current literature and collegial conversation.

Increase our knowledge of leadership resources and tools.
Time isn’t the main thing. It’s the only thing.
-Miles Davis

Leadership Associates is committed to ensuring that the time and attention of Superintendent participants benefits their work in these very challenging times. To that end, the first semester of SLS sessions will be provided virtually in two-hour time frames. The content that follows in this module will be included and expanded over two virtual sessions.
Leadership Associates
Superintendent Leadership Series
2020 – 2021
Session 1 Parts A & B

Uncharted Territory:
Improvisation, Swing & the Blues

Agenda

*Jazz is democracy in music.*
— Wynton Marsalis

Welcome, Introductions, Outcomes, Essential Question, Agenda, Norms, Acknowledgement of Sponsors

Preview “Upstream” by Dan Heath

Community-Building: “Bounce Forward”

Bringing the Work into the Room: “Ten Words for the Future”

Focus I - Context: Planning for a Desired Future While the Crisis Prevails

Leadership & Jazz – A Model

Wicked Problems


Discussion

Swing Style

• Race & Equity
• Teaching & Learning – Rigor and Delivery
• Employee Issues – Unions & Employee Wellness
• Politics – Boards & Community

Coming Attractions and Feedback
Coming Attractions
Session 1 Part B

Circle Back
Wicked Problems

Focus II - Context: Nimble leadership in a period of nationwide protests with a focus on racism and equity
Jazz & Leadership Model
Video - “Jazz Great Teaches Kids About the Sound of Democracy”
https://youtu.be/q2v1wVex5_M
“A Conversation with Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor”
- Excerpted from Moving to Higher Ground
  by Wynton Marsalis
Discussion

Focus III – Into the Book
“Upstream” by Dan Heath
Building Our Leadership Community:

*One Conversation at a Time*

- Bring your authentic work to the table.

- Start with the belief that there is another way.

- Give yourself permission to “Not Know Yet.”

- Respect the diversity of styles and points of view within the group.

- Be completely present without the temptation of devices and multitasking.

- Actively engage in making meaning.

- Have Fun!

- Be willing to amaze yourself!
Building Our Leadership Community: 
One Zoom Conversation at a Time

• Use the “Raised Hand” feature when you wish to be recognized by the facilitator.

• Mute your screen if you have noise in your space that may be distracting or when asked to do so by the facilitator.

• Remember you are on camera so display the same professional appearance and demeanor that you would in a live meeting.

• When using the “Chat” function remember that your message will go to everyone unless you designate otherwise.
Bringing the work
Into the room

*Reading gives us someplace to go when we have to stay where we are.*
-Mason Cooley,
Professor, College of Staten Island

In future sessions, SLS 20-21 will include reading, conversation, and activities related to Dan Heath’s book, Upstream, March 3, 2020, which was provided for you with your materials.

In his latest book, Dan Heath uses interesting stories of organizations facing challenges to respond to the following questions.

- How will you unite the right people?
- How will you change the system?
- Where can you find a point of leverage?
- How will you get early warning of the problem?
- How will you know you are succeeding?
- How will you avoid doing harm?
- Who will pay for what does not happen?
Checking In: Bouncing Forward

*Don’t look back, the future is forward.*
-Unknown

[A lot of nerves located in and around our wrists and hands are connected directly to the brain. When you exercise pressure on a stress ball, the nerves and the muscles stimulate and contract, making them stronger. This, in turn, improves nervous system functioning and reduces essential hormones, which control and curb stress levels.]

- Times of India 9/5/2019
See more information on the health benefits of using a stress ball on the following page.

With the stress ball that you received in your packet of materials, answer the following question by squeezing your stress ball;

1 time if the answer is not at all, 2 times if the answer is often, or 3 times if the answer is all the time.

**Questions:**

1. Do you laugh throughout the day?
2. Can you visualize a good outcome for the district?
3. Are you involved in fun activities with family and friends?
4. Can you identify strengths in others that have come out of the current crises?
5. Are you glad that you are a Superintendent right now?
Do Stress Balls Really Work?

According to Mayo Clinic, stress can physically cause problems such as headaches, an upset stomach, muscle tension, sleep problems and fatigue. If left unchecked, it can also contribute to more serious health problems, such as high blood pressure, diabetes and obesity.

So how can you avoid these negative health complications that come from periods of high anxiety? Turns out, a stress ball can help, according to Dr. David Posen, a stress expert and the author of "Is Work Killing You? A Doctor's Prescription for Treating Workplace Stress."

"You've got all this stress energy – your body is in a state of high alert, but there's nowhere for it to go," Posen told The Huffington Post. "When you're stressed, your body tightens up – so a physical release helps to let go of some of that energy... The benefit of squeezing is that it releases some kind of energy – it also induces you to relax."

Though squeezing a stress ball is not a long-term solution for stress, it can help your body to release tension in the moment. The motion acts as a reminder to relax the muscles that are clenched when you're anxious, which can help avoid complications like headaches or pain that accompany long periods of tensing.

-brownmed.com.
Bringing the Work into the Room

“Ten Words for the Future”

Using the “Chat” function to everyone on the Zoom screen, in ten words write what is most important for your students to take away with them at the end of the coming school year.
After everyone has had a chance to respond the group will have an opportunity to discuss the results.

NOTES:
Uncharted Territory: Improvisation, Swing & The Blues

Focus I

Planning for a Desired Future While the Crisis Prevails
Leadership & Jazz

A great metaphor can tell us how we might use something.

Metaphors are useful in design because a large part of the craft is about seeing things in a new light. And when things are seen in a new light, new solutions may reveal themselves.

Metaphors do more than cloak something in a poetic veil: like design, they broaden our minds and help us learn how to see. What does one thing have to do with another thing? And how best to explain a connection when we make it? Through metaphors, of course. Why Metaphors Matter, Linh Nguyen, 2016, marvelapp.com

Jazz music is the power of now. There is no script. It’s conversation. The emotion is given to you by musicians as they make split-second decisions to fulfill what they feel the moment requires.

-Wynton Marsalis

When we come together in SLS this year we will apply the metaphor of Jazz to Leadership as a way of accessing effective ways of framing, analyzing, and messaging the critical work now in the forefront of Superintendent leadership.
Uncharted Territory:
Improvisation, Swing & the Blues – A visual
With Quotes from Wynton Marsalis

**Improvisation**
"I" - Freedom to Express Yourself
"You have to have unique identity"

**Jazz & Leadership**

**Swing**
"Us" – Coordination & Balance
"Work together with people"

**The Blues**
Optimism in the Face of Adversity
"Things happen in life"
How to Think About Wicked Problems

Strategic Foresight

Please take this opportunity to watch the following video:


While you are watching the video please consider the following questions:

1. How might a “structured examination of alternative futures” inform your work going forward?

2. What is the impact of the “catalysts, disruptions and game changers” at work right now?

3. In what ways are the “interdependent” areas of health, the economy and politics informing possible next steps?

After the group has had an opportunity to watch the video there will be time for a group discussion. More information on defining and applying the concept of “Wicked Problems” follows.
Focus I

Context: Planning for a Desired Future While the Crisis Prevails

Wicked Problems

Today school districts and especially Superintendents are facing a crisis that impacts every aspect of the district and the Superintendent’s leadership decisions and actions. Superintendents have to plan for a future that is actually unknown in an environment that changes daily. The pressure on Superintendents is unprecedented since the results of their decisions and actions may impact the work many years into the future. The future of the school district rests upon those leadership decisions and actions.

*Most importantly the future of our students rests upon those leadership decisions and actions.*

In this focus there will be the opportunity for collegial conversation informed by a video and text excerpt as well as an opportunity to frame your current work and get feedback from your colleagues.
What is a Wicked Problem?

Definitions

**Wicked Problem** - is a phrase used in social planning to describe a problem that is difficult or impossible to solve because of incomplete, contradictory, and changing requirements that are often difficult to recognize. Moreover, because of complex interdependencies, the effort to solve one aspect of a wicked problem may reveal or create other problems.
Wicked Problems
Worksheet

Of the four topics, please select one.
1. Race and Equity
2. Teaching and Learning – Rigor and Delivery
3. Employee Issues – Unions and Employee Wellness
4. Politics – Boards and Community

Specific Wicked Problem – What specifically are you working to address?

Strategic Wicked Problem Questions – (refer to the infographic on page 18)

What are the root causes?

What is the scale of the problem?

What are the other connected issues?

Who are the stakeholders, what are their agendas?

What expertise do you need from other disciplines or organizations?

What are the ramifications of your possible actions to your district?
Swing Style
(Working with Others)

Please take this opportunity to participate in a collegial conversation on one or more of the topics referenced on the following pages. The facilitator will place everyone in a breakout room to allow for small group conversations.

First select one member of the group as the Facilitator and one member of the group as the reporter.

To begin, using the Rules for Ordered Sharing that follow, each member of the group shares which of the topics might start the breakout room discussion.

Your conversation might include elements that are particularly challenging right now as well as sharing experiences and successes to support the work of others in the group.

Then using the Guidelines for a good discussion, consider the excerpts and quotes given for each topic and open the conversation up to identify insights, possibilities, and next steps.

Be prepared to summarize the conversation for the whole group.
1. Race & Equity

How might we think about, talk about and act to address the challenges of race and equity exacerbated by the current crises?

“[T]he more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he or she can transform it. This individual is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled. This person is not afraid to meet the people or to enter into a dialogue with them. This person does not consider himself or herself the proprietor of history or of all people, or the liberator of the oppressed; but he or she does commit himself or herself, within history, to fight at their side.”
— Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed

“There is no America without Black America. If you break down any of your favorite parts of American culture, and all the best of American music, and American art, and American literature, and American accomplishment, you will see Black lives and Black experiences woven throughout every single aspect of it. Black lives built this country, in the shackles of slavery, and under endless clouds of oppression that followed even after the abolition of that monstrous and diabolical practice. And Black lives have been fighting this fight, and suffering for this fight, and dying for this fight, alone, for too long. But they are not alone anymore. We must all join the fight now, in this moment, to build something new together.”
— Jamey Bainer, PACIFIC Strategy & Planning Director

“The educator has the duty of not being neutral.”
— Paulo Freire, We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change
2. Teaching & Learning – Rigor and Delivery

What are the implications for delivering teaching and rigorous learning achievement in the current complex environment?

“But even in the best of circumstances, remote instruction can intensify challenges inherent in face-to-face settings. Research has shown that online learning doesn’t generally work as well as traditional instruction—and that students who are already struggling are likely to be harmed the most. Still, in recent weeks some experts and practicing teachers have offered pointers that can help remote instruction be as effective as possible.”

-Natalie Wexler, Forbes.com April 8, 2020

“Whatever your personal beliefs and experiences, I invite you to consider that we need a new worldview to navigate this chaotic time. We cannot hope to make sense using our old maps. It won’t help to dust them off or reprint them in bold colors. The more we rely on them, the more disoriented we become. They cause us to focus on the wrong things and blind us to what’s significant. Using them, we will journey only to greater chaos.”

— Margaret J. Wheatley

3. Employee Issues – Unions & Employee Wellness

What might be possible futures that respond to the current crisis while also addressing employee issues?

“In these uncertain times, how you treat your employees will be remembered for years to come. How businesses respond will have a lasting impact on employee behavior including, engagement, productivity and loyalty. Health and well-being, financial stability, and job security are top concerns for employees right now and employers can help address those fears in meaningful ways.”

-Alan Kohll, Forbes.com April 6, 2020

“The things we fear most in organizations – fluctuations, disturbances, imbalances – are the primary sources of creativity.”

— Margaret J. Wheatley

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4. Politics – Boards & Community

How might Superintendents navigate the turbulent political waters in ways that serve their communities?

“We are facing a global health crisis unlike any in the 75-year history of the United Nations — one that is killing people, spreading human suffering, and upending people’s lives. But this is much more than a health crisis. It is a human, economic and social crisis. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19), which has been characterized as a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO), is attacking societies at their core”.
-United Nations Department of Economic & Social Affairs –Everyone Included

You can’t go back and change the beginning but you can start where you are and change the ending.”
- C. S. Lewis
Ordered Sharing Guidelines

Purpose: To invite all voices to be heard equally in a trusting and respectful way

Ask one member of the group to serve as a timer and one member to serve as a facilitator.

Any member of the group may begin by sharing their responses to the prompt.

Whenever a member of the group is sharing the group listens without interrupting, engaging in side-conversations or asking questions.

Each turn to share should last no longer than 3 minutes at the end of which the turn moves to the next member of the group. A member may choose to pass and should be given another opportunity to share before the round ends.

At the end of the round the group may have a conversation about what has been shared
Building Better Conversations

1. Make it about the other person
2. Practice active listening
3. Move the conversation to a deeper level
4. Ask good questions
5. Consider time and space

Adapted from Fast Company 3.24.14 by Harvey Deutschendorf
Please make plans to join your colleagues for SLS Session 1 - Part B where there will be additional opportunities for thought and conversation about leadership in these unpredictable times.

In Session 1 - Part B we will “Circle Back” to Wicked Problems and reflect on ways in which the jazz metaphor informs our thinking about moving forward. There will also be an introduction of Dan Heath’s book, “Upstream”.

As always, the work will include relevant videos, resources and protocols which are also useful for Superintendent work with district leadership teams and others.

We look forward to seeing you next time!
Using the “Chat” feature please let us know about your SLS experience today.

• Let us know about the relevancy of the content and activities.
• What was especially relevant for you?
• In what ways did the technology work or not work for you?
• What additional thoughts do you want to share about how SLS might support you?