

## Transforming Principals into Chief Learning Officers

**Successful principals will lead as chief learning officers for schools that act as learning communities.**

### Vision 2021 Foresight Brief

Effective Principals in 2021 have become the model that other chief learning officers in corporations and organizations want to emulate. They are masters in leading their schools to learn and adapt in an uncompromising pursuit of what is best for their students. Emerging from an era of intense accountability few corporations will ever experience, these principals are creating learning organizations that are transforming individual lives and communities.

Principals will be at the forefront of efforts to tailor education to each child. For some time educators have recommended extending the idea of individual learning plans used with special needs students to all students. Schools could never handle this idea if it is implemented in the same bureaucratic and often contentious manner seen with special needs children. The ability to do continuous assessment of student performance will enable educators to move beyond individualized learning plans to a more adaptive approach to individualized learning.

By 2021, educators and policy makers will recognize the need for holistic standards to develop human capital. While schools are the most important public institution involved in developing human capital, other community and political interests will be threatened if schools take on the level of responsibility required to meet multiple indicators of human learning and well being. Once medical and social science clearly establish the role that life conditions play in academic success, schools may seek to find ways to intervene in parenting from birth.

The next 14 years will see a sea change in how principals identify and incorporate innovation. The standards of NCLB will create a much higher level of educational research that incorporates more “scientific” methods from other disciplines while maintaining the learning they have developed to apply that learning to complex and dynamic classrooms. Non-profit organizations such as *Educational Underwriters* will also emerge to certify research and products that meet “evidence standards” under NCLB and to help principals pick the products that are the best fit for their schools.

Platforms and practices for open source research are making it possible for organizations in different locations to share data and findings. In an open source model, schools will be able to test innovations in other schools against the data for their own unique situations. When more principals and teachers can be active participants in research and development, knowledge about important innovations will diffuse more rapidly.

A learning environment that connects education and economic success would support the freedom to play, experiment, and enter into dialogue. It would assume shared knowledge and collegial relationships.<sup>1</sup> This intellectual exploration and these collegial relationships can now extend well beyond the traditional boundaries of classrooms and companies. It is not a far stretch to imagine adults gaining fresh perspectives from their dialogues with children and children accelerating their learning through real and virtual connections to the tasks working adults perform. Principals as CLOs will place student and adult learning at the center of the school. They help students achieve high standards of academic performance by creating safe and secure learning environments for students and fostering collaborative learning communities for adults.

#### Provocative Questions for Board Leadership

- What will be the job description of the 2021 principal?
- Will schools become surrogate parents with responsibility from birth to adulthood?
- How will principals grow into this challenging new role of chief learning officer?

#### Opportunities for Leadership

- ✓ Principals can expand their vision of learning to embrace the experience of children outside the schoolhouse.
- ✓ Schools could experiment with the Chief Learning Officer (CLO). For example, CLOs could be given responsibility over a set number of students or teachers rather than a particular schoolhouse.
- ✓ Principals can advocate for a renaissance in education that goes beyond test scores to honoring different ways of being human.
- ✓ Principals who have already adopted the role of CLO can serve as models for their peers, defining the standards of their profession and mentoring new entrants or those who fall behind.

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<sup>1</sup> Zuboff, S. (1989) In *The Age of the Smart Machine: The Future of Work and Power*. Basic Books.