

Data That Matters

Giving Principals Impactful Diagnosis and Design Tools to
Improve Achievement

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HOUSTON EDUCATION

Leadership Partners

Proven Success Priceless Results

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Introduction



Let's Begin

Wouldn't it be amazing if school leaders had tools to diagnose ALL the impactful variables that influence achievement on their campuses? Not from state test results, not from a climate survey, and not from an opinion survey. We are talking about a research based framework supported by a set of diagnosis and design tools that allows leaders, with granular precision, to ascertain ALL the conditions that impact achievement on a campus. This allows a leader to use precious time and resources in optimal ways to improve learning and achievement on her campus. Based on the work and research of the prolific Dr. Kenneth Leithwood from the University of Toronto, leaders have a framework and set of tools that facilitate the process of diagnosing the condition of all achievement variables. It is called "The Four Paths of Influence."

This ebook references a leadership development program originally designed through an innovative business/education faculty partnership at Rice University and now continued as a professional development organization for campus and district leaders, [Leadership Partners, LLC., in Houston, TX](#). One part of the programming for our leaders includes what the Four Paths and their related variables are, along with a system for the collection of data about the key learning conditions in the schools that impact achievement. Also highlighted will be how Leadership Partners provides several forms of support to principals for the application of these data for their individual school improvement purposes - the design process.

Effective principal leadership matters a great deal to the success of their students and the many well-known changes and challenges now facing schools place a premium on such leadership. Despite years of criticism and years of work in response to such criticism, however, improving the preparation and professional development of principals still has a long way to go (Hess and Kelly, 2005; Levine, 2005, Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd, 2009; Leithwood and Louis, 2012; Professional Standards, 2015; Turnbull et. al, 2016).

We feel understanding the value and impact the Four Paths model can have for principals answers the age-long question, “Of all the things I COULD do to improve achievement and learning conditions on my campus, on what, specifically, do I focus my time, money and other resources on? State standardized test results do not give you this information. Neither do grades. Neither do walk throughs nor teacher evaluations. A leader can get a sense of what is impacting achievement, but analyzing variables and conditions that impact achievement is deeply systemic and complex. We know how to ease that burden and create the clarity for leaders they need to successfully plan for and potentially improve achievement on their campuses.

The rest of this ebook will address the pressing need to help leaders become the best versions of themselves and armed the best tools to improve achievement. We will then move into a description of the Four Paths and their variables. Next, we will take a look at the instruments used to ascertain the status of the 13 variables that impact achievement the most on a campus. Finally, we will see examples of two principals who used the Four Paths for school improvement.

Chapter 1: The Need to Optimize Leaders



The Need Has Never Been Greater

The need for powerful school and district leadership could not be more urgent than it is in the United States in 2023. Post-Pandemic learning loss, teacher and leader shortages, budgetary woes, stress, and lack of work-life balance are all contributing to make school leadership one of the most challenging and demanding positions. One tremendous challenge leaders face is how to deal with rapid shifts in demographics and how that impacts education. Famed social scientist and Rice University Professor Emeritus Dr. Steve Klineberg surveyed and studied Houston for over 30 years. He ascertained the shift in demographics toward mainly Hispanic origins over the last several decades is simply a microcosm of the demographic shifts occurring across the United States, and there is “no turning back.” The entire nation is seeing this trend.

Using Texas as an example, the state is rapidly changing from a predominantly Caucasian population to one that is predominantly Hispanic. For example, Houston ISD alone is nearly 90% Hispanic and African American combined, and most of these students are economically disadvantaged. Students in Texas struggle to complete their public education and obtain post-secondary credentials. A new study from the Bush Institute in Austin, TX reveals some grim realities about post secondary readiness in Texas. According to the study, titled, *The State of Readiness (2023)*, “Too many Texas students do not have the knowledge and skills to succeed in their next grade, much less in the workforce. This lack of readiness begins in the early grades, and students rarely catch up. Ninety-three percent of students who are not on grade level in third grade are still not on grade level by fifth grade. During the 2021-2022 school year, no grade level was more than 60% ready for the next grade” (p.3).

This has life-long consequences. Between now and 2036, when Texas will experience its bicentennial, over 70% of the jobs in Texas will require a postsecondary credential. Unfortunately, too few Texas students will have such credentials. The infographic below illustrates the sobering data:

5 Fast Facts

- 1 **70%** of jobs in Texas **will require a post-secondary credential** by 2036.
- 2 Only **22%** of Texas 8th graders earn a degree or credential **within six years of high school** graduation.
- 3 **60%** of Texas students **do not do math on grade level** **48%** of Texas students **do not read on grade level**
- 4 Only **26%** of Texas voters with children under 18 said they **think young people are ready to get a job and earn a self-sufficient wage immediately after high school.**
- 5 People moving to Texas hold nearly **2 times as many bachelor's degrees as Texas's native workforce**

Each of the five is of deep concern; we are illustrating a powerful set of data that implores we need high-level leadership now, more than ever. These issues will not self-correct, but optimized leadership can address these head on.

The report continues:

Readiness means that a student has the skills and knowledge to succeed in their next step, whether that is the next grade or life after high school. Readiness looks like fourth-graders who can read well enough to access new concepts in science and social studies. It looks like high school students engaged in rigorous career education

programs that will prepare them to access college and a career after graduation. It looks like college students who do not require remedial courses and can instead focus immediately on classes required by their academic or workforce program. (p. 4).

Given Dr. Klineberg's prediction, "How goes Texas is how goes America ", it behooves us to prepare our leaders in unique, new ways to meet the incredibly new education landscape in which they must lead. There is a deep sense of urgency around these data alone. The social and economic ramifications are tremendous if we do not change course, and highly optimized and prepared leaders can contribute greatly to address these needs. One way is to provide campus and district leaders a systemic, deeply personalized set of experiences that helps transform them to the best versions of themselves. another is to give them the right tools and data to help improve their schools. After all, leadership influences achievement on campuses only second to teachers.

Chapter 2: Giving Leaders What They Need Most



Some Context

Improving the preparation of campus principals in the Houston area became the focus of business, philanthropic and education leaders in 2007. The Rice University Education Entrepreneurship Program (REEP) began its first Cohort in 2008 with the support from local philanthropy and Rice University in Houston, TX. As of 2016, REEP had trained 338 educators in 16 school districts, including 173 seated principals who served over 175,000 students.

REEP aimed to prepare principals with a combination of business school acumen, entrepreneurial skills, problem-solving methodologies, CEO mindsets and the capacity to run effective schools. These "CEO mindsets" and capacities added great value to principals' efforts to improve teaching and learning often in the face of extremely challenging circumstances. When REEP came to an end, my two close colleagues, Kim Huseman and Cecilia Hawkins, began Leadership Partners, LLC. in 2016, as an external partner with Rice University. Now, in 2023, we are beginning our 13th and 14th cohorts of leaders from around the state of Texas.

We have now developed and supported over 1200 leaders from over 65 districts in Texas and beyond. Much can be learned about who we are and what we offer in our most recent [Annual Report](#).

From REEP to Leadership Partners

We learned much in the eight years of REEP. When we began Leadership Partners, we decided to offer six critical components for leadership development, and we formed what we call our "Theory of Action" as seen in the figure below:



Rice University Programming

- ▶ NEO Personality Assessment
- ▶ Leading Yourself
- ▶ Leading Teams
- ▶ Marketing Strategies for Education Leaders
- ▶ Communicating During Change and Crisis
- ▶ Rice University Credential - Business Certificate

Cohort Model and Professional Networking

- ▶ Leadership Efficacy
- ▶ Vast Resources and Support
- ▶ Culture Building via Dynamic Curriculum
- ▶ Strategic Professional Networking
- ▶ Network Membership with over 1300 leaders from over 60 districts

Executive Coaching

- ▶ Six Rounds of Coaching with a Board-Certified Coach
- ▶ Work-Life Balance
- ▶ Set Professional and Personal Goals
- ▶ 360 Leadership Assessment
- ▶ Optimum Assessment
- ▶ Best Version of Yourself
- ▶ Life Script/Toolbox of Strategies

Leadership Partners Programming

- ▶ Change Management
- ▶ Knowing and Telling Your Story
- ▶ Entry Plan Methodology
- ▶ Building Resilience and Optimism
- ▶ Appreciative Inquiry/Advanced Problem Solving
- ▶ Four Paths of Influence
- ▶ Family Engagement

Leadership Summit at Rice University

- ▶ National Presenters Focus on Current Education Issues
- ▶ Social Emotional Learning for Leaders
- ▶ Equity in Schools
- ▶ Culture and Network Building
- ▶ Annual Houston Survey Report - Kinder Institute
- ▶ Graduation/Celebration of Program Completion

Four Paths of Influence Surveys

- ▶ Teaching and Leading Survey
- ▶ Leading and Teaching Survey
- ▶ Precisely Diagnose the Status of 13 Campus Achievement Variables
- ▶ Leadership Partners will Debrief Survey Results
- ▶ Strategically Design the Improvement of Achievement Variables

We combine 13 days of programming at Rice University over a nine month period using Rice University Jones Graduate School of Business professors, our own programming, national speakers (Principal Kafele, Adam Saenz and Anthony Muhammad, for example), seven rounds of executive coaching with board certified coaches, and a robust cohort model not only to develop leadership competencies, but also to develop the WHOLE leader as a result. All of this is framed by five competencies (and a slew of sub competencies) seen in diamonds at the top of the figure. This design was based on the research done over the last several decades on how to best develop leaders and from what we learned by providing REEP for eight years.

That said, the focus of the rest of this ebook will be **The Four Paths of Influence**, which began during REEP and has evolved as an essential part of our overall system of professional development for leaders. External surveys conducted by Johns Hopkins University showed REEP principals to be much better leaders, more confident in their abilities to solve problems with greater fidelity and to improve teaching and learning. REEP principals' schools outperform other schools in their own districts and the state based on evidence from the state's accountability system.

While REEP provided principals with new capacities for improving their schools, we found they still lacked the data needed to maximize their impact. We wanted to give them better tools for identifying their priorities and designing their school improvement efforts. After much reading and study, we turned to the work of Dr. Ken Leithwood, University of Toronto, and Dr. Jing Ping Sun, University of Alabama. They graciously partnered with us to use their tools and framework within REEP, which has continued now for almost a decade and into the Leadership Partners era.



Chapter 3: The Four Paths Model - The Clarity Leaders Need



The Data Leaders Need

Determining the most productive focus for school improvement efforts is arguably one of the most important challenges facing school leaders. Get it wrong and everyone has wasted a lot of time and energy. Get it wrong several times and you have lost your staff's willingness to engage in collective improvement efforts led by you. So a lot is at stake. That said, most of the evidence used by school leaders to identify their strategic goals is woefully inadequate. Typically, this is evidence about student achievement on district and state tests.

While such evidence does point to areas of student strength and weakness, it provides almost no clues about how to respond to aspects of student performance in need of improvement, nor does it offer any insight about underlying causes.

The approach to this problem assumes that the impact of school leaders on student achievement is mostly *indirect*. Such impact depends on leaders improving those features in schools that do have a direct influence on student achievement AND that school leaders can influence using appropriate leadership practices; these features can be referred to as “key learning conditions” or “variables”.

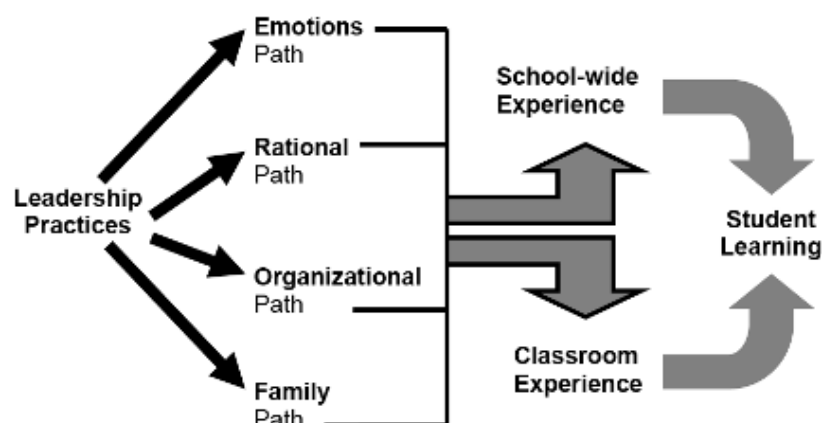
A considerable body of evidence and research identified the variables that Dr. Leithwood organized into four categories or “paths”. He and others use the term “path” metaphorically to suggest the “flow” of influence from leader to students (Copeland and Knapp, 2006). His “four paths model” narrows the focus of school leaders’ improvement efforts to features of their organizations that not only matter most to students, but also provides leaders considerable autonomy to choose which of those conditions that need their attention in light of their own local circumstances (Leithwood, Anderson and Wahlstrom, 2011; Leithwood, Sun and Pollock, 2017). The figure on the next page shows the paths and how they influence school wide and classroom learning.

Key learning conditions on the “**Rational Path**” are rooted in the knowledge and skills of school staff members about curriculum, teaching, and learning - the technical core of schooling.

The “**Emotional Path**” includes those feelings, dispositions, or affective states of staff members (both individually and collectively) shaping the nature of their work. For example, how efficacious are teachers and what are their levels of trust?

Conditions on the “**Organizational Path**” include features of schools that structure the relationships and interactions among organizational members including, for example, cultures, policies, and standard operating procedures, the structures often part of professional learning communities.

On the “**Family Path**” are conditions reflecting family expectations for their children, their culture and support to students, and community orientations toward school and general education. The table on the next page describes the key learning conditions on each of the four paths, which research from meta analysis suggests are the most promising focus for school leaders’ improvement efforts. Remember, EACH contributes a significant effect size on achievement, so knowing the condition or status of ALL is important. Also note that instruction is but ONE variable.



The 13 Variables that Impact Achievement in Schools

Rational Path

- Disciplinary climate
- Academic Press
- Teachers' use of instructional time
- Classroom instruction

Emotional Path

- Teachers' trust in others
- Teachers' collective efficacy
- Teachers' commitment

Organization Path

- Safe and orderly environment
- Collaborative structures and cultures
- Organization of planning and instructional time

Family Path

- Parents' expectations for their children's success at school and beyond
- Parents social and intellectual capital about schooling
- Forms of communication between parents and children

Once leaders know the conditions of these variables, they can act on improving the ones that need the most attention. And they discover this by the use of two surveys, *The Teaching and Leading Survey* (taken ONLY by campus teachers) and *The Leading and Teaching Survey* (taken ONLY by campus leaders).

Each survey asks parallel sets of questions about all 13 variables in order to ascertain the degree to which teachers and leaders are viewing these conditions in the same light or not. This is done using a simple Likert Scale to measure items that collectively represent a "mean" for each variable on a scale of 1 to 5. The survey asks no qualitative questions. When there is agreement that certain conditions are not favorable, this is an indicator of an area on which to focus. However, sometimes leaders and teachers see the same variables in very different ways, which is something else to investigate. Why are ALL educators not seeing some of the variables the same way? Much can be determined around data conversations derived from the survey results.



Chapter 4: Diagnosis – The Two Surveys

Two surveys were developed by Dr. Leithwood and Dr. Sun with extensive field testing to measure each of these conditions, one survey being for teachers and one for school leaders. Each of these surveys also includes measures of both individual and collective leadership reflecting current evidence about best practice and approaches to leadership reflected in the leadership core competencies. Each year, principals associated with our programming (or external to the programming) accept the invitation to complete the online school leader survey and to request their teachers to complete the online teacher survey (identifying their schools but not themselves).

These data are then developed into school-specific reports ([see an example here](#)) and returned to each school leader as information to be used with their teachers in their school improvement efforts. Notice the yellow highlighted areas. These represent differences in how teachers collectively view the status of a certain indicator or variable and how leaders collectively view the same indicator or variable. The similar and different responses to the indicators on the survey lead to using the results to pinpoint areas of opportunity for improvement and variables that are solid.

As such, each campus report summarizes the results about the status of each of all 13 variables measured in the two surveys for the individual school, as well as - for comparison purposes - all schools in the appropriate district and all schools of leaders in the our program. These individual campus reports, in addition, report the relationship between each key learning condition and measures of student achievement based on data aggregated across all campus reports. Several additional documents are provided to school leaders about the Four Paths model, including a summary of previously published research about the contribution of each of the key learning conditions to student achievement.

Supporting the Effort

Leadership Partners provides support, advice and guidance to school leaders about how to interpret and use these data, and we interact in response to requests to support the use of data in schools. A summary of the relationships among all key learning conditions and an estimate of the contribution to student achievement of variables on each of the Four Paths based on the data from all schools surveyed are also provided to leaders. Leaders are also given a matrix of definitions of the Four Paths, their variables, and hyperlinked resources based on research concerning these variables in order to jump start their use of the data for school improvement.

Principals who partake in the surveys respond very positively to the results. During the professional development sessions on the Four Paths, leaders and their teams are taught more about each path, all the variables, and how they impact learning. Guides are supplied to help them interpret their data. One theme that emerged is that while they use various surveys their districts provide, this survey gave them the most vital and helpful information they had ever received on their schools. This evidence not only helped school leaders identify areas for improvement but also informed them of what to do with the data. The two vignettes below of how principals used their survey data to improve their schools illustrate this.

Stories from the Field

Improving the Emotions Path. One of our elementary principals shared the survey data with her entire faculty. She explained the Four Paths model and shared the survey results. They discovered that teacher trust was an issue in the school. She added, “They were hopeful and believe that it can happen, and these are the things we discussed as far as why there was no trust, and what we can do to change it.”

- Teachers and admin feel overwhelmed with so many new things coming from the district and having new staff members on their teams
- New staff feel overwhelmed coming to an established building where “tribal knowledge” is not being shared.
- Team leaders want help on how to approach their team members about team issues (i.e. feeling like not everyone is carrying their weight). They were encouraged to come to admin for tips with the understanding that if team leaders were not able to work through issues with their teams that admin would step in.
- Grade level team building. Some teams are doing this on their own and have and/or are in the process of hashing out their differences, and some have asked for ideas on what to do.
- Better communication between the grade levels.

By using her survey data, the principal ascertained with precision what variable to work on and how. This saves resources, time, and allows her learning community to problem-solve with fidelity.

Improving the Family Path. Another elementary principal used her data to engage parents. She felt the survey data were very powerful, and she analyzed them over the summer and shared them with her leadership team. The survey results allowed them to see they needed to engage their parents in very specific ways, especially along the variable, “Parents' Social & Intellectual Capital about Schooling.” They decide to help parents:

- Ensure that their children have healthy diets and enough sleep.
- Volunteer to assist with school or classroom work in the school.
- Often discuss their kids at school with their teachers.
- Usually go to parents’ nights and special school events.

They also decided to engage the parents in the school's curriculum. They provided "Parent Learning Days", where parents conducted lessons with their child in their child's classroom with direction from teachers. Parents also attend a small group session with a counselor and social worker focused on how to play/read/talk to their children in their home languages. She reports these have been successful. Teachers have requested to continue them and so have parents. As with the previous story, the data from the Four Paths Survey allowed this principal to problem solve with precision and create viable solutions with her faculty.

Improving the quality of on-the-job evaluation and professional development for novice principals is one of the few major ways to produce a large cadre of strong novice leaders (Turnbull et al., 2016). Experience with the first round of the REEP survey data in 2013 confirmed the positive impact on school improvement efforts that can be realized by providing research-based evidence (i.e., the Four Path model) and related professional development to principals. That continues today with Leadership Partners.

Most new school leaders are unsure about how to use their leadership knowledge for their own school improvement work. Though data-informed decision-making has become a more common practice, school staff mostly focus only on student achievement results (Kowalski, Lasley and Mahoney, 2008). Such data, though helpful in identifying areas of student strength and weakness, offer little guidance about how to improve achievement. The Four Paths survey data about key learning conditions, as well as student performance, aligned with the Four Path framework helped principals frame their thinking and make evidence-based decisions on what to lead and flexibility on how to lead for purposes of improving student learning.



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Chapter 5: Wrapping Things Up

LOVETT HALL



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As mentioned earlier, the Four Paths framework and surveys are but one of six key components or services Leadership Partners offers. The Four Paths provides a superb set of tools and research to help leaders improve their schools. The tools allow principals to diagnose and design with fidelity.

That said, our mission is to develop the Whole Leader, so the other program components seen earlier in our Theory of Action contribute to that as a systemic professional development model. We know the value superb teachers provide to the education for our children. We also know effective leadership only improves achievement even more.

The rest of what we do develops and transforms leaders into the best versions of themselves, and we know when leaders are optimized, it matriculates through teachers and into students and their families. We have A LOT to share, and we will be sharing it all with more ebooks, blogs, newsletters and on social media!

Looking Ahead

If the Four Paths model and surveys are of interest to you, please email Lawrence Kohn, Co-Founder and Partner of Leadership Partners at lkohn@leadershippartnerstx.com. We can provide the training, administration of surveys and support with the results.

Upcoming ebooks topics will include, but not limited to:

- Using MBA professors to develop education leaders - Why and How?
- The use of Executive Coaching to transform leaders - How leaders become the best versions of themselves
- Why we use a strategic cohort model to develop leaders - How we create strategic networks and collaboration for over 1200 leaders!
- Why we provide PD for leaders around usually unheard of topics for the profession - Why we use some unique programming leaders really need.
- How our National Speakers tie up the whole package - How do some of the most sought after speakers add value to the Leadership Partners experience?

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A Bit About Us

Co-Founders and partners [Kimberly Huseman, M.Ed.](#) and [Lawrence Kohn, Ed.D.](#) are lifelong educators of over 40 years, with combined roles of former teachers, administrators, authors, and professors.

Leadership Partners is supported by a bevy of incredible professionals. First, we have five amazing, International Federation Coaching certified Executive coaches, Kim Huseman, Dusty Precure, Tammy Shirley, Genny Coyne and Sheila Henry. Next, we are fortunate to have our Procurement Director, Kim Klepcyk, and our Finance Director, Royce Huseman, along with our virtual assistants, Beth Hess and Zoom Producer Michael Hauk.

While I have your attention, please visit [our website](#) and join all our social media platforms:



We would love to add you to our network of amazing leaders on social media!

Contact us at: lkohn@leadershippartnerstx.com or via cell 281-850-4992. We would love to hear from you!