During the first three years at the helm of Chapel Hill-Chauncy Hall School, I spent the majority of my time focused on organizational leadership and working with my board of trustees to establish a series of guiding documents defining and expressing mission, vision and direction. These included a long-range plan, campus master plan, strategic plans, and a sustainable business plan, as well as the creation of new standing board committees to assist in more effective governance, including the New Business Committee, Marketing Committee, and Strategic Financial Planning Committee. In year four of my headship, after my primary focus on student enrollment and experience, my work has centered around the professional experience of my colleagues. Specifically, I am in the process of creating a new “faculty experience” board committee that focuses on recruiting, recognition, reward and retention of our faculty and staff. In short, I wish for my colleagues to feel more valued and loved for the tremendous work that they perform with our students each and every day. While employee retention has been very strong during my four years as head, my goal is to create the type of environment that provides each individual employee (63 total) the type of professional experience they seek and will keep them at CH-CH for many years to come.

Increasing human, financial, and material resources is the logical starting point in demonstrating my leadership and commitment to professional development. It is essential that I provide the personnel, capital and tools that my colleagues need to engage in the best educational opportunities possible. The goal, of course, is to enhance teaching and learning for the students we serve. With our unique approach to teaching and learning within a framework of understanding Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences, our faculty and staff are challenged with the opportunities of differentiated instruction and assessment in
our incredibly student-centered environs. I continue to challenge my colleagues to be practitioner
researchers and engage in active learning through active research as they construct knowledge about
effective M.I.-based approaches to pedagogy and assessment. I visit with individual teachers and
academic departments to document their practices and, later, celebrate their craft through educational and
promotional highlight material that the School generates for our many outside constituents, from current
parents to prospective parents and students, from alumni to trustees and friends of the School.

As Ball & Cohen (1999) advocate, job-embedded, research-based professional development is the
best strategy for school improvement. Teachers need to be action researchers of their pedagogy, content,
materials, and assessments, as well as understanding their students’ cultural background and learning
styles. For Chapel Hill-Chauncy Hall School, we focus on each individual student’s learning strengths as
guided by the theory of multiple intelligences and various inventories that help individuals evaluate their
own asymmetrical excellence. As Ball & Cohen (1999) profess, the best professional development would
be for teachers to adopt a stance of inquiry of their practice. At CH-CH, I believe we are beginning to do
that.

I agree with Darling-Hammond (2009) that it is essential for school leaders to adopt a more
systemic approach to teacher recruitment, retention, and preparation. The creation of the ad hoc
committee focused on issues of faculty/staff recruitment, recognition, reward, and retention noted earlier
is an attempt to be more deliberate and create a more systemic model for increasing the professional
experience of each individual employee during their time at our School. One size does not fit all, and I
wish to create a mechanism to determine what the most important elements of an improved professional
experience will look like for each of my 63 colleagues.

This approach would go beyond what is normally viewed as school leadership support for
professional development. So while we have significantly increased the professional development budget
for the upcoming school year, how that money is spent is the key question in my mind and what I have
challenged my academic deans, dean of faculty, and curriculum committee to consider carefully. As Baker-Doyle & Yoon (2010) acknowledge, engaging teachers in collaborative work and inquiry to continue professional learning beyond a particular workshop or course is paramount. At CH-CH, I have been working on establishing very deliberate professional learning teams through various cross-sections of the School in order to foster collaboration and inquiry. I am encouraging what Baker-Doyle & Yoon (2010) call social networks for educators. Since curriculum reform is directly tied to peer-to-peer relationships, these collaborations need to be nurtured so that educators can truly spur curricular improvements in their schools, as well as better guide new policy and necessary changes. As Davidson (2011) notes, the current workplace for schools is not structured for collaboration. Most of us still work as educators did in the 20th century. Educators must be empowered to embrace collaboration and change by school leaders. And as Waff (2009) concludes, “Moving away from teaching as a private activity to one of collaboration and inquiry built a strong sense of professional identity among school staff, and positively impacted staff and student learning” (p. 18).
References


