

Table of Contents

Chapter 1. Clarifying Your C.O.R.E.	1
Defining and Discerning the Core	5
Enduring Principles of School Success	6
From Principles to Values	7
The 4 C.O.R.E. School Success Factors	10
Chapter 2. Communication: Strategies for Success ...	11
Facets of Communication	13
Effective Communication Defined	14
Starting and Ending the Week	16
The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly	25
One a Day; One a Week	31
Teacher Newsletters	34
School Newsletters	36
Clarifying the C.O.R.E.: Communication	40
Chapter 3. Observation: Strategies for Success	45
Facets of Observation	47
Effective Observation Defined	48
Peer Observations	50
Focused Classroom Walks	52
Visibility	54
Arrival and Departure	57
Meeting Locations	59
Visiting Other Schools	61
Student Teachers	62
Teacher Observations/Evaluations	64
School Improvement Plans	67
Clarifying the C.O.R.E.: Observation	69
Chapter 4. Relationships: Strategies for Success ...	75
Facets of Relationships	77
Effective Relationships Defined	78

Communication

- ◆ *We Will* systematically and regularly communicate our Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals to all school stakeholders.
- ◆ *We Will* communicate the results we are achieving as a school throughout the school year to all school stakeholders.
- ◆ *We Will* communicate with each other about the work we are doing in our individual classrooms and throughout the school.
- ◆ *We Will* communicate with our students, informing them of their own progress, including areas of strength and areas in which they need further improvement.
- ◆ *We Will* communicate regularly and systematically with all parents informing them of their child's progress.

Observation

- ◆ *We Will* observe our students carefully, monitoring individual learners, noting and responding to their unique learning capabilities and learning needs.
- ◆ *We Will* observe each other in the classroom in order to gain new insights into best practices and provide constructive feedback.
- ◆ *We Will* observe events occurring in our community, which may also impact our school.
- ◆ *We Will* monitor our progress toward school improvement goals on a daily basis and adjust our practices based on what we observe.
- ◆ *We Will* monitor the time we spend each day on specific behaviors relating to teaching and learning, ensuring that our behaviors are aligned with research-based best practices.

Relationships

- ◆ *We Will* cultivate collegial, collaborative conversations by scheduling purposeful planning sessions.
- ◆ *We Will* demonstrate an awareness of each other's personal, as well as professional, lives, acknowledging significant

events and accomplishments and remaining informed about personal issues affecting professional performance.

- ◆ *We Will* rely on face-to-face interactions between teachers, parents, administrators, students, and community leaders whenever possible.
- ◆ *We Will* celebrate individual student and teacher success, as well as school-wide success regularly and systematically.
- ◆ *We Will* confront those within the school community who are not acting in accordance with our mission, vision, values, and goals with honesty, fairness, and a desire to effect positive change and growth.

Expectations

- ◆ *We Will* establish and enforce clear expectations for student behavior and student academic performance.
- ◆ *We Will* expect our students to succeed, and we will intervene strategically and immediately when they are not.
- ◆ *We Will* establish and enforce clear expectations for all educators within the school, holding ourselves accountable for adhering to our stated values.
- ◆ *We Will* expect our parents and others within the school community to work as partners with educators in ensuring that our students perform to standards.
- ◆ *We Will* expect each other to uphold all school policies, yet realize that individual teachers may create additional expectations for themselves and their students that they will create and enforce.

The statements above are a first step in moving from one-word principles of success to action steps that stand as core school values—commitments to behaving purposefully in order to improve school and student performance. Still, these 20 commitments are broad statements of action without specifying precisely how they will be carried out. In the remaining chapters of this book, we will offer specific strategies that we have used or observed in hundreds of schools and that address these statements,

providing educators within the school a clear roadmap for acting in a manner consistent with these principles and values.

The 4 C.O.R.E. School Success Factors

There are literally hundreds, perhaps thousands, of factors that lead to the success—or lack of success—in our schools. Differentiation, assessment for learning, professional learning communities, mentoring and induction, standards-based grading and reporting, standards-based unit design, inclusion of special education students, and sheltered instruction for English Language Learners are just a few of the recent educational buzzwords that we happen to agree are valuable ways to improve our schools. Yet, in a bigger-picture sense, the 4 C.O.R.E. principles of communication, observation, relationships, and expectations are even more crucial to school success because they are necessary human relations skills that must be purposefully and consistently acted upon if any of the other school programs listed above are to succeed. No school improvement initiative can succeed in a school unless the educators within that school are accomplished in these four critical areas.

In the following chapters of this book, we will provide specific steps for teachers and school leaders interested in improving their skills in these four vital areas of education and promoting behaviors that fulfill these responsibilities. Every strategy we share in this book has been successfully implemented in elementary, middle, and high schools across the country. Perhaps the best thing about these ideas is that they are simple. We all have the ability to do them. They can be implemented in any classroom at any school immediately. The difference between mediocre educators and great educators is that the great ones will not only acknowledge them; they will act upon them.

The importance of communication in any organization cannot be overstated. Stephen Covey goes so far as to state, “Communication is the most important skill in life” (1989, p. 237). In perusing any job posting or job description, one can almost assume that “strong oral and written communication skills” will be included as a skill necessary for the position advertised. Effective communication skills are especially vital to school success, where teachers, administrators, students, parents, and community stakeholders must all be aware of what occurs within the school setting. Teachers and school administrators must excel in all facets of communication to ensure a safe and orderly learning environment, a sound instructional program, and optimal levels of learning for students. Educators skilled in the area of communication recognize these multiple facets of this trait and purposefully plan for fulfilling all components of this core responsibility outlined below in a systematic, consistent manner.

<i>Facets of Communication</i>		
<i>The imparting or interchange of thoughts, opinions, or information by speech, writing, behavior, or signs.</i>		
<i>Educators effective in the core skill of communication:</i>		
♦ Advise	♦ Disclose	♦ Read
♦ Articulate	♦ Disseminate	♦ Receive
♦ Assert	♦ Exchange	♦ Reveal
♦ Attend	♦ Express	♦ Speak
♦ Care	♦ Inquire	♦ Teach
♦ Connect	♦ Listen	♦ Tell
♦ Converse	♦ Make Known	♦ Translate
♦ Correspond	♦ Notify	♦ Transmit
♦ Declare	♦ Publish	♦ Write

Teachers cannot expect results from the students they teach if they do not effectively communicate precisely what it is they want students to know and be able to do at the outset. Similarly, school administrators must communicate to teachers what must be done and the ways in which the work must be carried out.

Both teachers and school administrators spend almost every minute of the day engaged in the act of communication, specifically the actions listed above. Whether we are in front of the classroom teaching students, conducting a faculty meeting, or simply walking around the cafeteria, we are communicating a great deal about our beliefs, expectations, and attitudes. The way we speak, read, listen, walk, sit, stand, and dress sends both explicit and subtle messages to those on the receiving end of our varied communications. It is vital that all educators realize the extent to which communication impacts their likelihood of success in the schoolhouse and discover ways to improve their skills in this area.

Sommers (2007) identifies two primary responsibilities related to communication for principals. We maintain that these apply to teachers as well: (1) lead conversations on instruction and learning and (2) keep hope alive. As educators, it is imperative that—regardless of our specific role—we consistently engage others, including our students, in discussions about learning. The responsibility to keep hope alive may be a less obvious, but even more important, component to communication. Teachers and administrators are—in a very real sense—in the business of “hope.” Although it may sound trite, we often talk about the dreams we have for our schools and our students while cultivating within students their own dreams for future success as well as actions for fulfilling these hopes and dreams. The way we communicate with our students and with each other plays a major role in keeping these hopes and dreams alive.

Effective Communication Defined

The National PTA (1997) offers six standards for family involvement programs, listing “Communication” as its first standard and suggesting that effective communication between the home and school must be regular, two-way, and meaningful. Although stated quite simply, we feel that this three-pronged approach to communication—regular, two-way, and meaningful—is not only the key to successful home-school communication, but also the key to communication in every other school

In the previous chapter, we emphasized the importance of communication with all stakeholders regarding everything that occurs within the school. Of course, we cannot communicate about what is taking place in our schools, in our classrooms, and in our community that impacts learning unless we strategically and consciously observe these activities. At first glance, the word “observation” aligned with a book about education might bring to mind simply the traditional observations that school administrators schedule to evaluate classroom teachers. Although this is indeed a component of our core value, observation in the school setting should encompass a great deal more. It is certainly true that administrators should observe teachers teaching (although such observations should occur much more often than they do at most schools we have visited and should be conducted for a wide variety of purposes, not merely evaluation), yet teachers should also observe each other, and all educators must carefully observe their students. We must also pay close attention to our school facility to see what it implies about our beliefs and actions. We should observe our school community and track changes in growth and demographics. We should observe educators at other schools in our area and around the nation, when possible, searching out and learning from pockets of excellence we find around us. We should observe what occurs on our school buses periodically and even observe our students engaged in extracurricular

<i>Facets of Observation</i>			
<i>The act of noticing, perceiving, regarding attentively, and the information secured by such acts.</i>			
<i>Educators effective in the core skill of observation:</i>			
◆ <i>Acknowledge</i>	◆ <i>Evaluate</i>	◆ <i>Intuit</i>	◆ <i>Reflect</i>
◆ <i>Analyze</i>	◆ <i>Examine</i>	◆ <i>Measure</i>	◆ <i>Research</i>
◆ <i>Ascertain</i>	◆ <i>Focus</i>	◆ <i>Monitor</i>	◆ <i>See</i>
◆ <i>Attend</i>	◆ <i>Follow Up</i>	◆ <i>Notice</i>	◆ <i>Study</i>
◆ <i>Check</i>	◆ <i>Infer</i>	◆ <i>Perceive</i>	◆ <i>Supervise</i>
◆ <i>Contemplate</i>	◆ <i>Inspect</i>	◆ <i>Probe</i>	◆ <i>Survey</i>
◆ <i>Detect</i>	◆ <i>Interpret</i>	◆ <i>Record</i>	◆ <i>View</i>

activities. Educators focused on and skilled in the area of observation recognize the multiple facets of observation and purposefully plan for fulfilling all components of this core responsibility outlined below in a systematic, consistent manner.

Effective Observation Defined

When we refer to “observation” we actually use this term to include all facets listed above. In essence, we are firm believers that teachers and administrators must strategically, regularly, and consistently observe students learning and teachers teaching. The word most closely associated with “observation” that we consider a critical component of this core value is “monitor.” We must monitor what occurs in every area of our school—but most importantly, of course, in our classrooms. Teachers and administrators must monitor, for example, that the intended curriculum becomes the taught curriculum. Then, we must monitor our assessment practices to ensure that the taught curriculum aligns with the one that we assess. Finally, we must use these assessment results to drive future actions.

Reeves (2006) suggests that it is not enough to merely plan for improvement in student achievement; we must also monitor these plans. That is, we must regularly observe the results we receive in terms of all types of data and adjust our actions accordingly. Schmoker (2006) writes that we must have the courage to monitor the curriculum, with teachers and administrators meeting together regularly to demonstrate that we are teaching the agreed-upon standards and ensuring that progress is being made toward improvement goals with ongoing assessments and adjustments to instruction based upon analysis of these assessment results. Of the 21 leadership responsibilities that impact student academic achievement according to Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005), that of monitoring and evaluation—monitoring “the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning” (p. 43)—was associated with immediate and sustained change.

While observing what is occurring in classrooms and monitoring the implementation of the curriculum as well as the