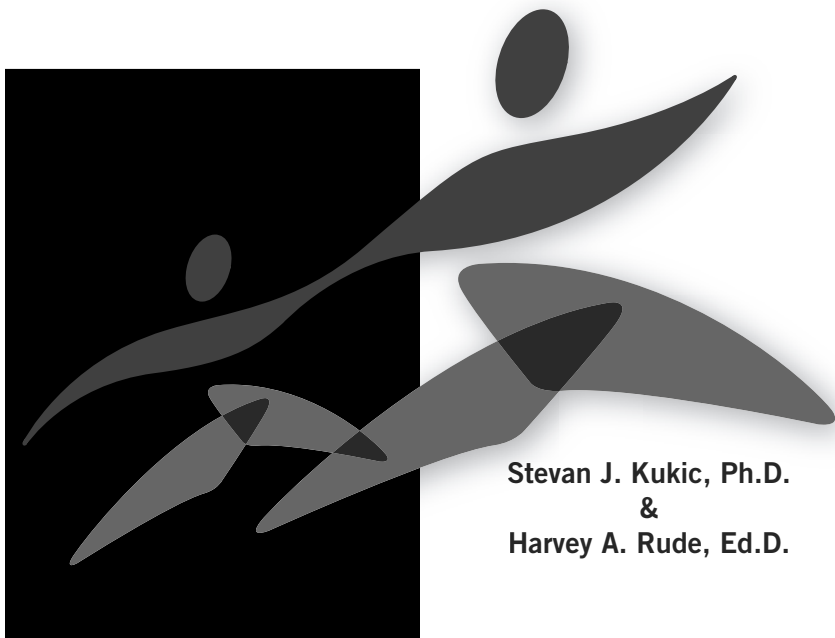


# Organizational Change: Transformative Leadership for Special Education



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&  
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for Special Education Administrators**



## About CASE

The Council of Administrators of Special Education, Inc. (CASE) is an international professional educational organization affiliated with the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). Members are dedicated to the enhancement of the worth, dignity, potential, and uniqueness of each individual in society.

Those receiving special education services are individuals who possess basic rights and responsibilities and who command respect at all times. Special education embraces the right to a free, appropriate public education.

The mission of CASE is to provide leadership and support to members by shaping policies and practices which impact the quality of education worldwide.

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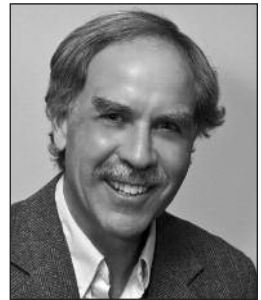
is a past president of the National Association of State Directors of Special Education. For five years prior to his state position, he directed a statewide center for technical assistance related to the education of students with disabilities.

Steve is the author of over 100 articles, chapters, newspaper columns, and books. Steve is proud to have consulted in all 50 states, Canada, Europe, and the Middle East. He earned his Ph.D. from the University of Utah in School Administration and his M.A. in School Psychology and B.A. in Psychology from UCLA.

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# 1 The Six Secrets of RtI Success: Using What We Know to Tend Change to Improve Outcomes for All Students

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A revered friend, Karen Kaiser Clark, said: “Life is change, growth is optional. Choose wisely” (1984).

I believe the one constant in life is change.

Think about what has happened in the last decade. The major economic reset caused by the Great Recession has caused us all to be more careful than ever with our decisions, both personally and professionally. Major cuts have followed stimulus funding.

Washington, D.C., politics have become so dysfunctional that federal policy solutions cannot be counted on to ensure ongoing commitment to the rights of students with special needs. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was last reauthorized in 2004, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 2001. Basic questions of access are again becoming part of the ideologically rigid position-taking in D.C.

The ubiquitous technology tools (SMART Boards, iPads and other electronic tablets, Wikipedia, Google) we have now were just beginning to emerge in our classrooms a decade ago. Michael Fullan (2013) warns us that we must learn to use our remarkable, overwhelming, seductive tools with a level of pedagogical sophistication that we simply do not have today.

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are being implemented directly in 46 states and are effecting systemic change in all 50 states. CCSS require proficiency in higher-order thinking that many students with special needs do not possess. Just implementing the CCSS will not ensure that these students have the skills they need to become college- and career-ready. Evidence-based, explicit instruction is needed to ensure that all students gain the skills they need to be successful with CCSS.

My goal is to focus on successfully confronting the daunting challenges we face rather than succumbing to them. Rather than regretting or

fighting the fact that change is a constant, the wise person or organization embraces that fact. Growth—progress—has a much better chance of happening when change is embraced as a reality. In addition, growth from the constant change we face has a better chance of occurring when we use what we know. Put another way, implementing evidence-based practice with fidelity is the surest path to success for all our students.

Nice rhetoric.

How does an organization effectively confront change? First, a set of nonnegotiable principles must be identified to serve as the foundation for all activity. These principles could be stated in a paragraph like the one so eloquently written by Ron Edmonds in 1979: “We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need to do that. Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven’t so far.”

What a call to action! Our choices declare our intentions. We have the knowledge. Do we have the will?

Another way to state our principles is to establish a set or list of nonnegotiables (Marzano and Waters, 2009). Marzano and Waters proved the value of nonnegotiables with their meta-analysis of high-performing school districts. For example, the Wichita Public Schools (WPS) in Kansas is seeing the benefits of its nonnegotiables in its five-year adventure to build a Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS), preK–12, no pilots, for all its 50,000 students. WPS is beginning year four in its five-year plan. Its list of nonnegotiables (included later in this chapter) provides direction and vision for the success WPS is beginning to see.

What are the nonnegotiable principles of your organization? If you cannot quickly and specifically answer, take the time to bring your stakeholders together to develop a list of nonnegotiables at the district level.

The second way to confront change is to embrace and implement a systemic, evidence-based service system. In 2004, IDEA opened the door to the wild world of response to intervention (RtI). RtI-world is a land of triangles, circles, data, responsive instruction, tiered interventions, technology, data-driven problem solving, and student success when implemented collaboratively with integrity. The evolution of RtI into MTSS is, in this writer’s opinion, the most positive development in the

last 50 years of school reform. In fact, I would characterize this movement as school transformation rather than school reform.

RtI/MTSS will fail if this grand movement does not move beyond rhetoric to sustained action. Secretary of State Seward, talking to his wife during the Civil War, was very skeptical about the actual commitment of the public to end slavery. “The public mind seizes quickly upon theoretical schemes for relief,” he pointedly told Frances, who had long yearned for a presidential proclamation against slavery, “but is slow in the adoption of the practical means necessary to give them effect” (Goodwin, 2005).

Thus it is with most innovations. We are very willing to talk the talk. Will we walk the talk? Without this commitment to the implementation journey, we will not benefit from this ever-changing world.

## **Fundamental Principles for Change**

What can we do? I propose some fundamental principles followed by an insightful analysis from the profound Michael Fullan.

The first fundamental principle is that our mindset has an effect on the way we see the world. If you give a totally committed adherent to the King James version of the constructivist Bible an intervention that uses explicit instruction, that adherent will not implement the intervention with fidelity and will not achieve the results promised. Why? Because that individual has a fixed mindset about instruction.

We all have fixed mindsets. Dear reader, think of your impressions about Twitter and Instagram.

Carol Dweck (2007) summarized 20 years of her research to conclude that there are two mindsets for any issue. One is a fixed mindset. The other is a growth mindset. Dweck’s research proves that people with a growth mindset have a better chance of accomplishing something significant than those with a fixed mindset.

In my experience, people are willing to change so long as that change does not significantly impact their existing perspectives. Muriel Barbery (2008) said it best: “I find this a fascinating phenomenon: the ability we have to manipulate ourselves so that the foundation of our beliefs is never shaken.” Because of our fixed mindsets, we talk and talk and commiserate and talk and, often, take no sustainable action to solve our achievement problems.

A second fundamental principle is the classic triad from Stephen Covey (1989): the way you **see** the world determines what you **do** which determines what you **get**. This “See, Do, Get” model explains the predictable connection between our beliefs and our actions with their inevitable effect on our results. What are the implications for change? There are two.

The first is to understand that the “See, Do, Get” model fully explains why every organization is perfectly aligned for the results it gets (Jones, in Covey, 1989). It is our belief system, full of low expectations and fear of change, that determines our actions and thus our results.

The second is to deeply understand that in order to achieve long-lasting change, those beliefs as well as actions must change. We must demand of each other that we use evidence-based practice 100 percent of the time. And we must work to help each other change the fixed mindsets that run counter to achieving high levels of outcomes with all our students. Simple? No. Essential, yes.

## **Six Secrets of Change**

In 2008, Michael Fullan suggested six secrets of change that must be addressed in order to ensure success. They are:

- Secret One: Love your employees
- Secret Two: Connect peers with purpose
- Secret Three: Capacity-building prevails
- Secret Four: Learning is the work
- Secret Five: Transparency rules
- Secret Six: Systems learn

The remainder of this chapter will analyze these secrets with an eye toward developing an action plan for a significant change initiative in which you are involved.

To begin, think about the times you have been part of a successful change initiative. In fact, count the times. If the answer is more than a handful or even more than two or three, consider yourself an exceptional change agent. What were the characteristics of those successful change initiatives?

One of the counterintuitive characteristics of a successful change initiative is that the more complex the change, the less likely that a comprehensive, detailed strategic plan will be helpful and facilitative. Fullan (2008) put it this way: “Give me a good theory over a strategic



plan any day of the week. A plan is a tool—a piece of technology only as good as the mind-set using it. The mind-set is theory, flawed or otherwise. Theory is not abstract conjecture, and it is not about being cerebral.”

Fullan’s more recent writing (2010; 2011) and Tom Peters’ classic piece (1992) have gone so far as to suggest that the old, trusted way of solving complex change issues, Ready – Aim – Fire, should not be used. In its place, a new paradigm should be used: Ready – Fire – Aim. Jack Welch (2005, in Fullan, 2008) phrased it more directly, in his usual pithy style: “Forget the arduous, intellectualized number crunching and data grinding that gurus say you have to go through to get strategy right. . . . In real life, strategy is actually straightforward. You pick a general direction and implement like hell.”

Productive leaders use a principle-centered theory of action to govern their change initiatives while being open to finding new points of leverage based on the obvious fact that the only constant is that everything changes.

The principles governing the change initiative in Wichita include teaching and learning with a belief and commitment that all students will reach rigorous standards; a focus on classroom instruction; a culture that emphasizes continuous learning; continuing professional development for all staff; and an alignment in standards, curriculum, assessment, and professional development. WPS is having success with this initiative because it is all-in, because it is listening to the warning given in 1963 by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in his “I have a dream” speech. Dr. King warned that “we have no time for the tranquilizing drug of gradualism.” Our students have no time for this drug of gradualism, this drug of never-ending pilot projects that never generalize into system change.

So the first, overriding question related to the six secrets is:

**What is my simple, principle-centered, RtI/MTSS-based theory of action for large-scale school transformation?**

Once you have determined your theory of action, you are ready to respond to the six secrets of change. Here are the definitions of the six secrets (Fullan, 2008):

- 1. Love your employees:** If you build your organization by focusing on your customers without making the same careful commitment to your employees, you won’t succeed.

- 2. Connect peers with purpose:** The job of leaders is to provide good direction while pursuing implementation through purposeful peer interaction and learning in relation to results.
- 3. Capacity-building prevails:** Capacity-building entails leaders investing in the development of individual and collaborative efficacy of a whole group or system to accomplish significant improvements. In particular, capacity consists of new competencies, new resources (time, ideas, expertise), and new motivation.
- 4. Learning is the work:** Learning external to the job can represent a useful input, but if it is not in balance and in concert with learning in the setting in which you work, the learning will end up being superficial.
- 5. Transparency rules:** By transparency, I mean clear and continuous display of results, and clear and continuous access to practice (what is being done to get results).
- 6. Systems learn:** Systems can learn on a continuous basis. The synergistic result of the previous five secrets in action is tantamount to a system that learns from itself. Two dominant change forces are unleashed and constantly cultivated—knowledge and commitment.

## Secret One: Love Your Employees

Michael Fullan believes that our student-centered change initiatives need refinement. They are not complete. If we do not nurture the development of more effective teachers, student outcomes will not improve.

We must make schools wonderful and fulfilling places to work. Too many educators have been successfully beat down by political agendas that are undervaluing teaching as a vocation. Current levels of investment in our schools are insufficient if we expect our teachers to succeed. Expectations must be high for students *and* for those who serve them. Without expert, ongoing professional development on evidence-based practice and a dedication to nurturing effective teaching, we will never succeed in our quest to improve student performance.

Fullan (2008) suggests that the core idea behind Secret One is to “maximize trust and effectiveness in order to reduce resistance to a minimum.” Why do teachers and other critical stakeholders (like parents)