Quadrant D Leadership —
Improving Student Performance Through Adaptive Leadership

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International Center for
Leadership in Education
Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships for ALL Students

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Quadrant D Leadership is the International Center for Leadership in Education's framework for school leaders. It is an effective blending of vision and empowerment and involves an adaptive process by which leaders, staff, and students take action to improve teaching and learning in their school.

Quadrant D Leadership is an outgrowth of the research the International Center has done on school leadership through its extensive work with model schools across the country. For more than two decades, the International Center has identified and analyzed hundreds of the highest performing and fastest improving schools in the country to showcase at the annual Model School Conference. Schools that have made great advances despite limited resources, high poverty, and high student mobility are sought out, because they offer the best lessons on the practices to move all students to high levels of learning.

In working closely with thousands of schools in hundreds of districts, the International Center has learned a great deal about the leadership skills that yield the best results. The Quadrant D Leadership Framework applies that learning.

In the International Center's view, school leadership is not a position but a *disposition* for taking action. When leadership is considered a position, the leader is judged by the decision he or she makes. When leadership is considered a disposition, leadership is judged by the actions taken in the school community. One role of the individual school leader is to broaden the definition of leadership to include the many staff and students as leaders who share a common vision. *Quadrant D Leadership is the collaborative responsibility for taking action to reach future-oriented goals while meeting the intellectual, emotional, and physical needs of each student.* Quadrant D leaders are:

- Flexible to adapt to the school environment
- Able to analyze the leadership characteristics of their school
- Knowledgeable about where a school community is and where it needs to move to
- Able to develop a vision about the future needs of students and deliver a coherent message so stakeholders can talk the same language about leadership in the school
- Able to work with people in a manner that ignites their passions, talents, and desire to attain that shared vision

There are multiple ways to provide effective leadership. Practices that work in one situation may not work in another. That is what makes leadership so challenging. There is no "operator's manual" that details the correct procedure for leading a school. In addition, what worked in the past may not work today.

Quadrant D Leadership Framework

School leaders need a flexible framework for leadership action that they can use to deal with daily challenges while keep the school community moving toward the overarching goal of improved student achievement. This leadership framework should allow leaders to draw upon their talents and experience to lead a school community and continually reflect on decisions and actions in a manner that benefits student learning.

What benefits school leaders the most is not so much a list of good leadership practices but *mental models* that help them in decision making and problem solving. A mental model is an internal symbol or representation of external reality. The right mental model is like having a map to a city. Professional development in mental models introduces a framework, gives concrete examples, and encourages patterns of reflective thought and conversations to act consistently in these mental models.

Quadrant D Leadership is a mental model that can guide leadership actions. It gives a context for acquiring and applying leadership skills, abilities, tools, and processes.

The International Center's Rigor/Relevance Framework® (see Appendix) offers insight into creating a leadership mental model. The framework helps teachers quantify the level of their teaching and make progress toward providing students with the highest level of learning, defined as Quadrant D.

A similar framework can be a mental model for reflecting on leadership practice. In the four quadrants of leadership model, the level of individual leadership can be identified, and a school culture aspiring to high levels of organizational leadership can be established.

Four Quadrants of the Leadership Framework

Like the Rigor/Relevance Framework, the leadership framework can be divided into four quadrants and labeled along the vertical *knowledge* continuum and the horizontal *application* continuum. Knowledge involves raising the level of thinking about what is important in a school. At a low level of knowledge, leaders acquire understanding of school practices and the management of day-to-day tasks. Moving to higher-level thinking causes leaders to imagine and anticipate the future. *What skills will students need for their future? What are we missing in current programs and services that will help students?* These are the types of reflective questions that leaders ask at high levels of the knowledge continuum in order to create a vision for rigorous and relevant student achievement. High-knowledge leaders recognize that the current practice may not be the best practice and are willing to take risks and innovate. High-knowledge leaders keep part of their attention on the distant horizon of sustained long-term improvement, constantly seeking creative solutions to problems.

Application of leadership is the other continuum. At low levels, leaders execute leadership practices singularly, making decisions and solving day-to-day problems on their own. At higher levels on the application continuum, leadership shifts from the actions of a single leader or a small leadership team to
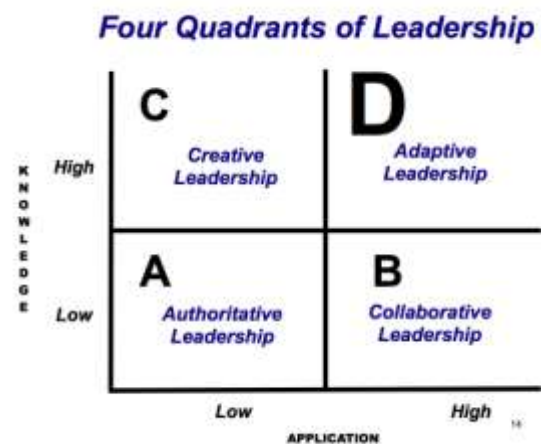
distributed leadership throughout the school community. Empowerment increases the distribution and density of leadership from a single leader to an entire school community taking leadership actions.

The four leadership quadrants are described below.

Leadership in Quadrant A (Authoritative Leadership) applies to traditional leaders, such as the principal, assistant principals, and department chairpersons, acquiring the skills they need and making decisions independently with respect to school improvement and student achievement. Usually, the Quadrant A leader decides and others act. Roles often labeled as "manager" would apply here.

Leadership in Quadrant B (**Collaborative Leadership)** involves the application of leadership, not just by traditional leaders, but also by staff. Actions are not based on submitting a problem to a higher level of authority and waiting for a decision. All staff, and ultimately students, work in a highly collaborative environment and take action consistent with the school goals.

Leadership in Quadrant C (**Creative Leadership)** characterizes higher-level thinking in which leaders are more reflective and innovative. They are not guided solely by past experience, but anticipate the future and look for new solutions. School goals are tied to current research on proven strategies and practices. Research and reflective thought guide actions.

Leadership in Quadrant D (**Adaptive Leadership)** is the combination of the both high levels of application and knowledge. At the highest levels of Quadrant D, students are taking a significant leadership role in the school as well as responsibility for their own learning. Leadership in Quadrant D allows a school to change and adapt more easily through staff collaboration in which everyone shares the same vision and commitment to preparing students for their future.

**Strategies for Building Toward Leadership in Quadrant D**
The most desirable leadership quadrant for effective schools is Quadrant D, and this should be the aspiration for all leaders. However, leadership is situational, so there is still a need for leadership decisions and actions in all quadrants.

Safety and security threats, for example, clearly fall in Quadrant A. Leaders in a new situation and without established relationships might naturally operate more in Quadrant A. Over time, though, the goal is to function mainly in Quadrant D. As staff recognize this, it will help them better understand the role of the individual leader in decision making and engage them further in becoming part of the school organization leadership.

Moving from Quadrants A and C to Quadrants B and D can be characterized by increasing both staff and student leadership. At the highest levels of leadership, students take significant responsibility for their actions. Practices related to teacher leadership are consistent with moving organizational leadership to Quadrants B and D. Creating various school-based teams to lead school improvement efforts or focus on enhancing school culture or analyzing student data is a good method of increasing staff leadership.

Four Quadrants of Leadership
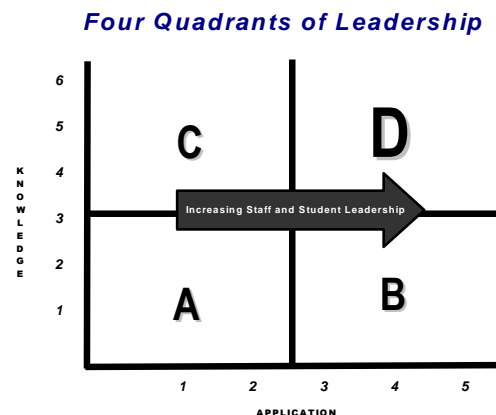
Moving from Quadrants A and B to Quadrants C and D can be characterized by the shift in thinking that guides leadership action. Leadership is not simply guided by past practices and traditions. Decisions and actions are based on reflective thought that includes paying attention to the future education needs of students to succeed in a complex rapidly changing world. When school organizations are defending the status quo and complacent with current results, the organizational leadership is at levels A and B. When organizations passionately pursue higher expectations for all students, are not satisfied with current student achievement, and implement creative solutions, they are more likely functioning at Quadrants C and D.

Four Quadrants of Leadership
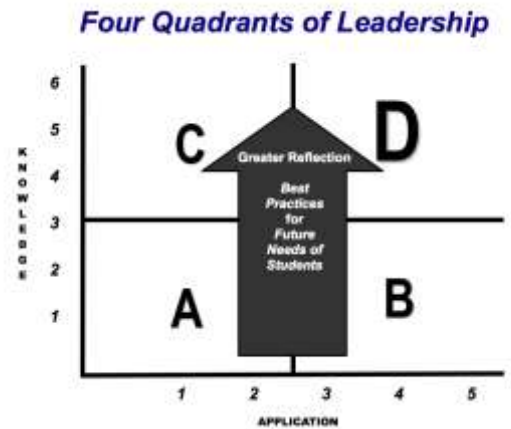
Leading in Different Quadrants

When leadership is based in one quadrant only, it can create certain characteristics in a school. Quadrant A leaders, for instance, might be called managers. There is a traditional chain of command, and the leader is the primary decision maker in the school. A good way to describe these schools is "rule driven." Past experience guides the leader's decisions, leaving the school with little capacity to respond to a changing environment, such as increasing demographic diversity in the student body.

A leader operating mainly in Quadrant C understands the contemporary challenges to education and seeks to make significant changes. Quadrant C leaders might be labeled as visionaries. They introduce innovations, primarily through the power of their personalities. These innovations will yield some success, but it may be only with the portion of the staff who buy into the idea. When the leader leaves the school, the momentum for school improvement may slip away. This is characteristic of schools that have leadership primarily in Quadrant C. Success is partial, varies, and is tied to the presence of a single leader. When school leadership is closely identified with a single individual, Quadrant A or C leadership is typically the dominant style.

A Quadrant B dominant leader has created leadership capacity throughout the school community. This could be described as a collaborative environment because of the leadership density, as the individual leader serves to support the leadership of many others. The leader's focus, however, is mainly internal and does not reach extensively beyond the school for new ideas and best practices to improve instruction.

A school in Quadrant D is adaptive and on a clear path to sustained improvement. Leadership in a Quadrant D school does not reside in a single individual but rather is highly collaborative. Teachers and students act every day in ways that support the school's mission. Schools that function at the highest level of leadership involve all students actively in taking responsibility for their own behavior and learning.

A. J. Moore Academy in Waco, Texas, operates mainly in Quadrant D. One example of Quadrant D leadership occurred at the time when communities around the nation were having demonstrations on immigration issues, and one was planned for Waco. Staff did not go to the principal and say, "We have a potential problem, do something!" Instead, several staff members recognized this as a learning opportunity and crafted a lesson on the immigration issues that included how to influence government

leaders and civil disobedience. They taught the lesson the day before the demonstration. On the following day, no A. J. Moore students skipped school, while the other district schools were scrambling to decide how to punish the large number of students who skipped school to attend the demonstration. In this incident, A.J. Moore staff and students exhibited the characteristics of leadership in Quadrant D by taking action to work toward their common vision as a school community.

A K-5 elementary school that is an excellent example of leadership in Quadrant D is A. B. Combs Leadership Magnet Elementary School in Raleigh, North Carolina. In 1999, A. B. Combs was the one of the lowest performing schools in the district. The school was issued an ultimatum by the district: improve or close. The school's challenge was to invent and implement a learning model that was different from any other school in the nation. In addition, the learning model would have to be successful without the help of additional money or staff.

Under the leadership of the principal, the school adopted a vision of focusing on the principles of Steven Covey in *7 Habits of Highly Effective People.* Using her collaborative style, the principal empowered staff to create rigorous and relevant learning experiences that engaged students and made learning meaningful. With no script to follow, staff created innovative instruction. While preparing for state testing was not their goal, they did not ignore test scores. The school leadership team kept a constant focus on student data to measure the school's progress.

Leadership in Quadrant D includes tying student leadership to staff leadership. A. B. Combs has accomplished that with its elementary students, who show outstanding confidence, maturity, and responsibility for their own behavior and learning as a result of the school culture and practices. Today, the school is a high-performing and highly collaborative school.

Developing Quadrant D Leadership

Professional development and coaching in leadership development frequently focuses on acquiring content knowledge about leadership and management. Developing Quadrant D Leadership is more than acquiring content. The goal is to build leadership capacity. The breakthrough of understanding for the International Center is that Quadrant D Leadership development should focus on three areas:

1. Skills and abilities
2. Mental models
3. Tools and processes

Skills and Abilities
The skills and abilities that are central to Quadrant D Leadership are coherent vision, empowerment, and instructional leadership, along with personal/social/emotional characteristics and community relationship building.

Coherent vision means that leaders develop, communicate, and build momentum for clearly defined beliefs about teaching and learning. Staff share ownership in the direction that the school must take. Leadership provides adequate direction and support to help staff achieve school goals.

Empowerment means that staff have a clear sense of identity to the school, have feelings of well-being

and satisfaction, and adapt to meet the needs of all students. Staff feel as though they share responsibility for all phases of the school operation and have a strong collaborative relationship with school leaders. This collaborative environment includes opportunities to give meaningful feedback and make suggestions for improving teaching and learning along with sharing in the decision-making process. Empowering students as well is a critical aspect of Quadrant D Leadership.

Instructional leadership requires developing a culture of high expectations for every student. Instruction comes first. Decisions are based on what is best for the learning environment for students. Ongoing professional development is aligned to school goals and focused on student achievement. The strengths of each staff member are used to optimize student achievement and create an effective learning environment. School administrators assure that staff focuses on delivering high-priority academic skills and knowledge.

Personal/social/emotional reflects the personal traits important for leadership. Leaders need to recognize strengths in areas of observation, communication, self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and social facility. Style inventories are useful in identifying personal strengths and the strengths of others. Such personal skills as time management, maintaining balance between personal and professional life, and finding leisure activities to recharge energy are essential for effective leaders.

Community means leadership in building external relationships. Leaders need to involve parents and respond to their ideas and issues effectively. Leaders must also cultivate relationships with community leaders. Partnerships with businesses, non-profit organizations, and local government add to the effectiveness of the overall school program.

Mental Models
In addition to skills acquired through formal instruction and the ability to apply them, Quadrant D leaders also need mental models related to the function of leadership. Some of the International Center mental models used in schools are the Process of Change Model, which takes schools though the *why*, *what, where*, and *how* of school improvement; the Rigor/Relevance Framework, which guides instruction; the Learning Criteria, which measures learning beyond the test; and the Effectiveness and Efficiency Framework, which helps leaders evaluate programs to make the best use of resources.

Tools and Processes
The International Center uses a series of tools and processes to help schools improve their culture, instruction, and leadership. These include the We Survey Suite, which provides data from staff, students, and community; a needs assessment rubric that helps a school identify where it is and where it needs to go; and leadership growth plans for building leadership capacity school-wide.

(See the Appendix for more information on mental models and tools/processes developed by the International Center that are essential to effective leadership.)

Using the Quadrant D Leadership Framework

Leaders can use the Quadrant D Leadership Framework to begin to shape their actions as school leaders. Consider, for example, a leader who is confronted by the release of test data that shows an

unacceptable number of students not meeting state benchmarks in reading comprehension. There are several ways to handle this information to begin to influence school improvement.

One way would be to act as a Quadrant A leader and take action unilaterally. Announce the results to the staff and tell them that the required amount of instructional time devoted to reading will be increased effective immediately. Moreover, all teachers will participate in a workshop focused on reading in the content areas. In a school led by a Quadrant C leader, staff members would feel empower to seek out research-based best practices for improving literacy and to bring them forth as new ways to tackle the reading comprehension problem.

A Quadrant B leadership action would not rely on unilateral decisions, but rather would involve a staff committee, which might include students at the high school level, to explore options for increasing reading instruction and support. To elevate the action to Quadrant D, staff would connect the need to increase reading comprehension to other initiatives and establish an expectation for improved reading comprehension, not just to increase state test scores, but also as part of an overall set of student expectations to prepare them for their future.

All of the above actions likely would have some impact on increasing reading scores. However, actions at higher levels of leadership would be more likely to create innovative solutions, to result in practices that can be sustained over time, and to elicit fewer negative emotions in staff.

Summary

Leadership can be defined in simple terms as *causing people to go places that that they probably would not have gone on their own*. Leadership requires making changes: change of goals, change in direction, change of practice, change in work, or change of values. Deliberate changes in people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are difficult to accomplish, and this is the challenge of leadership. Effective leadership involves recognizing what works, when, and with whom. To work effectively with others, leaders must understand their own personal strengths and inclinations in order to work effectively with people.

School leaders who possess the knowledge, abilities, and attitudes to bring about action rather than defend the status quo will create the schools that will be most successful in the 21st century. The charge to school leaders is to build awareness and support for change in institutions that are often steeped in tradition and inherently resistant to change. Leaders must work with the staff and community at large to develop a consensus on what to change and how change will be implemented. Meaningful, sustained improvement more likely will take place when teachers, students, parents, and community work toward a shared vision. Effective leadership does not reside in a single position, but encompasses the diversified skills of many. It is this distributed leadership that defines successful schools. The Quadrant D Leadership Framework gives leaders a way to guide their daily actions and reflect on the growth of the school organization leadership in sustaining school improvement and long-term student achievement.

Appendix
Support for Quadrant D Leadership

Skills and Abilities

The following list defines the key elements of the International Center's Quadrant D Leadership development activities. Existing leadership standards were considered along with what has been learned from practices in the field from some of the most effective schools.

- Coherent vision
- Instruction
- Empowerment
- Personal/social/emotional
- Community

Some of these elements, such as organization management and political/economic/legal context are best learned through on-the-job internships, coaching, and modeling. The International Center provides workshops and coaching assistance to school leaders to develop leadership skills in coherent vision, instruction, empowerment, community, and personal social-emotional skills.

The **Quadrant D Leadership Skills Inventory** is a simple instrument for leaders that helps them assess both the current dominant quadrant of their leadership practices and the dominate conditions of organizational leadership. Using this tool, school leaders can more accurately reflect on the current personal leadership preferences and map changes to improve leadership.

Mental Models

The International Center has developed several mental models that we believe are essential to effective leadership.

School Change

Creating real change in schools is dynamic. There is no detailed blueprint for schools to follow for success. However, there are lessons that can be learned from other schools. The International Center has worked with schools across the country to identify models, share best practices, conduct research, and support school leaders in facilitating changes that lead to improvement. This work has revealed that schools usually need to address four interconnected questions, which comprise the International Center's **Process of Change Model**. To achieve high academic standards for all students, change requires answering four questions—*why*, *what*, *where*, and *how*. All schools must start with the *why* question. *Why is change necessary?* Next, the *what* question builds a common focus on what to change. *What is the vision we are trying to achieve?* Third, schools must set a course of direction with the *where* question. *Where are we now and where do we want to go?* Finally, the *how* question deals with the implementation of change. *How do we implement the changes? How do we get started?*

Teaching and Learning

The **Rigor/Relevance Framework**® is a tool to examine curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The framework offers a common language with which to express the notion of a more rigorous and relevant curriculum and encompasses much of what parents, business leaders, and community members want students to learn. The framework is versatile. Teachers can use it to measure their progress in adding rigor and relevance to instruction, select appropriate instructional strategies, and engage in conversations among all disciplines to meet learner needs and higher achievement goals.

Rigor/Relevance Framework®
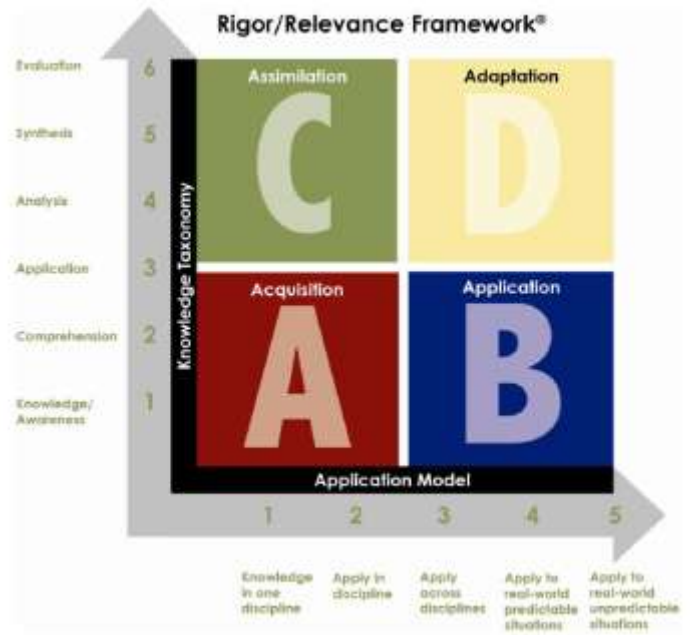
Student Achievement

Research and observation support what most educators see as common sense: what goes on between the teacher and the each student is central to high-level learning. Effective teaching is not the end goal, however; it is the means to an end: student achievement. Nevertheless, all teaching is more effective when supported. Achieving the goal of improving instruction requires a supportive and aligned system. Stated another way, effective teaching is essential, but not sufficient to maximize achievement for all students. This understanding of the need for an organization-wide commitment shapes the **Daggett System for Effective Instruction** (DSEI).

Daggett System for Effective Instruction

The DSEI is more than an approach to enhancing instruction and instructional capacity. It is a way of thinking about what we believe about children, schools, and learning which has coalesced at a critical time in American education when standards, assessments, accountability, and teacher evaluation systems are intersecting with budgets, time pressures, resources, and public policy debates. The DSEI builds upon the successful practices, tools and research of many, including research and meta-analysis on effective instruction and maximum learning time

What does a 21st century learner need to know and be able to do? The **Learning Criteria** serves as a lens through which educators can see if their school is meeting the learning needs of their students for today's world. Although states are required by *No Child Left Behind* to monitor assessment results in English language arts, mathematics, and science, most educators and the public recognize that state tests are too narrow to be the sole basis for determining school effectiveness.


LEARNING CRITERIA

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To address the broader needs of 21st century learners and at the same time enhance students' ability to "pass the test," schools need to take a broader view of learning in deciding what makes someone "graduation-ready" and a lifelong learner. The Learning Criteria has four dimensions: Foundation Learning, Stretch Learning, Learner Engagement, and Personal Skill Development

School Improvement

To guide school and district decision making, the International Center has created the **Effectiveness and Efficiency Framework**. The E/E Framework compares the efficiency (cost) and effectiveness (student performance) of a wide variety of tools, strategies, professional development, organizational configurations, and procedural decisions schools make. The data gathered from the E/E Framework also can be used to guide policy and allocation of resources. The approaches and structures that produce the greatest improvements for the least cost should be given priority.

Effectiveness and Efficiency Framework
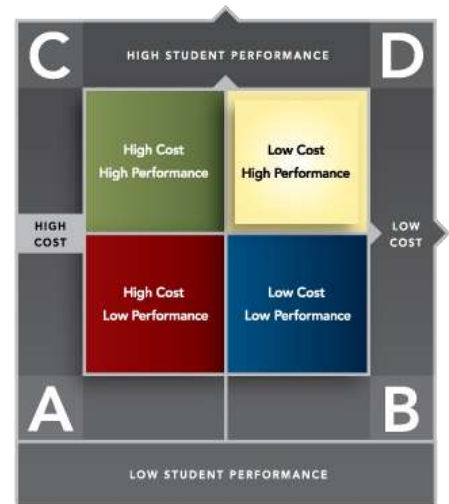
Tools and Processes

The experience of the International Center in providing professional development in leadership is that it is best accomplished when it is initiated with data. Too many workshops simply present ideas and information. Professional development in Quadrant D Leadership involves looking at current situations from a slightly different perspective by using an appropriate mental model. Moreover, developing Quadrant D Leadership requires reflection. The best way to reflect is with data that directly relates to a current situation. The International Center has developed several data collection forms and activities to initiate the reflection essential to this work.

The **WE LEAD™ Whole Staff Survey** assesses staff perceptions of school leadership. The survey provides school administrators with a powerful tool for understanding what staff members believe about the school. A survey report provides information that can help guide leadership to improve student achievement and promote the highest teaching and learning standards. The data gathered from the We Lead survey helps a school explore the three elements of leadership—vision, empowerment, and instructional leadership—in relationship to staff perceptions. By discussing survey results, schools will gain valuable insights into the leadership and overall health of their education institutions.

A **Data Analysis Report** reports on trends based on various measures of student achievement disaggregated by subpopulation. The trends can identify strengths and weaknesses in current student performance as a basis for identifying the focus of leadership development.