

# ***Engagement for Success:*** **Dade County's Definition of Leadership**

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## **Overview**

### ***Innovation/Solution/Practice at a Glance***

Dade County Schools implemented the program and framework of Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement's (GLISI) *Developing High-performing Leaders at all Levels* (DHPLAAL) leadership and planning retreat. Dade County worked as a district to define what leadership meant to them by examining leadership, identifying leaders, developing competency models for each category of leaders, and then taking those definitions a few steps further to improve their recruiting and hiring processes.

### ***Impact at a Glance***

Dade County Schools has successfully implemented the GLISI DHPLAAL process and has hired two principals who are positively impacting student achievement in their schools and district. District leaders have redesigned their leader performance and supply system and the process has led Dade County to change the way they define leadership and "grow" leaders within their district.

## **The Impact Story**

### ***Background/Context***

In a small, rural district of only four schools, replacing two principals in one year amounts to replacing half of the leadership staff – a large challenge for any district. This challenge led them to realize that selecting the right person is extremely important. The county is rural, with a total population of 16,000 and a student population of around 2500. With a per capita income of \$21,648, approximately 40 percent of students are eligible for free/reduced meals. Thirty-three percent of the population did not complete high school and only 11 percent of the population completed college. Sixty-five percent of the students attending post-high school education programs are enrolled in technical colleges. The high school was struggling, with frequent changes in leadership within just a few years. In addition, the End-of-Course test failure rate was high and the school did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for two years. The district had used its existing recruiting and interview process to hire a new high school principal, but midway through the year, they realized the importance of having a more rigorous process in place to ensure the selection of the right leaders.

### ***What Was Done?***

The leaders of Dade County Schools recognized that they needed to change the way in which they hired and developed leadership within their district to ensure they had the right people for leadership positions. The school board charged the Superintendent with developing leaders within Dade County to have leaders in place for upcoming leadership positions. This charge included not only

principals and assistant principals, but also teacher leaders. After participating in the GLISI planning and analysis retreat, Developing High-performing Leaders at all Levels (DHPLAAL), the Dade County Schools Superintendent felt confident that she could follow the comprehensive process outlined in DHPLAAL to achieve this goal.

After the Superintendent and her team returned home, they followed the steps they had learned and practiced at DHPLAAL to develop and implement an improved process for hiring, developing and assigning leaders. DHPLAAL provided Dade County Schools with a proven successful framework to make changes in their school district that would lead to developing high-performing leaders within their own schools.

**The first step they learned was to develop a diverse leadership design team** consisting of many stakeholders of Dade County Schools, including central office staff, Regional Education Service Agency (RESA) staff, a private college representative, a school board member, and local school leaders. A smaller core group of school leaders went through GLISI's DHPLAAL training and came back to Dade County to share their learning and start implementation. The larger leadership team expanded on the work the core group began and the leadership design team developed a Leadership Performance and Supply mission statement and a concise set of goals for the work ahead. The mission was to develop high-performing leaders that would impact student achievement. The design team's main charge was to develop a plan for creating the leaders Dade needed from within their district.

**The second step learned through DHPLAAL was for the design team to conduct an in-depth review** of the generic leader competency models GLISI had provided. They asked themselves, "What do we want leaders in Dade to be able to do?" This led to a more customized view of leadership for their district, in that they were specifically selecting what was important for Dade leaders to know and be able to demonstrate to positively impact student achievement in their unique local context. The end result of this step was that the design team leaders developed a document called the *Dade County Core Competencies for Leaders*, which outlined the competencies that were most needed in their district.

**The third step was to develop a Performance Path Plan for the entire district**, using the template provided by GLISI. The *Performance Path Plan* is a GLISI-created and recommended process for districts to take the time to stop and think about what knowledge and skills are necessary for success within their unique environment. In Dade County, the design team looked to identify what Dade leaders needed to know (knowledge) and be able to do (skills). The leadership design team identified five major areas for leaders to focus on: 1) implementing standards-based classrooms; 2) analyzing data; 3) managing performance using a Balanced Scorecard; 4) leading change; and 5) using zero-based budgeting. These areas would guide the leadership professional development plan for the district as well as drive other leadership development processes (as outlined below).

**The fourth step was to carefully review and revise the job descriptions** of principals and assistant principals. Based on the knowledge gained from developing the competency models and the alignment with the *Performance Path Plan*, the *Dade Leader Competency Model*, and the *Dade*

*Leader Performance and Supply Mission*, the leadership design team developed job descriptions that clearly defined the work these leaders needed to perform in the leadership roles. The identified skills and knowledge and expected tasks and responsibilities informed the new job descriptions. The Superintendent stressed that job descriptions needed to be “living, breathing documents” that should be updated periodically to reflect the changing work of education and leaders.

**The fifth step was to develop a *Performer Path Plan*** for each individual leader also using a GLISI-created template. These path plans were customized development plans that focused on the specific skills each individual leader needed to strengthen. They also referenced the *Core Competencies* identified for Dade County and aligned with the *Performance Path Plan* for each job group. The Superintendent said that one important lesson she learned was that this step helped determine the actual level of knowledge leaders had about standards-based classroom implementation and zero-based budgeting and identify these two areas as needing improvement. By identifying gaps in the knowledge of Dade, she was able to focus the *Performer Path Plans* initially on standards-based classroom teaching with data analysis and zero-based budgeting, to ensure leaders developed the critical skills they needed to lead effectively in Dade.

**The sixth step was to implement a *School Board Policy on Leadership*** in Dade County. This step is important to gain and ensure stakeholder engagement and support. This policy included a goal to recruit and hire highly qualified people who demonstrate the skills and knowledge outlined in the core competencies, job descriptions, and path plans. The ultimate goal is to hire confident, caring, and nurturing individuals that can make a difference in Dade County’s student achievement.

**The seventh and final step of this process was to outline leadership behaviors** for each leadership and school position. For example, what should a teacher be doing in a standards-based classroom environment and what should an assistant principal and principal do to support that environment? The Superintendent said, “I’ve never seen this in 40 years of education, but it seems so logical to define the expected behaviors for each role.” Outlining behaviors is a recommendation in the DHPLAAL training for district leaders to specifically focus on the performances or actions that leaders should be doing in their districts that will lead to improved student achievement.

### ***What Were the Results?***

The immediate outcome was that Dade County leadership felt using the DHPLAAL framework was key in helping them to develop a new leader performance and supply system. They have already hired two new principals that they consider the right leaders for their current and future challenges.

The high school struggled the most, churning through four principals in three years. Dade County leadership was confident the new principal would not only stay, but also would make a difference in student achievement. The new principal, in the Superintendent’s words, “knows what Dade County High School needs and how to get there.”

The organizational results can be seen through a new, proven leader performance and supply process that will help Dade County not only develop leaders within, but also hire the right leaders to make a difference in their community. Because of the process Dade County senior leaders learned

through GLISI's DHPLAAL, they now have a demonstrated, consistent leader performance and supply process and documented results to help guide internal leadership hiring, development, and assignment to ensure adequate and qualified leader supply. In addition, they were able to hire qualified leaders able to improve student achievement.

### ***What Was the Impact?***

The impact of developing a leader performance and supply system was more than just the hiring of two qualified leaders and the clarity that Dade County gained about their leadership needs, strengths, and opportunities. The high school experience positive gains in student achievement under the new principal's leadership. The Superintendent attributes these results to the leadership in the school: "He's rallied the troops." These included:

- The graduation rate increased by nine points
- The high school made AYP for the first time in two years
- High School Graduation Test (HGST) scores improved dramatically
- The meets/exceeds on Math improved 10.8%
- End-of-Course test scores improved dramatically, especially in Math
  - The "exceeds" category in Algebra I increased by 14%
  - The "did not meet" category in Algebra I decreased by 14%

To demonstrate the impact of this process, the Superintendent volunteered to be a part of a RESA Director Selection Committee, and she proposed using this process to recruit, interview, and hire the new RESA Director. "We used the process we learned at GLISI to do this job. We asked, 'What are the cross-cutting skills the new director needs, what attributes should he or she possess, what is the director expected to be able to do?' We developed behavioral interview questions which revolved around what we thought people ought to have as skills and be able to demonstrate as behaviors in prior jobs. I think we were successful in picking the right person. We worked hard to get the right person in the right seat."

### ***Next Steps***

Dade County Schools is continuing to focus on the five major leader competencies. These include: 1) implementing standards-based classrooms; 2) analyzing data; 3) managing performance using a Balanced Scorecard; 4) leading change; and 5) using zero-based budgeting. District leaders developed a Balanced Scorecard to monitor results and communicate progress in their organizational goals. The Balanced Scorecard is being finalized as they learn more about the process and their work ahead.