



# Leadership for Developing Highly Effective Staff:

## Setting the Atmosphere Through Beliefs, Practices, and Protocols

Alabama Association of School Boards  
March 6, 2026 | Auburn, Alabama

Dr. Deborah L. Wortham

Wortham Educational Enterprises

# Operationalizing Belief into Performance

## ● Belief System (Mindset)

Core convictions that guide decisions and shape organizational culture throughout.



## Practices (Effective Methods)

Evidence-based strategies that turn beliefs into tangible, measurable outcomes.



## Protocols (Sustainable Systems)

Frameworks and processes that weave excellence into the organization's core.

**Boards fund what they believe. Superintendents build what they believe.**



# Leadership Architecture: Belief Drives Behavior



**Belief is Board-Level Policy in Action**

**Evaluation Systems**

**Leadership Mindset**

**Fosters Resilience**

**Strengthens  
Decision-Making**

**Fosters Hope  
and Confidence**

**Prof. Dev. Investments**



# The Power of Belief Systems to Drive Behavior

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**Integrating Belief and Leadership-**

**Fosters Purpose, Integrity, and Vision  
that Inspires Others**

**Impact of Decision-Making**

**Leaders tackle complexity with clarity,  
basing decisions on values.**

**Belief fuels confident leadership.**

**“When leaders believe staff can improve, they build systems that allow staff to improve. When they don’t, they build compliance systems instead.”**

**We operate guided by belief, relying on what may not always be visible.**





# Visionary Leaders in Educational Transformation

Confidence and belief systems  
transform entire school districts.

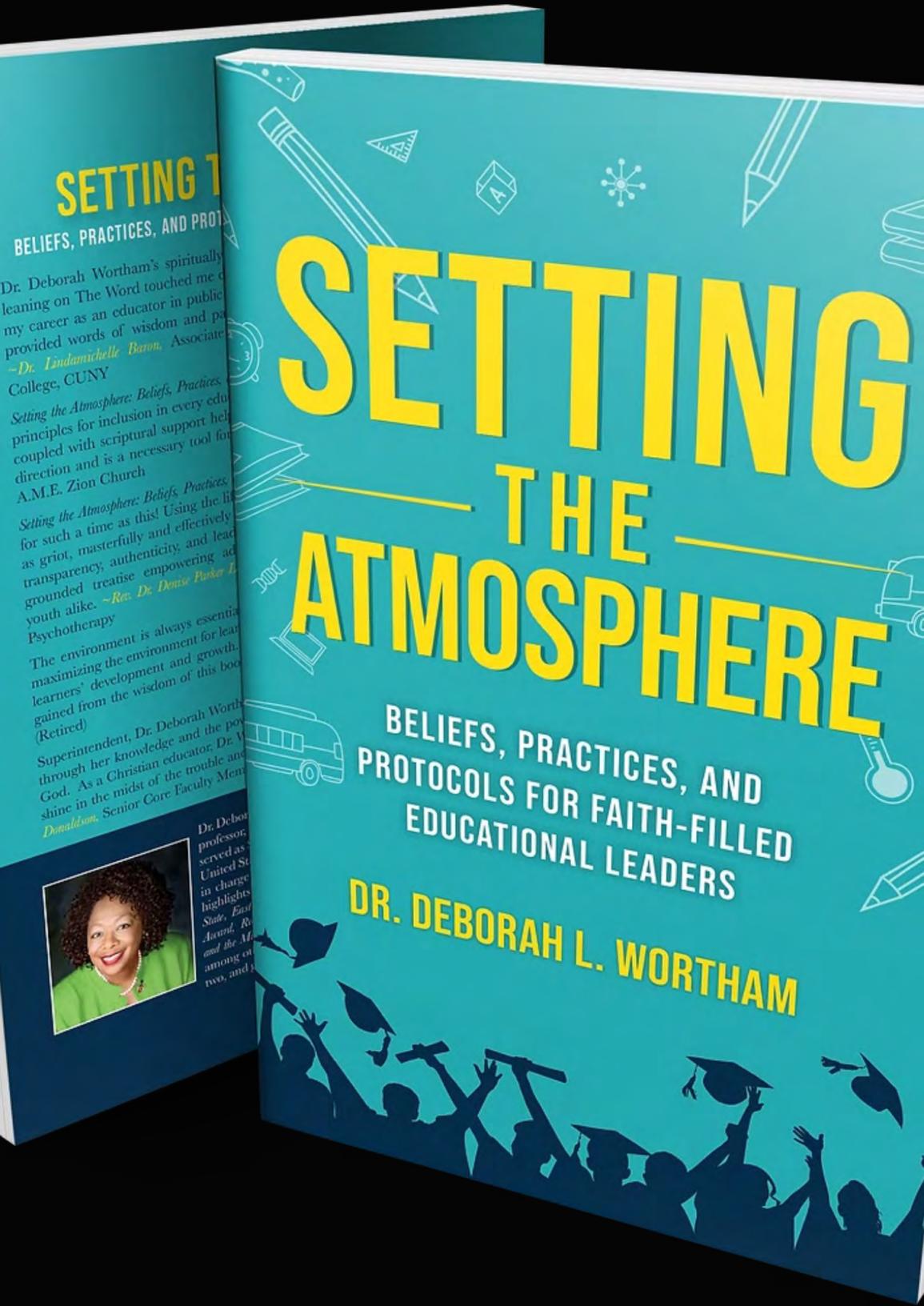
— *Dr. Deborah L. Wortham*



# The Power of Your Own Voice

Leadership begins the moment you decide  
your story matters.

— *Oprah Winfrey*



## SETTING THE

BELIEFS, PRACTICES, AND PRO

Dr. Deborah Wortham's spiritually leaning on The Word touched me d my career as an educator in public provided words of wisdom and pa  
-Dr. Lindamichelle Barron, Associate College, CUNY

*Setting the Atmosphere: Beliefs, Practices,* principles for inclusion in every edu coupled with scriptural support hel direction and is a necessary tool for A.M.E. Zion Church

*Setting the Atmosphere: Beliefs, Practices,* for such a time as this! Using the li as griot, masterfully and effectively transparency, authenticity, and lead grounded treatise empowering ad youth alike. -Rev. Dr. Dentie Parker B Psychotherapy

The environment is always essentia maximizing the environment for lea learners' development and growth. gained from the wisdom of this boo (Retired)

Superintendent, Dr. Deborah Worth through her knowledge and the po God. As a Christian educator, Dr M shine in the midst of the trouble and Donaldson, Senior Core Faculty Mem



Dr. Debon professor, served as United St in charge highlights State, East Award, Re and the M among on two, and

# SETTING THE ATMOSPHERE

BELIEFS, PRACTICES, AND PROTOCOLS FOR FAITH-FILLED EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

DR. DEBORAH L. WORTHAM



# “Where Did Your Leadership Beliefs Begin?”

## Leadership Roots Start Early

**Leadership Beliefs Are Formed Long Before Leadership Roles**

### **Influence of Early Role Models**

- Childhood role models
- Family interactions
- Shape Leadership Beliefs



## Leadership Beliefs Are Autobiographical

“The beliefs formed in your early leadership environments are now embedded in how you evaluate principals, hire staff, and respond to failure.”



# Leadership Formation: The Early Architecture (Of Every Great Leader)

Love  
Your  
Purpose

Love  
Learning

Love  
Family

# Siblings



**FRIDAY**

**May 13**

**13**

**1949**

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**Formative Beliefs Become  
Leadership Standards**

# A Story of Sisterhood

- ☐ The bonds that shape us become the leadership that sustains us.





# BE THE BEST THAT YOU CAN BE

Expectation is the First Leadership Tool

Make the Best Effort to Help

Do Your Best to Serve

Keep the Faith

Who Are You Sponsoring?

10M

Do your beliefs build highly effective staff?

**BELIEF SYSTEMS:**  
**The Foundation of Leadership**  
**The truths that drive**  
**every decision you make**

**Belief Becomes Budgeting Decisions**

**Belief Becomes Hiring Criteria**

**Belief Becomes Evaluation Language**



# Belief is the Foundation of Organizational Results



**Belief → Adult Behavior**

**Behavior → Systems**

**Systems → Results**







# The Direct Instruction Model

A proven teaching approach that transfers mastery from teacher to student.

## I Do (Modeling)

The teacher demonstrates while students observe

## We Do (Coaching)

The teacher and students practice together

## You Do (Releasing)

Students demonstrate independent mastery

# Practices: The Instructional Model for Leaders



## TEACH: "I Do" - Modeling

Leaders demonstrate excellence.



## PRACTICE: "We Do" - Guided Practice

Leaders and staff practice together and receive feedback.



## APPLY: "You Do" - Independent

Staff demonstrates mastery independently.

**Learning Targets: 50% of your day should focus on clear learning targets. The "3 B's Per Day" protocol ensures focus and accountability.**



# Belief is the Foundation of Performance.

## Leadership Lesson

*"When you tap into your belief, you unlock creativity and capacity beyond what you thought possible."*

# I Learned to Exercise My Belief

**Superintendent**

Leading with vision and purpose

**Assistant Superintendent**

Expanding influence through confidence

**Principal**

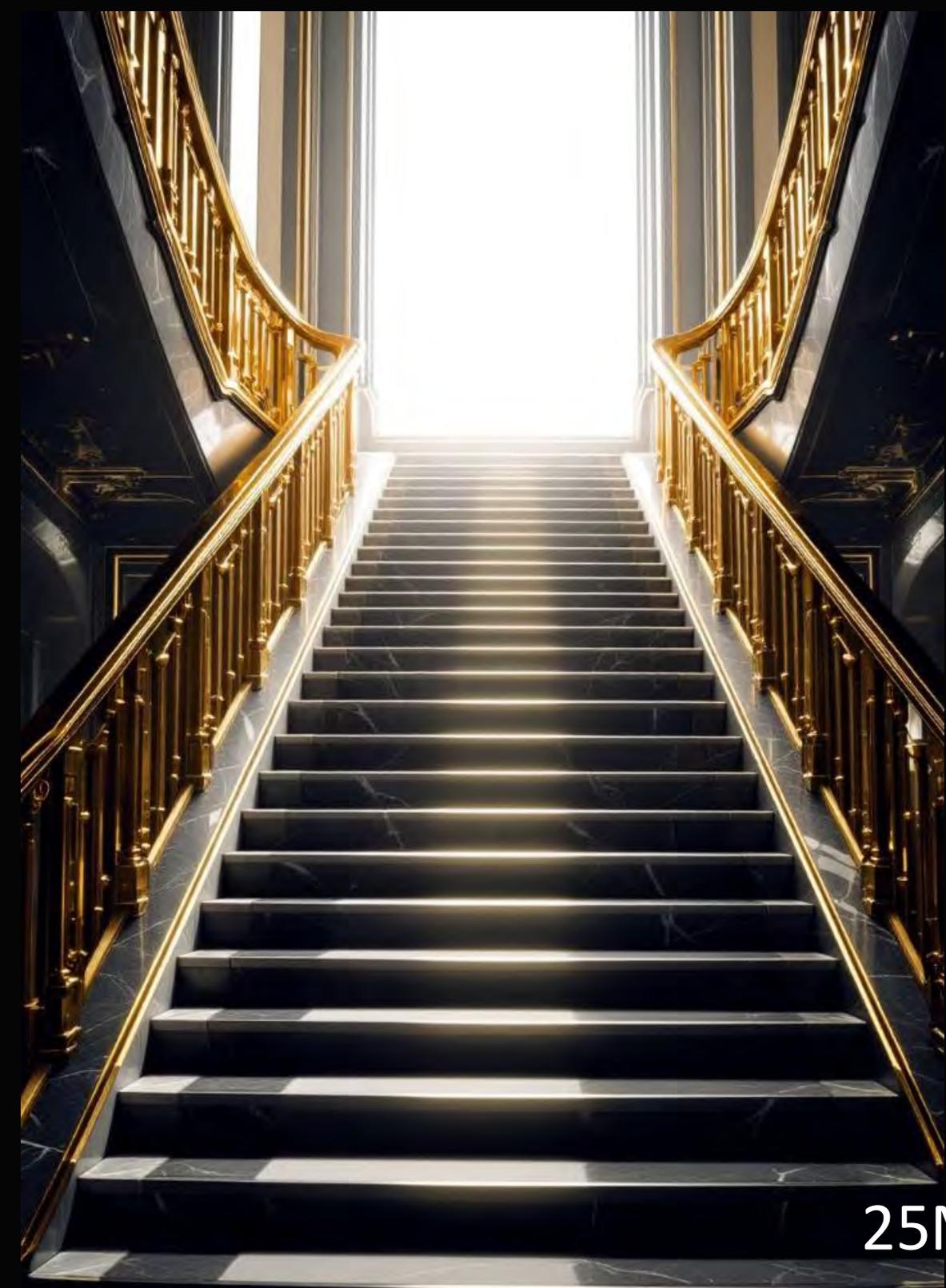
Guiding with confident leadership

**Teacher**

Nurturing belief in others

**Child**

The journey of belief



25M

**Each role builds upon the previous, strengthening our confidence.**



## **Innate Ability - Traditional View**

- Ability is Fixed
- Little we can do to improve qualities that are fixed at birth

## **Efficacy Model**

- Growth mindset
- Efficacy drives achievement
- Every child can succeed

**What Leads to Achievement?**

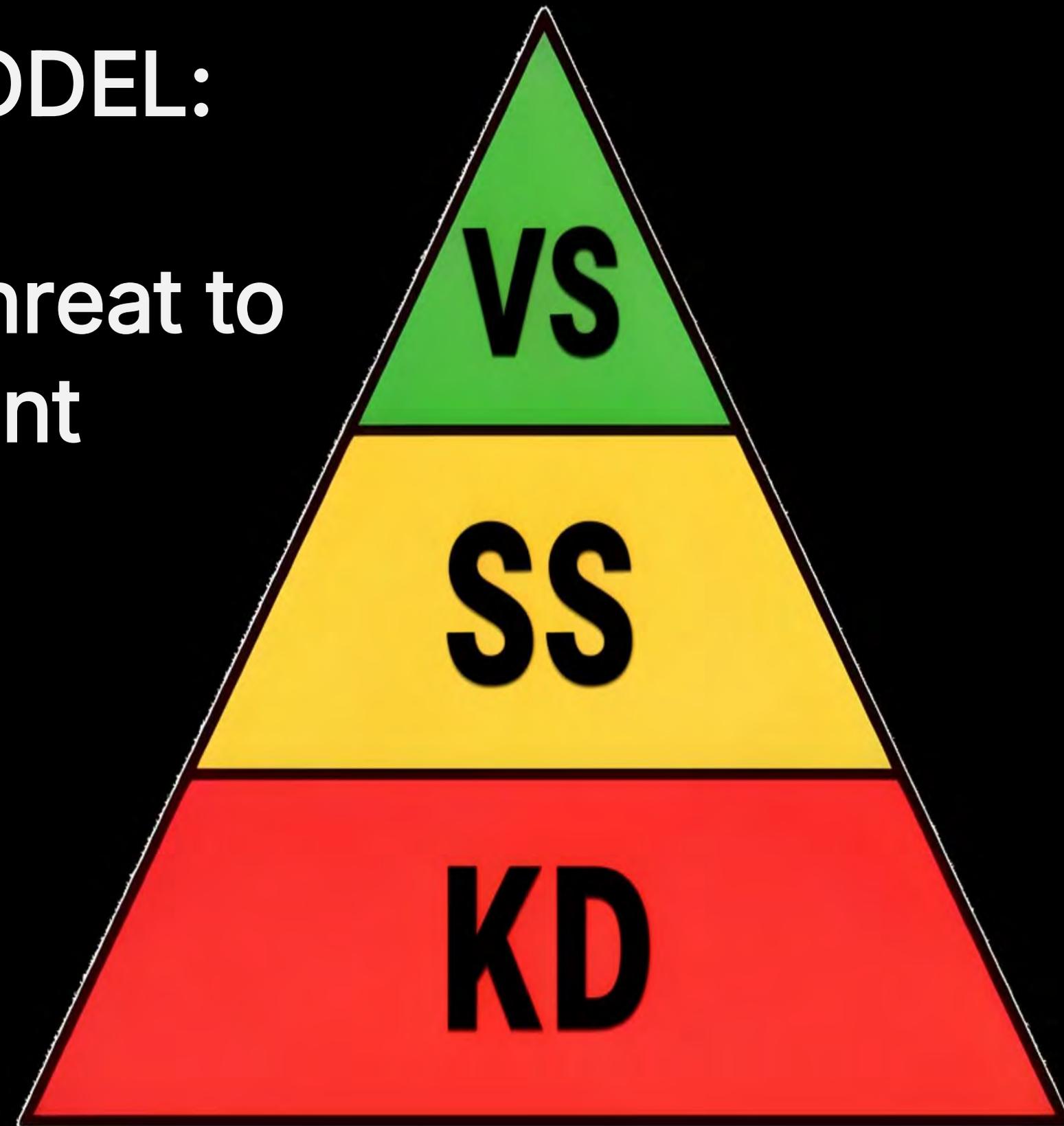
# INNATE ABILITY MODEL:

## The Fixed Mindset Threat to Staff Development

Verbal Skills (VS)

Spatial Skills (SS)

Knowledge Disposition (KD)





# The Efficacy Model

## Efficacy Definition

Capacity to mobilize available resources to solve problems and promote achievement

## Guiding Question

"Is it good for kids?"

## Core Belief

All students can achieve with confidence and hard work.

# EFFICACY MODEL

**Confidence**  
Belief in one's  
ability

**Effortive Effort**  
dedication and work

**Achievement**  
Results through action

# Constructing High-Performance Cultures



# Leadership Lesson: Do I Believe?

**Cultivate A  
Winning Mindset**

*Tattooed* on  
hearts—  
embedded in  
the  
organizational  
DNA.

## **The Bond Question**

Can boards and  
superintendents  
create the bond  
necessary for  
transformation?

**Unified belief** creates  
unstoppable  
momentum.

**Are You Aligned?**



Failure is  
not an  
option



# Strategic Alignment for Systemic Success

## Winning Mindset

Your mindset determines your outcomes.

## Faithful Action

Transform beliefs into achievement through leadership.

## Alignment

Leaders align goals through confidence and effort for imminent success

# VISION BEYOND WHAT YOU SEE



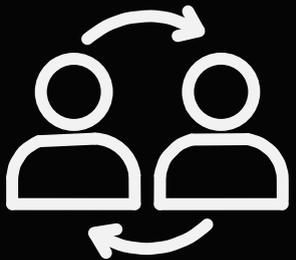
## Visionary Leadership

Leading by seeing what others cannot yet perceive.



## Catch More Bees with Honey

Embracing all perspectives



## Collaboration

Working together as one ensures collective success





# Leading Through Action

True leadership is demonstrated through consistent, visible action — not words. When leaders lead by example, high performance becomes the norm.



# Administrative Leadership in Action

Presence and visibility build trust.  
Accessible leaders create the  
conditions for transformational  
change.



# Samuel Coleridge-Taylor Elementary

A beacon of what's possible when **Belief Drives Leadership Decisions** and a unified commitment to excellence transform a struggling school.



## External Validation of Internal Alignment

# Recognition of Significant Improvement

America's  
Best  
Elementary  
School  
Award

Redbook  
Recognition





# Leadership Lesson

## Vision is the Catalyst

Vision is the catalyst that propels your leadership forward.

Close your eyes to see what others cannot see.

## **Belief Determines Student Outcomes**

Your leadership creates pathways to achievement that transform entire districts.



# From State Takeover to Good Standing

*What Alignment Produces*

This transformation illustrates the power of unified board and superintendent leadership grounded in confidence, effective practices, and sustainable protocols.

50M



## Leadership Corner

No matter your role in the district, **your practices will expose your belief system.** What you do reveals what you believe about students, staff, and the possibilities for achievement.

## Leadership Lesson

Confidence, *belief*, commitment, focus, strategy, and effort lead to achievement.

# STOP CANCELING THEIR FUTURE

Limiting Beliefs

Negative Labeling

Discouraging Innovation

Ignoring Growth





## Leadership Lesson: The Principle

**Build them up; don't break them down.**

Belief drives behavior ➡ culture ➡ performance ➡ results

When we build people up—students, staff, and community members—we create cultures of excellence where everyone can thrive and contribute their best.

# LET THEM SPEAK: Students' Voices Matter

What Can I Do to  
Be the Best  
Superintendent  
Ever?



# Listen Before Leading

## Leadership Lesson

You cannot serve a community that you have not heard from.

## Voice Matters

Listening must precede leading if we want to create sustainable, meaningful change.





# "YOU'RE A LIAR!"

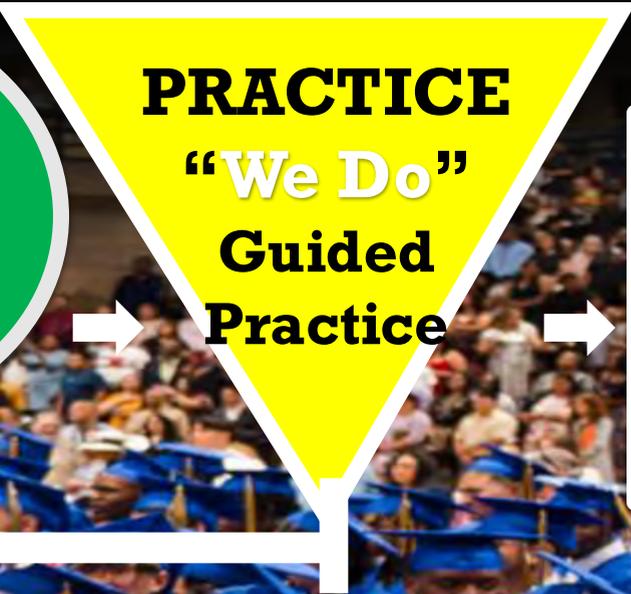
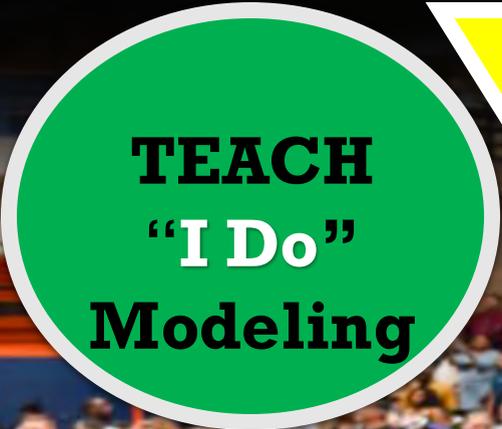
- Listening Tour
- 400 Porch Talks
- Protocols for Respect
- Collaborative Village



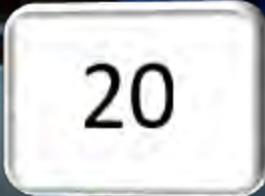
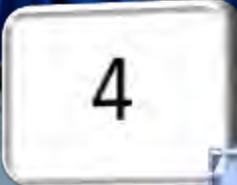
## Leadership Lesson

# It Takes a Village to Educate the Future

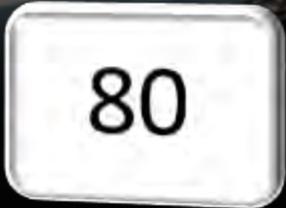
No superintendent, no board, no individual leader can transform a district alone.



**3 B's**



• Per Week

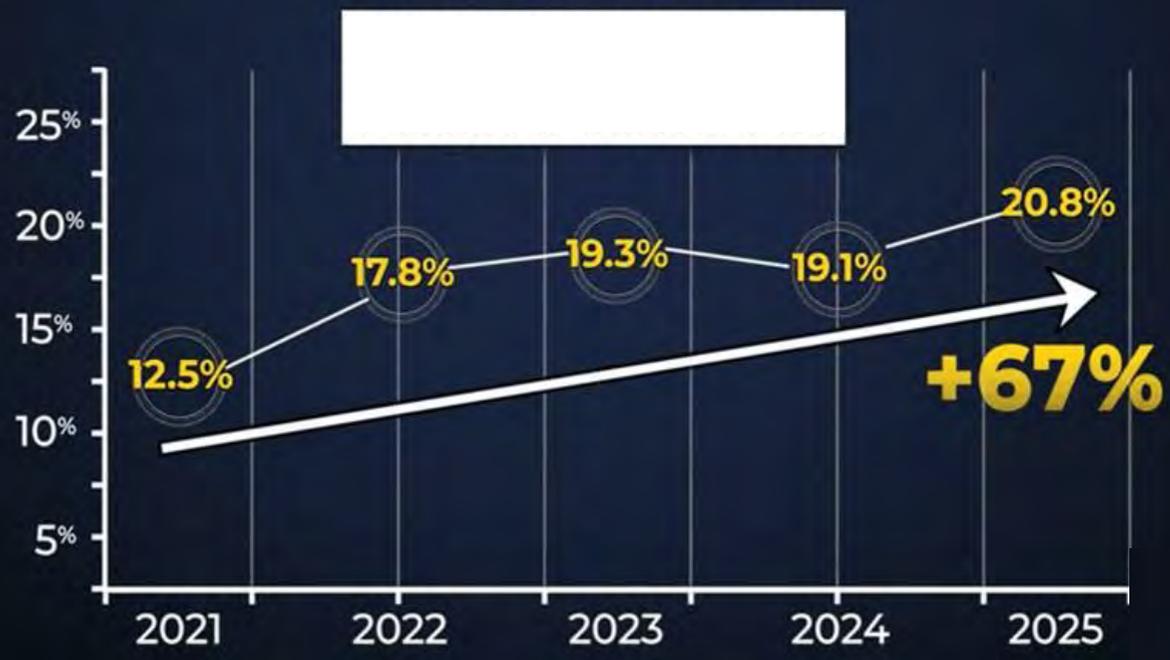


• Per Month

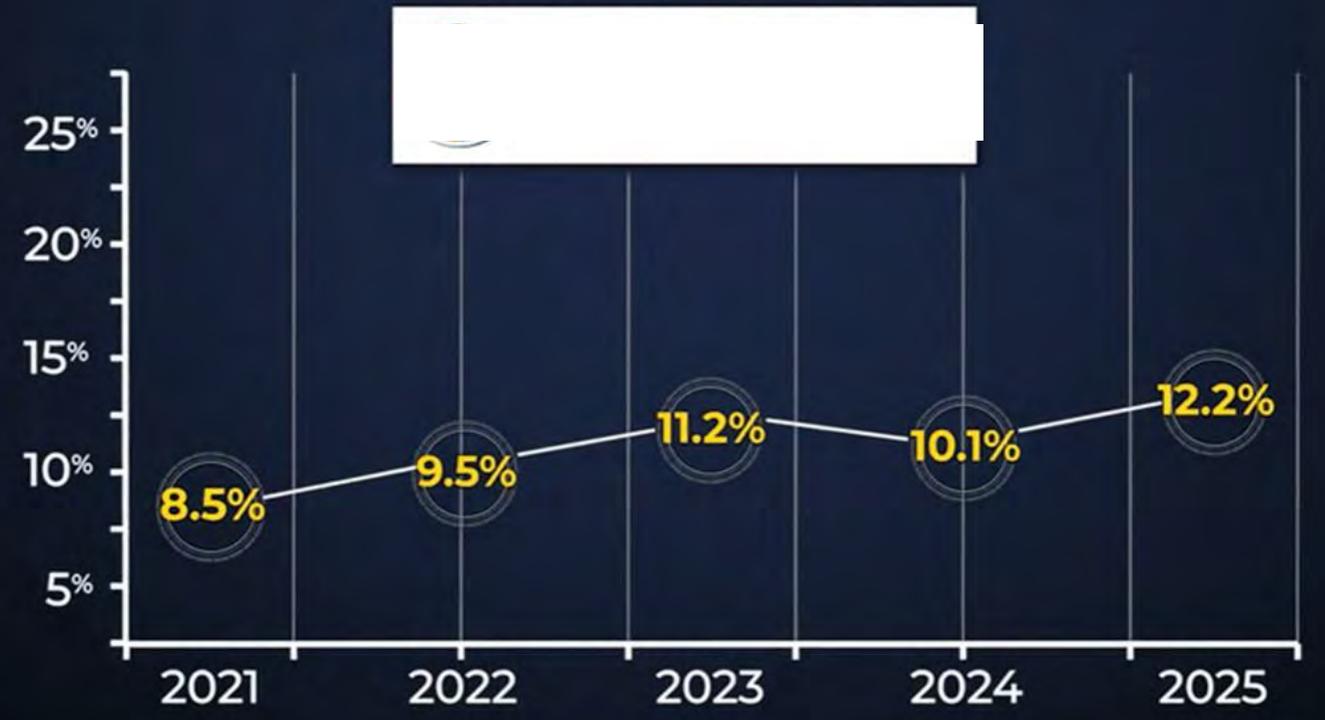


**50% of Your Day**

# HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT RATES



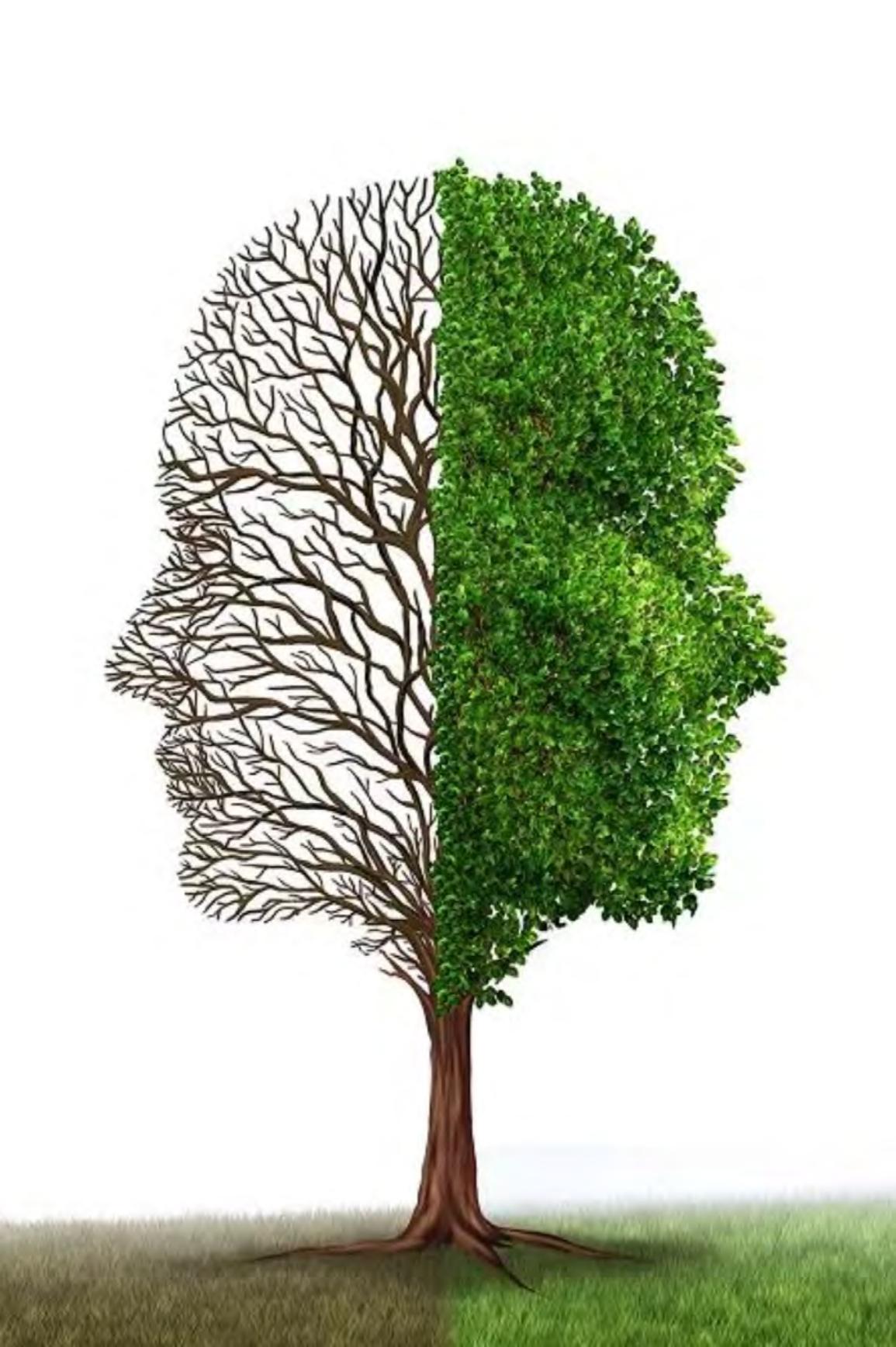
# HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT RATES



"focusing on instructional quality"

"expanding credit recovery options"





# Growth Mindset - Carol Dweck



## Fixed Mindset

Intelligence is static



## Growth Mindset

Intelligence can be developed



## Impact

Cultivating belief in possibility

Belief drives behavior → culture → performance → results



# THE FINAL 5—GRADUATION PROTOCOL

1.  
Acceptable  
GPA

2.  
SAT/ACT

3.  
Acceptable  
Attendance  
& Behavior

4.  
Community  
Service  
Hours

5.  
Apply to  
College

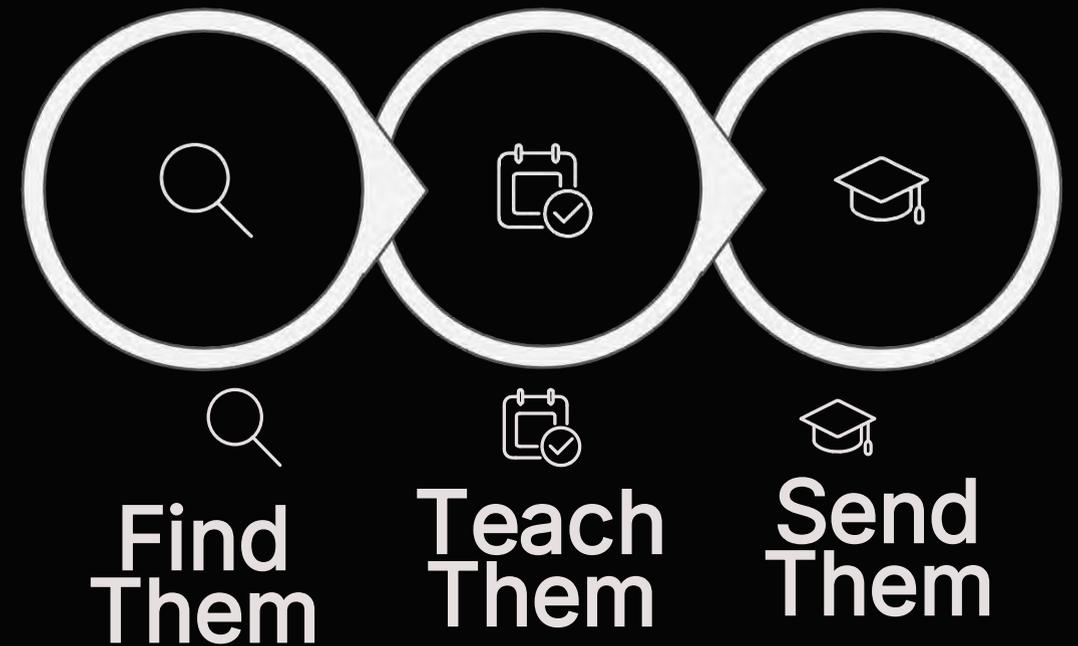
## Staff Effectiveness Is Everyone's Work

*Systemic Accountability*

Distributed Responsibility Drives Results



# The Graduation Rate Is In The Palm of Everyone's Hand



Graduation success results from intentional systems and shared responsibility.

# Graduation Rate Growth

Roosevelt's Transformation —  
The Power of Belief in Every Student

Student Group	Before	After	Growth
All Students	71.9%	86.4%	+14.5%
African-American Students	78.6%	89.8%	+11.2%

Hispanic Students    64.2%                      83.9%                      +19.7%



These improvements reflected the district's commitment to a growth mindset and **belief** in every student's potential.



Measurable  
Outcomes of  
Unified Leadership

**Roosevelt stopped chasing compliance and designed for confidence.**



The Roosevelt Union Free School District has been named a National School Boards Association (NSBA) 2024 Magna Award winner.

Members of the Board and our Superintendent of Schools will attend the NSBA conference from April 6-8 to accept the prestigious award.

## ROOSEVELT UFSD LEADERSHIP



Mrs. Rose  
Gietschier

*Board President*



Mrs. Charlena  
Crouch

*Board VP*



Mrs. Belinda  
Monroe

*Trustee*



Dr. Emily  
Moore

*Trustee*



Dr. Deborah  
Wortham

*Superintendent*





# Leadership Corner: Early Intervention

## The Misconception

Many believe students drop out in 9th grade.

## The Facts

By 2nd grade, students have decided to drop out or disengage.

## Leadership Impact

The graduation rate reflects the power of leaders to cultivate relationships, collaborate across departments, and influence systems from the earliest grades.



**PROTECTING THE ATMOSPHERE**



# Organizational Energy and Staff Performance

Physical Impact

Professional  
Performance

Workplace  
Atmosphere

Teacher Wellbeing

Lesson Planning



# Vitalizers: Energy, Common Language

Energy, Language, and Leadership Signals

## ☐ Calling the Atmosphere to Order

Leaders must cultivate positive energy, establish a common language that reinforces shared values, and create momentum that lifts everyone.



# TO PROTECT THE ATMOSPHERE, WE MUST:

## 1. Protect the Peace

Systemic positive beliefs

## 2. Protect the Place

Embrace the "3-B Strategy"

## 3. Protect Proficiency

Aligning Expectations

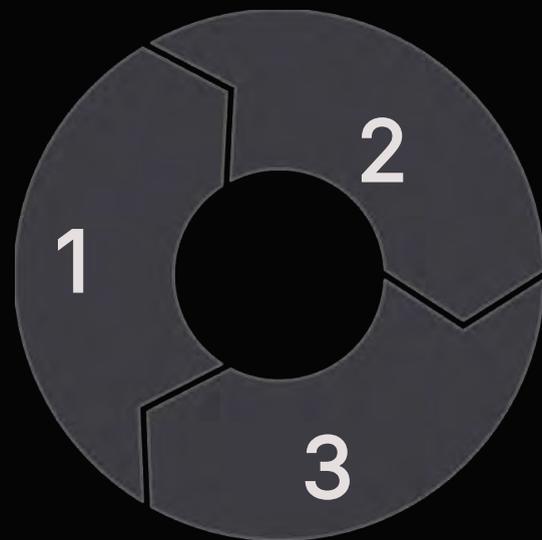
**Stabilizing the Conditions for Staff Excellence**

**75M**

# Leadership Lesson: Notice, Fix, Protect

Intervention Before Institutional Decline

1. Notice  
See what others overlook



2. Fix  
Act before it spreads

3. Protect  
Guard the atmosphere



# Knowing Your "Why"



**Your Purpose Guides Your Path**

**Your "why" cuts through confusion and directs every decision.**

**Embrace Opposition**

**Opposition means you are a threat to progress.**

**Resistance means you're challenging the system.**



# Confidence and Your Why: Your Leadership Superpowers

## Purpose & Foundation

Purpose creates a vision for what's possible.

## Action

Vision inspires & turns ideas into reality.

## Vision & Destiny

Action fulfills destiny.



# You Are Called to Pour Out

Pour Out Confidence



Pour Out Wisdom



Pour Out Love



**Boards set the Belief.**

**Superintendents set the Direction.**

**Together – you set the Atmosphere.**

As a leader, your calling is to be a vessel of transformation, pouring out what is in you to fill others with confidence, competence, and hope.

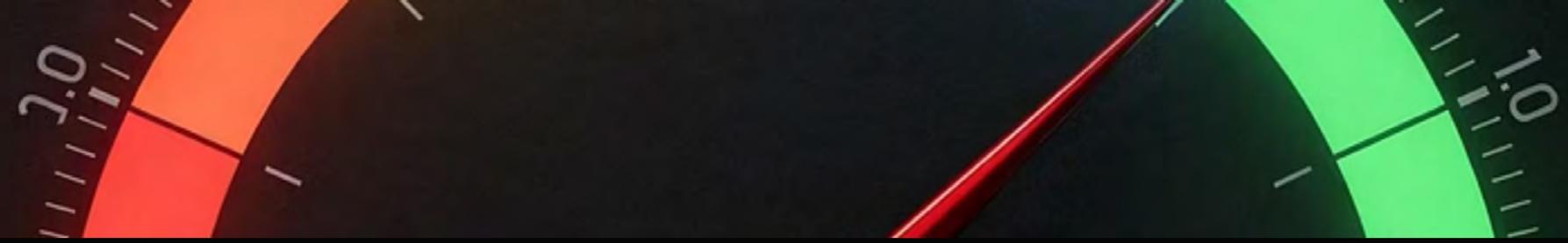
# YOU ARE CALLED TO SET THE ATMOSPHERE

The Responsibility of Leadership Alignment



**Highly effective staff are not found – they are formed.**

They are formed in atmospheres where belief is operational, practices are disciplined, and protocols are protected.



# Barometer of Achievement

## A Year's Worth of Growth for a Year in School — John Hattie

1.57

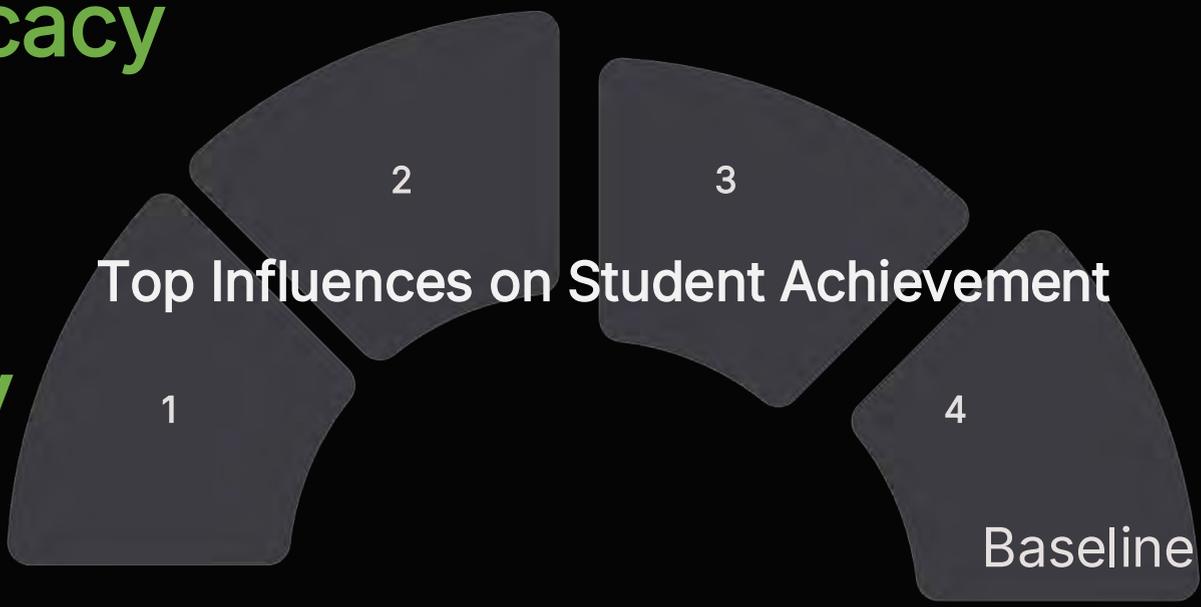
### Collective Teacher Efficacy

The #1 ranked influence on student achievement

0.75

### Teacher Clarity

Clear learning intentions and success criteria



### Zone of Desired Effects

$d = 0.40+$  Practices that accelerate learning beyond one year's growth

0.40

### The Hinge Point

Baseline for one year's expected growth

0.72

### Teacher-Student Relationships

Positive, trusting classroom connections

🎯 The Hinge Point:  $d = 0.40$

An effect size of **0.40** represents one year's growth for one year in school. Anything above **0.40** means students are learning at an **accelerated rate**.

Source: Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement*.

# Teacher Clarity Moves the Needle

ELA/Math Modules — John Hattie's Visible Learning

"When teachers are clear about what students need to learn, how they'll learn it, and what success looks like — achievement accelerates."

0.75

Teacher Clarity Effect Size



Success Criteria	Description
Clarity of learning intentions	Students know what they are to learn and why.
Clarity of success criteria	Students know what good work looks like and how to achieve it.
Clarity of learning activities	Students know how to learn and what to do.
Clarity of assessment	Students know how they will be assessed and what is expected of them.
Clarity of feedback	Students know how to improve their work and what to do next.

Success Criteria

HOW

0.40

Hinge Point



Learning Intentions

WHAT

1,500+

Meta-Analyses Synthesized



Relevant Experiences

WHY

Clarity is the bridge between teaching and learning.  
When we are clear, students achieve.

## Barometer of Achievement



Teacher Clarity:  $d = 0.75$

# Teacher-Student Relationships Move the Needle

The Model of Engagement — John Hattie's Visible Learning

"Students don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. Relationships are the foundation of engagement and achievement."

**0.72**

Teacher-Student Relationships

Effect Size

**0.48**

Student Engagement

Effect Size

**0.40**

Hinge Point

1 year's growth for 1 year in school

- Trust & Safety
- Belonging & Connection
- High Expectations with Support
- Feedback & Dialogue

**Relationships are not soft skills — they are the hardest, most impactful work we do. They move the needle.**

## Barometer of Achievement



Teacher-Student Relationships:  $d = 0.72$





# Collective Teacher Efficacy

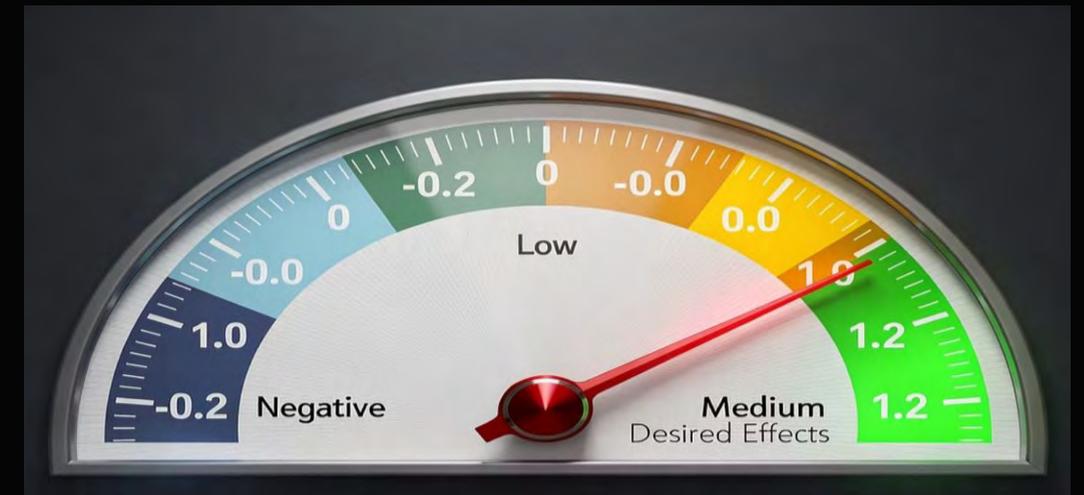
The #1 Factor Influencing Student Achievement — John Hattie

"The collective belief of teachers in their capacity to positively affect students."  
— Bandura, 1997

Effect Size: 1.57 — Nearly 4x the hinge point of 0.40

## Sources of Collective Efficacy

- Mastery Experiences
- Vicarious Experiences
- Social Persuasion
- Affective States



Collective Teacher Efficacy is the Needle Mover

"When teachers collectively believe they can make a difference, they do."

LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

## A Call to Superintendents & School Board Members

*Superintendents and school board members play a pivotal role in shaping your district's educational landscape.*

*Your unified leadership, grounded in faith and vision, is the driving force behind transformation.*

- Beliefs drive adult behavior.
- Adult behavior drives culture.
- Culture drives staff performance.
- Staff performance drives student outcomes.

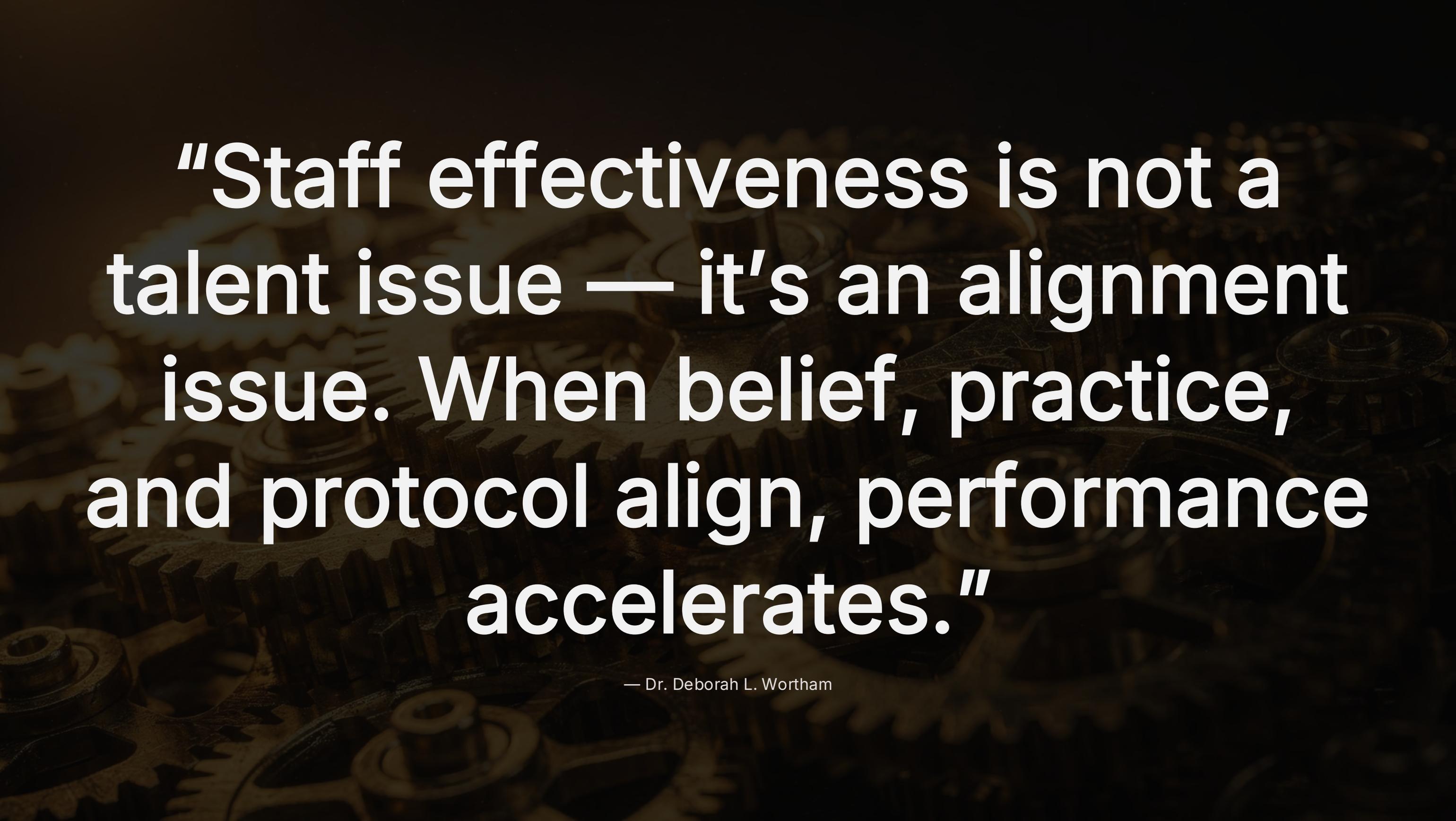
**You are the thermostat, not the thermometer.**  
You set the temperature for an entire district.

**Unity between the board and superintendent is essential for district transformation.**



85M





**“Staff effectiveness is not a talent issue — it’s an alignment issue. When belief, practice, and protocol align, performance accelerates.”**

— Dr. Deborah L. Wortham

Leadership sets the  
atmosphere. The  
atmosphere determines  
what adults believe is  
possible.

— Dr. Deborah L. Wortham



# Leadership for Developing Highly Effective Staff:

## Setting the Atmosphere Through Beliefs, Practices, and Protocols

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