

Beyond Boundaries: Transforming Postsecondary Readiness Through Developmental Networks

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OneGoal

This interactive case study presentation will explore the transformative power of developmental networks in education. By examining the OneGoal Leadership Network's implementation at Barren County High School, we will illustrate how intentional mentorship, external leadership coaching, and communities of practice can revolutionize postsecondary readiness. The presentation will engage participants through a narrative approach, highlighting the strategic interventions that catalyzed systemic change and improved student outcomes. This case study synthesizes sociocultural learning theory, developmental network theory, and organizational change scholarship to examine postsecondary leadership development. Drawing from Bandura's social cognitive theory, Wenger's communities of practice, and the OneGoal Leadership Network's three-tiered framework of strengthening capacity, building efficacy, and enacting will, we explore how collaborative Leadership Networks transform educational systems. The research illuminates the interconnected dynamics of mentorship, collective efficacy, and systemic improvement in K-12 contexts. Barren County High School demonstrated a strong educational foundation with committed leadership and promising student outcomes. The OneGoal Leadership Network aimed to elevate an already effective system, introducing sophisticated developmental strategies to optimize institutional performance further. Through targeted external leadership coaching, intentional mentorship programs, and strategic professional learning communities, the initiative refined existing strengths. The school's robust educational culture provided an ideal environment for sophisticated, nuanced network-based interventions. Results demonstrated significant organizational transformation: leadership team capacity expanded, teacher engagement in advisory models increased, and student postsecondary indicators improved markedly. Key outcomes included increased aligned advising, enhanced leadership team collaboration, and more robust advisory structures. The case study reveals the potential of developmental networks to create sustainable change, emphasizing the reciprocal relationship between institutional support, mentorship, and individual wellbeing in educational contexts.

Keywords: Developmental networks, postsecondary readiness, leadership development, mentorship, educational change

Introduction

Postsecondary readiness remains a persistent challenge in rural school systems, where resources are limited and systemic barriers often hinder transformative progress. While many interventions target students directly, fewer initiatives focus on cultivating the adult leadership and systems required to sustain long-term impact. This case study of Barren County High School examines how strategic leadership development through the OneGoal Leadership Network presents a promising approach to enhancing postsecondary outcomes. The OneGoal Leadership Network centers its support on a developmental network model, prioritizing mentorship, external coaching, and communities of practice. These strategies aim to build the internal capacity, efficacy, and willpower of educational leaders and systems. Drawing on the Leadership Development framework (Ritter Rickels et al., 2024), this case examines the

catalytic power of adult learning ecosystems and networked leadership models.

By focusing on adult development, this intervention challenges the common assumption that only student-facing efforts yield measurable improvements. Instead, it asserts that empowering educators through relational learning, continuous coaching, and shared leadership strengthens their ability to implement and sustain reforms that directly impact students. This study shifts the unit of change from individual classrooms to leadership systems, embracing a more holistic, networked approach to improving postsecondary readiness, particularly in contexts where isolation, role strain, and scarce resources are prevalent.

Literature Review

Conceptual Framework

This study draws on three foundational theoretical perspectives to conceptualize

leadership development through developmental networks: Bandura's (1997) Social Cognitive Theory, Wenger's (1998) Communities of Practice, and the Leadership Development framework (Ritter Rickels et al., 2024). Together, these theories provide a comprehensive lens for understanding how adult learning ecosystems can foster systemic change in educational leadership and postsecondary readiness.

Social Cognitive Theory

Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory emphasizes the reciprocal interactions between individuals, their behaviors, and their environments. Central to this theory is the concept of self-efficacy, or one's belief in their ability to effect change. This framework supports the intervention's focus on enhancing leaders' confidence and motivation through mentorship and coaching, which serve as mechanisms for observational learning and reinforcement.

Communities of Practice

Wenger's (1998) concept of communities of practice highlights the importance of social learning within groups sharing a common domain of interest. These communities facilitate knowledge sharing, mutual engagement, and the development of collective identity. Within the intervention, communities of practice provide a supportive environment where educational leaders collaboratively reflect, problem-solve, and innovate, strengthening relational ties and shared leadership capacity.

Leadership Development Framework

Building on these foundations, the leadership development framework (Ritter Rickels et al., 2024) integrates mentorship, external coaching, and networked learning as critical components that foster adult leadership capacity. This model underscores the role of developmental networks in mitigating isolation and role strain often experienced by rural educators, positioning relational learning as a catalyst for sustained change.

Together, these theories construct a comprehensive foundation for understanding how adult learning can drive system-wide educational change. They collectively illustrate that sustainable transformation arises not solely from technical interventions but from the development of human capital through relational, cognitive, and motivational growth. By embedding these theoretical constructs within real-world school leadership practices, this case study explores how integrated, theory-informed networks can be harnessed to improve postsecondary readiness and build resilient educational ecosystems.

Leadership Development

Leadership development is a cornerstone of effective school improvement efforts, yet it is frequently underfunded or deprioritized in favor of more immediate, student-facing initiatives (Grissom et al., 2021). Research indicates that school leaders, particularly principals, play a crucial role in shaping school climate, promoting academic achievement, and enhancing postsecondary outcomes (Malin & Hackmann, 2017; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012). These outcomes are mediated through leaders' ability to build strong instructional cultures, manage complex organizations, and foster collaborative relationships (Tingle et al., 2019).

The concept of developmental networks expands the focus from individual mentoring relationships to interconnected webs of support that include peers, supervisors, and external experts (Dobrow et al., 2012). Such networks can cultivate both instrumental knowledge and psychosocial support, which together contribute to increased leadership efficacy and adaptive expertise (Dugan, 2017). These relationships are often multidirectional and mutually beneficial, fostering a culture of trust and shared accountability. Unlike traditional mentorship models that rely on hierarchical, one-to-one relationships, developmental networks promote a dynamic exchange of learning across different roles and contexts, enabling leaders to draw on a broader range of experiences and perspectives, thereby supporting their growth as reflective practitioners and strategic decision-makers. In school settings, these networks can serve as buffers against burnout and professional isolation, while also creating collaborative spaces for problem-solving and innovation that directly impact student outcomes.

Additionally, educational researchers argue that communities of practice serve as vital sites of professional learning where shared norms, collective inquiry, and co-construction of knowledge occur (Wenger, 1998). These communities enable leaders to process complex changes, align on shared goals, and distribute leadership across systems (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2020). This is particularly important for educators in under-resourced or rural settings, where access to formal professional learning is often limited, and where distributed expertise and collective problem-solving can help fill critical gaps in infrastructure, capacity, and innovation.

Finally, investment in leadership capacity is linked to long-term sustainability and systemic wellbeing. The Leadership Development framework synthesizes these perspectives by demonstrating how capacity, efficacy, and will interact as key drivers of school improvement and equity-centered leadership (Ritter Rickels et al., 2024). When school systems invest in these

elements through structured Leadership Networks, they enable both individual and collective transformation.

Methods

This case study draws on qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews with school leaders, counselors, and teachers; observational notes from coaching sessions; and school documents, including advisory lesson plans, postsecondary tracking tools, and meeting agendas. Additionally, open-ended response survey questions captured participants' reflections on leadership shifts, collaboration, and student support. Data sources were triangulated to ensure credibility and depth, offering a multi-perspective understanding of the intervention's implementation and outcomes.

A narrative analysis approach was used to synthesize emergent themes, particularly those reflecting organizational change, leadership capacity, and student impact. Themes were coded inductively and organized around the theoretical constructs of the Leadership Development framework: capacity, efficacy, and will. This approach allowed for a layered interpretation of how developmental networks functioned within the specific cultural and institutional context of Barren County High School.

Results

The OneGoal Leadership Network at Barren County High School centered on three interconnected strategies: external coaching, intentional mentorship structures, and cross-institutional communities of practice. These were not standalone elements but rather components of a cohesive developmental network that aligned directly with the Leadership Development framework: building capacity, strengthening efficacy, and enacting will across the school community.

1. **External Coaching:** A dedicated leadership coach partnered with the school's administrative team to facilitate goal-setting, model inquiry-driven improvement cycles, and cultivate habits of shared leadership. These coaching sessions provided real-time, differentiated support, enhancing the strategic coherence of the leadership team.
2. **Mentorship Structures:** Advisory programs were restructured to embed meaningful mentorship, equipping teachers with tools and protocols for one-on-one and small-group conversations grounded in student aspirations. Staff received professional learning that increased both the technical skills and relational confidence needed to serve as effective postsecondary advisors.
3. **Communities of Practice:** Biannual convenings provided spaces for educators within Barren County and peer districts to reflect, share best practices, and collaboratively problem-

solve persistent challenges. These gatherings emphasized collective efficacy, mutual learning, and the distribution of leadership responsibilities among participants.

Each of these strategies served as an entry point for enacting the core tenets of the Leadership Development framework:

- Capacity was cultivated through professional learning on advising systems, improvement science, and student data use.
- Efficacy was built as educators witnessed tangible improvements in their practice and student engagement.
- Will emerged through a culture of shared ownership, strategic alignment, and relational accountability.

Together, these efforts produced measurable outcomes and qualitative shifts in school culture. Leadership team meetings evolved from compliance-driven checklists to rich, data-informed planning sessions. Advisory participation expanded in both reach and depth, as more students engaged in goal-aligned, personalized advising. Internal surveys reflected a growing confidence among educators in discussing postsecondary pathways, and student-level indicators, including transition readiness, graduation rates, and postsecondary plan documentation, showed year-over-year improvements within the 3-year engagement period.

Educators reported a renewed sense of purpose and cohesion, expressing that the developmental network not only improved systems but also humanized the work of postsecondary readiness. The integration of coaching, mentorship, and peer collaboration served as a lever for sustainable transformation, with ripple effects across both adult practice and student outcomes.

Discussion

This case highlights the power of developmental networks to transform educational ecosystems by strengthening adult learning and leadership. The Barren County implementation illustrates that even in well-functioning schools, developmental networks can activate more profound coherence, shared ownership, and sustainable improvement. The OneGoal Leadership Network's model is especially effective in rural contexts, where isolation and role redundancy often limit leadership development. By integrating external support with internal collaboration, the network expands access to high-quality professional learning and reduces the fragmentation that can occur in siloed systems. It creates a bridge between individualized leadership growth and collective institutional advancement.

These findings affirm existing research on leadership efficacy, distributed leadership, and high-impact mentoring. The integration of Bandura's concept of self-efficacy, Wenger's concept of communities of practice, and the leadership development framework of capacity, efficacy, and will provides a compelling theory of

action for educational transformation. The case not only validates these theoretical underpinnings but also offers practical evidence that when educational leaders are equipped with the right support networks, they are better positioned to foster postsecondary readiness cultures.

What is especially striking is the ripple effect observed: as leaders grew in confidence and clarity, their teams followed suit. Teachers began to see themselves as agents of postsecondary success, not just academic instruction. Advisory structures became more intentional, postsecondary plans more robust, and the overall culture more cohesive. This transformation was not the result of a single intervention but rather the cumulative outcome of a networked ecosystem designed for adult learning, collaboration, and shared accountability. By humanizing the systems of support and embedding leadership development in the daily fabric of school life, the Non-profit model offers a replicable and scalable strategy. This is particularly crucial in today's climate, where educational institutions must address equity, resource scarcity, and workforce readiness simultaneously. The developmental network approach demonstrates that investing in adult learning is not a tradeoff from student-centered goals—it is the very mechanism through which those goals become sustainable realities.

Limitations

While the findings from the Barren County case study offer promising insights, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the context-specific nature of this implementation limits the generalizability of the results. Barren County's existing conditions, such as strong baseline leadership and district support, may not be present in all rural settings. Therefore, the outcomes may not be replicable without similar foundational assets. Second, as a single case study, the data are necessarily limited in scope and may reflect localized dynamics or selection bias. Third, the evaluation relies heavily on qualitative observations and self-reported perceptions, which, while valuable, may introduce subjectivity and limit causal claims. Finally, the long-term sustainability and impact of the developmental network on student outcomes remain to be seen and warrant further longitudinal study. These limitations suggest the need for additional research across diverse contexts to better understand the mechanisms, scalability, and durability of network-based leadership development models.

Conclusion

The case study of Barren County High School highlights a transformative approach to postsecondary readiness that transcends traditional interventions focused solely on student-facing strategies. By centering the development of educational leaders through the OneGoal

Leadership Network, this study underscores the profound impact that developmental networks can have on systemic change. The intentional focus on mentorship, external coaching, and communities of practice created an interconnected ecosystem that empowered school leaders and educators, ultimately leading to improved student outcomes. At its core, the Barren County initiative demonstrates that the pathway to enhanced postsecondary readiness is as much about cultivating the capacity, efficacy, and will of educators as it is about directly supporting students. The Leadership Development framework (Ritter Rickels et al., 2023) effectively guided the intervention, highlighting that leadership capacity is built not only through skill development but also through relational, motivational, and cognitive growth. This framework ensured that the Leadership Network was not just a series of isolated activities but a cohesive, sustainable model for continuous improvement.

The results from Barren County provide compelling evidence that leadership development through developmental networks is not only effective in rural contexts but is scalable and adaptable to other educational settings. By embedding a culture of shared leadership and continuous professional learning, the intervention strengthened institutional coherence and established a foundation for lasting change. As school leaders experienced increased confidence in their roles, they created a ripple effect that empowered their teams, resulting in stronger advisory structures, enhanced teacher engagement, and a more supportive school environment for students. This relational growth translated directly into improved student outcomes, including higher FAFSA completion rates and better alignment of students' postsecondary plans.

Moreover, the integration of external coaching, mentorship, and peer collaboration alleviated the isolation often experienced by rural educators, creating a robust network of support that promoted collective efficacy. This model effectively challenges the assumption that system-wide change can only be achieved through direct student interventions. Instead, it positions educators as central agents of transformation, capable of driving the success of their students by fostering a collaborative, growth-oriented leadership culture. The reciprocal nature of the developmental network model, where leaders support one another and engage in mutual learning, is a critical factor in sustaining educational improvement.

Looking forward, this case study offers valuable insights for other schools, particularly in rural and resource-constrained areas, that seek to address postsecondary readiness. As we continue to navigate the complexities of equity, resource scarcity, and systemic change, the findings from Barren County High School offer a clear message: sustainable improvements in postsecondary outcomes are best achieved when Leadership Networks are prioritized, supported, and developed as key drivers of systemic change. In

a world where educational systems must adapt rapidly to new challenges and opportunities, investing in the development of educators and leaders through collaborative networks provides a long-term, scalable, and effective solution to enhancing postsecondary readiness.

Ultimately, the OneGoal Leadership Network's model of developmental networks exemplifies the power of relational, collaborative, and networked leadership in transforming educational ecosystems. By focusing on adult learning, empowerment, and shared accountability, this intervention does more than improve postsecondary readiness; it sets the stage for the ongoing success and sustainability of educational practices that are deeply rooted in equity, collaboration, and collective impact.

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