



# FINDING “WHAT STICKS”

## Andy Hargreaves and Sustainable Leadership

Fueled by bananas and armed with a dry British wit, Andy Hargreaves travels the globe to talk about leadership and educational change that lasts. Hargreaves, the Thomas More Brennan Chair in the Lynch School of Education at Boston College, has authored or edited more than two dozen books that have been translated into a dozen languages. He also serves as editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Educational Change*.

Hargreaves’s latest work on sustainable leadership brought him to Portland this fall to address representatives from 15 Oregon school districts involved in the State Action for Education Leadership Project. The project, funded by the Wallace Foundation, is part of a national effort to increase student achievement by strengthening the performance of education leaders.

While in Portland, Hargreaves talked to *Northwest Education* about the elements of education sustainability, the pitfalls of No Child Left Behind, and the lessons to be learned from our global neighbors.

**Q.** *A lot of people talk about the challenge of sustaining reform and describe it as continuing innovations over time. Your definition of sustainability goes beyond duration. Why?*

Most people use it [sustainability] to describe persistence over time or cheap, prudent, and efficient strategies using minimal resources. Both are important. But, we wanted to understand what happens to change when people have experienced multiple changes simultaneously over time. Our investigations of long-term change focus on more than 30 years in eight secondary schools in Canada and the U.S., as seen through the eyes of 300 teachers who’ve worked in those schools from the 1970s to the present. We looked at what stuck, what didn’t, and what made the difference.

What we found running through the data were student demographics, teacher demographics, and leadership demographics, and how these were affected by waves of reform coming into the school that were simultaneous and contradictory. One thing we discovered is that in the last 10 years there’s been more interconnectedness: What happens in one school affects what happens in the schools around it.

We read everything we could in environmental policy—where the concept of sustainability first emerged—and we looked at business literature, connecting those two strands to research on how change gets embedded into people’s practice. Through that, we came up with seven principles of sustainable leadership (see sidebar at right).

*You’ve asserted that those seven principles are “a meal, not a menu.” With the pressures of No Child Left Behind, how hard is it for leaders to resist taking shortcuts or going for the quick fix?*

It’s enormously hard. AYP and NCLB are shot through with unsustainability. They make people think about the present, not the future or the past. It [AYP] is the gas-guzzling SUV of educational policy. At the same time, what preceded NCLB was so long term that when teachers left or budgets shifted, all reform was lost. Our challenge with sustainability is how to meet deep, long-term goals driven with purpose but also have immediate, short-term lifts that show

you're making progress toward your goals. However, these goals have to be set collectively in a culture of urgency and hope, rather than one of compliance and fear.

It's essential that school boards, leaders, and teacher organizations work together for a more creative, innovative approach to responding effectively and transparently to the diverse needs of their communities. If they rush around panicking in response to meeting short-term, standards-based goals, they'll dig themselves deeper into an inescapable grave.

*What does the experience of other countries with standards-based goals tell us?*

It's clear that America is heading in a direction almost all countries have abandoned. The fact is that Wales abolished educational testing before age 14. England is reviewing and relaxing its National Literacy Targets because of problems with retention of teachers and leaders. Fullan is now advising Ontario [Canada] to pay attention to targets, but not forced ones.

So, America is going back to the future and most educators don't know this. The danger is that in 10–20 years, America will be less competitive internationally, both educationally and economically.

*Your leadership work with Oregon's State Action for Education Leadership Project is supported by the Wallace Foundation. Can others replicate this work without such resources?*

All projects need to think about how to sustain the work once the resources have disappeared. To do that, you need to invest in building awareness and understanding of the different stages of leadership—both among principals and teachers. This afternoon [at the institute in Portland] we'll develop a new staff development framework. Often, schools have one staff development plan for teachers and one for aspiring principals, but we're trying to connect them, developing a set of indicators of sustainability to be used in designing a staff development network. What we're trying to do is mainstream the idea of sustainability into the policies and practices. We'll know we've achieved that when sustainability is treated like gender equity with strategies that people have to pay attention to in a formal way and with cultural competency training that equips them to do so. ■

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## SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF SUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP

Andy Hargreaves and coauthor Dean Fink argue that “sustainability does not simply mean whether something can last. It addresses how particular initiatives can be developed without compromising the development of others in the surrounding environment, now and in the future.” In their recent book *Sustainable Leadership* (2006, Jossey-Bass/Wiley), the two researchers articulate seven principles of sustainability in educational change:

1. **Depth**—Sustainable leadership matters: It promotes the fundamental moral purpose of deep and broad learning.
  2. **Length**—Sustainable leadership lasts: It endures year after year, from one leader to the next.
  3. **Breadth**—Sustainable leadership spreads: It depends on the leadership of others.
  4. **Justice**—Sustainable leadership does not harm the surrounding environment: It doesn't raid other schools' outstanding teachers or students and doesn't prosper at their expense.
  5. **Diversity**—Sustainable leadership promotes diversity and cohesion: It avoids standardization.
  6. **Resourcefulness**—Sustainable leadership develops materials and human resources: It doesn't deplete them by wasting money or people's time.
  7. **Conservation**—Sustainable leadership honors the past in creating the future: It considers organizational memories and “the wisdom of memory bearers.”
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 School Leaders on Staff Development