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DATE: 12/15/00
TO: (name) Jerry Weast

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MESSAGE:

TRIAGING TIME FOR REFLECTION

Jerry-

At the end of yesterday's meeting I said I'd like to offer a process to take advantage of the new *space for thinking* you began to create there. As always, the *timing* is important if you are going to sustain momentum, as is *time* as a factor in reflection.

Before I address the connection between those two critical factors, I feel the need to say that this is not just another one of my "*out-of-the-box-20,000 foot*" ideas. It's an area in which I have had "inside-the-box" interest and accountabilities for many years. Starting with operating and studying a network like this for the US Dept. of Education in the early 80's; facilitating a network of principals for Apple's *Classroom of Tomorrow*, serving on the advisory board of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting's *Learning Link* during the same period; and then as the internet and easy access to email and listserves developed, taking part in, and eventually facilitating some, on-line focused discussions with and for people involved with leadership issues, organizational development, and quality management in education. One of my last experiences was right here in MCPS where last year I created and facilitated an on-line Learning Loop for a MCPS course on Coaching that I co-led. [see attachment.]

My reason for the bio here is to add validity to the one critical learning emerging from those experiences. There are a lot of sound and wonderful reasons to network and interact with others that this medium makes possible right now, but in this 24/7 world, time to do it is the controlling factor. But there is one exception. Purpose overrides it. If the reason to spend the time in the interaction is strong enough, we find time. And it's even better when these purposes are driven both intrinsically and extrinsically -- i.e., it contributes to our personal, and the organization's, learning.

So back on the ground, in the MCPS "box," you've created a situation with both those necessary dimensions. You gave them a taste of the process yesterday, and stated that you want to continue providing opportunities for ExecStaff reflection like that during your weekly two-hour meeting in the future. In fact, you indicated you and they need it if you are going to figure out what the "common map" of the MCPS territory looks like.

Even if my head is in the "clouds," it's hard to believe that you'll be able to continue to find time for that within meetings that start with full agendas and carry-over items

from the past. But you also have, through OGAT, the technical capacity to create a closed on-line conference.

Here's how it might work, with a suggested starter topic as catalyst.

Purpose: Explore the implications of Elmore's new paper "*Building a New Structure for School Leadership*" for MCPS's structure and processes.

The paper is being referenced respectfully all over the place. The issue blocking most discussions is how to translate it into everyday practice without first changing preparation programs, policies, etc.

1. You distribute copies at a meeting. (You might also want to offer a list of questions I've developed that could serve as an advance organizer for their thinking about MCPS relevance while reading it.)

2. At the following meeting, you ask for general reactions and thoughts, and identify particularly strong tracks for further discussion on-line. You might want to see who wants to participate actively in each one, but that isn't necessary. No one has to contribute, but the all have to check in and read what's there at least twice a week.

3. You may want to have someone summarize the discussion at your meetings, but again my sense is that if this is effective, the "results" will begin to appear in the content of what they contribute to other action items on your agenda.

4. Another learning I've taken away from my experiences is that this form of continuing discussion (like any meeting) is more effective if facilitated.

5. If this were in place, wouldn't this be a perfect example of how a relationship with MCPS might add value to Marla Ucelli's "School Communities that Work" and vice-versa? They might offer one of their papers as discussion starter, and get it back enhanced by a 360° picture of its implications for a real system. And its author might even want to participate in the discussion thus giving MCPS access to an unique depth of knowledge.

If you feel these ideas have merit, and the timing requires it, I'd like to explore it in greater detail with those you think should be involved in setting it up. xxxxxx might be one, and xxxx another because this can serve as a model for knowledge development in learning communities-of-practice that could become a component of the *System of Shared Accountability*.