



IS IT A PEOPLE PROBLEM, OR A DESIGN PROBLEM?

A 10-question self-assessment for superintendents, executive directors, and school leaders

Schools produce what they are designed to produce. When outcomes persist year after year despite good people working hard, the honest question usually isn't "who isn't trying hard enough" — it's "what is the system currently designed to produce, and is that what we actually want?"

This isn't a diagnostic tool or a formal assessment — it's a set of honest questions to sit with. If several of these feel uncomfortably true, that's worth a real conversation, not a resolution to try harder next semester.

The Ten Questions

On Leadership

- ☐ When you're out of the building for a few days, does real decision-making meaningfully slow down?
- ☐ If your best assistant principal left tomorrow, would anyone else be able to do what they do?

On Adult Expertise

- ☐ Does instructional coaching happen on a deliberate sequence, or mostly in response to whatever a coach happened to notice that day?
- ☐ Could a new teacher describe, in one sentence, what "good" looks like in your building — or would they give you five different answers depending on who they asked?

On Teaching & Learning

- ☐ Does the rigor of instruction depend more on which classroom a student is assigned to than on any schoolwide standard?

On Evidence & Improvement

- ☐ When a result disappoints you, is the first instinct in the room to ask "who" before asking "what system produced this"?
- ☐ Do you find out about a real problem from a state report or an annual survey — or did you already know, because your own systems told you first?

On Trust

- ☐ Would families say they know how their child is doing right now, or only once a report card or state test tells them?

On Sustainability

- ☐ Has a strong improvement from a year or two ago quietly faded, without anyone being able to say exactly why?
- ☐ If your organization stopped relying on one or two exceptional individuals, would your current results hold?

What This Means

There's no score here, and that's intentional. But a rough guide:

A few honest yeses: normal. Every organization has real gaps. Worth naming them plainly.

Several yeses, especially across different sections: the pattern is usually not about any one person or one bad year. It's a sign the underlying systems were built for a different set of conditions than the ones you're actually operating in now.

If that's where you landed, the next step isn't a new initiative or a harder push on the people already working hard. It's an honest look at what your organization's systems are currently designed to produce — and a deliberate redesign of the ones that aren't serving you.

If several of these questions hit close to home, we'd welcome a conversation — no pressure, no pitch, just a chance to talk through what you're seeing. Reach out through edurizonconsulting.com.