NYSED Principal Evaluation Training Program

Day 1- Principal Evaluation Learning System

Session 1- Highly Effective Principals

Trainer’s Guidance

February 2012

v021412
February 8, 2012
Session 1: Highly Effective Leaders

This slide should be on as participants arrive.
Welcome the participants back from lunch.

This session is planned to run from 9:00 to 10:30.

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Day 1 Session 3: Principal Evaluation Learning System, Highly Effective Principals

Working Protocols

- Listen with respect so we can maximize learning from each other
- Avoid speaking over others - one voice at a time to ensure we are all heard
- Minimize distractions by leaving cell phone/iPad/laptop sound on silent
- Use electronics respectfully and appropriately when prompted
- Return to large group attention when signaled
- Recognize / share the wealth of experience, expertise and understanding among the group
- Respect confidentiality regarding specifics to encourage learning through openness and honesty
- Keep to time to respect our various commitments elsewhere
- Keep a note of queries and thoughts in a “Parking Lot”
- Record any points we disagree with in the “Parking Lot”

Use slide 4 to introduce the Aims and Objective of the session.

Aims and objectives of the session

By the end of the session participants will have a shared understanding of:

- The Keys to Organizational Effectiveness
- Different Leadership Styles
- The Principal’s key Leadership role
- How highly effective leaders make a difference
- The importance of creating a positive culture and developing trust between staff

Explain that the session draws on a wide range of what is widely recognized as amongst the leading research, from around the world, on Organizational Effectiveness as well as School Leadership; Effectiveness going back to the 1950s right up to the latest Wallace Foundation Report January 2012.

The next slide is a good example it references Thomas Peters, who with Robert Waterman co-authored In Search of Excellence (1982).
Key to effective organizations

Tom Peters, modern day ‘guru’ on effective organizations in response to the question:

- What is the key to effective organizations?

Reply:

- It’s Leadership stupid

He went on to add that while:

- A mediocre organization with good leadership is generally effective
- A superior organization with poor leadership is not

At this stage **pause** and pose the following three questions to the group:

1. What is a leader?
2. What is Leadership?
3. What makes a leader?

Spend a maximum of 3 minutes to obtain suggested answers from the group – you may wish to ask your co-trainer to chart the key words.

**Now show slide 6 which shows some of the key messages taken from research.**
Three Key questions?

1. What is a leader?
   - A person who rules, guides or inspires others
   - Having primary authority

2. What is leadership?
   (not defined in most dictionaries)
   - The will to control events, the understanding to chart a course, and the power to get the job done, cooperatively using the skills and abilities of other people

3. What makes a leader?
   - Belief that leadership comes from within.. it is a function of character, not an accident of birth or a prerogative of position

Having established a mutual understanding of these three key questions, use slides 7-9 to introduce The Changing Role of the Principal.

The main messages from these slides are that in the 1950s to 1980s principals always thought they were busy when they only had the 3 Bs to contend with.
In the 1990s, principals gained an increased role as initiative after initiative came in, but these were mainly one at a time.

Over the past 5-10 years, more and more initiatives have come into schools, but unlike previous years they now come in clusters of 3 or 4 at a time.

Hence, the role of principal is continually changing – but in particular the focus has now moved away from the 3 Bs to the role of Leading Learning.
Use slide 10 to introduce Activity 1 – Leaders you know well.

**Activity 1**

**Small groups**

- Think of leaders who you know well
- List 3 or 4 of the key features that made the difference between those you consider to be highly effective and the less effective leaders

Be prepared to share your reflections with the rest of the group.

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Use Slide 11 to introduce the concept of the Principal of the School Leader and the changes in style form the 1950s to 2012.

**The School Principal as Leader**

The traditional model for the principal resembled the **middle manager** suggested in William Whyte's 1950's classic *The Organization Man*:

- An overseer of buses, boilers and books.
- Today, a different conception has emerged – one closer to the model suggested by Jim Collins’ 2011 *Good to Great*
- A leader who focuses with great clarity on **what is essential, what needs to be done and how to get it done.**
Use Slide 12 to introduce the Principal’s Critical Leadership role (Wallace Foundation 2012).

The Principal’s Critical Leadership role

• The importance of the Principals’ leadership role is one of the clearest messages from school effectiveness research
• Most school variables, considered separately, have at most small effects on learning
• Real pay off comes when individual variables combine to reach a critical mass
• Creating the conditions under which that can occur is the job of the principal
• Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among school-related factors that affect student learning in school.

Since 2000, The Wallace Foundation has supported numerous research studies on school leadership and published more than 70 reports on the subject.
Models of Effectiveness

The next part of the session is designed to provide an overview and an introduction of a Model of Organizational Effectiveness.

Explain that the Models are based on the work of the Hay Group.

Over the last fifty years, Hay has studied organizations to determine what it takes to make organizations effective.

Stress that the intention is simply to give a big picture overview – we do not have the time to go into all he research and fine details.

The Hay Group Background:
Who or what is the Hay Group you might ask?

- Most of the participants will probably never of heard of the Hay Group but almost of all them will be familiar with the work of Daniel Goleman, who used Hay Group Research and published “Working with Emotional Intelligence.”
- The following is provided as background for trainers if participants want to know more details, refer them to the Hay Group website.
- The Hay Group is widely recognized as one of the world’s leading Management Consultants who have undertaken and applied research to both industry and education.
- In 1943, Edward N. Hay and Associates, Management Consultants, was established as a sole proprietorship in space rented from First Pennsylvania Bank. Its first major compensation project was with General Foods.

- In 1998 and 1999, on behalf of the U.K. Government, they also conducted in depth research into Highly Effective Headteachers (Principals) which became very influential in the Professional Development of School Leaders.
Use slide 13 to introduce: A Model of Leadership Effectiveness in schools.

**A Model of Leadership Effectiveness**

*Four key factors affecting the performance of a school*

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**Four key factors influence an organization’s effectiveness:**

1. **THE CONTEXT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT (CULTURE)**
   This is the most critical factor.
   It is a measure of how well the principal is leading or optimizing the contributions from the staff.

2. **LEADERSHIP STYLES**
   It is the principal’s styles of leadership that create the school’s context for improvement or the environment in which his or her staff work, which in turn has a direct impact on the staff’s ability to perform effectively.

The Leadership Styles are the patterns of behaviors used by the principal in the school.

3. **JOB REQUIREMENTS**
   One of the most important factors in deciding on appropriate leadership styles should be the nature of the situations which the principal has to deal with. The styles required to transform a failing school are not the same styles required to maintain and improve a successful school.

4. **INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS**
   The other most important factor in determining leadership effectiveness is the set of characteristics that principals bring to the job. If they do not match the job requirement, additional effort may be necessary to achieve success.

**Highly successful leaders have the right characteristics and a wide range of styles and know which style to use and when. This is the equivalent of playing a round of golf with a full set of golf clubs as opposed to trying to complete the round with only a driver.**
Introduction to slide 14

What has evolved from this work is the identification of **seven key variables** that account for organizational effectiveness.

A Model of Organizational Effectiveness

These seven variables represent the *organization’s interface with and reaction to the external environment*.

The variables address three areas:
- Adaptation
- Coordination
- Outcomes/Measures

**Adaptation:**
Adaptation is about a school’s ability to adjust to the changes in the external environment.

**There are two major variables: Strategy and Curriculum.**

The Strategy reflects *how the school plans to manage* its resources so that it can respond positively to opportunities in the community.

The Range of Curriculum (both formal and informal) offered is the concrete expression of the strategy and is *often changed in response to changing demands.*
Coordination:
There are three variables which address how a school responds to external factors.

1. An issue is whether the School Structure/Job Design/Policies are aligned with the Strategy. Is the school structured appropriately so that targets can be reached?

2. Supporting School Structure/Job Design/Policies are the Managerial practices. The question is whether or not the school has established management practices that translate the strategy into the appropriate Context for School Improvement (Culture). This is critical to successful implementation of the Strategy.

3. Central to all of this are the Characteristics of the Leadership Team. Research has shown that the effectiveness of the leadership team is largely driven by how well they work together rather than how good each of them are individually. Synergy matters.

Outcome:
As with Adaptation, there are two key outcome variables.

One is the so called ‘hard’ performance measures that the schools, districts and states traditionally use to define the performance, such as test and assessment results.

The second is the Contact for School Improvement (Culture) which is largely created by the leadership styles of the senior staff.

Given current demands, all schools will need to change to succeed or even to survive.

But how will schools react?

Use Slide 15 to introduce the fact that in reacting to changing demands historically many schools have focused entirely on changing structure.
This can be been described as the **Transactional Approach to Leadership**.

**Use slide 16** to highlight the key features of Transactional Leadership.

### Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership practices were the traditional focus of attention until the early 1980s

- An individual takes the initiative
- Fosters ongoing work by attending to the needs of the organizational members
- But this does little to bring about organizational change
While focusing on changing structures might be an appropriate response for short term success, the failure to reflect on changing management practices and styles of leadership often leads to long term failure.

70% of change programs fail because ‘the people’ dimension has not been addressed.

What will differentiate the best from the rest will be the leadership team’s ability to address all of the critical factors, to create synergy and a Context for School Improvement where the strategy becomes a reality not just a possibility.

Use slide 17 to focus on the other 4 key circles and introduce the concept of Transformational Leadership.

Use slide 18 to highlight the key features of Transformational Leadership in the context of a school.
Transformational Leadership

Six strategies used to develop collaborative school cultures:

- strengthen the school’s culture
- stimulate and reinforce cultural change through systemic processes
- foster staff development
- direct and frequent communication about cultural norms, values and beliefs
- share power and responsibility with others
- use symbols to express cultural values

It is referred to as Models and not Model – because different leaders have different strength is the difference ‘boxes’ and it’s their ability to lead and manage the team that is key.

Use slide 19 to highlight the importance of the principals’ role as the Leader of Learning.

Leader of Learning

Wallace’s work since 2000 suggests this entails five key responsibilities:

1. **Shaping a vision of academic success for all students**, based on high standards

2. **Creating a climate hospitable to education** in order that safety, a cooperative spirit and other foundations of fruitful interaction prevail

3. **Cultivating leadership in others**, so that teachers and other adults assume their part in realizing the school vision

4. **Improving instruction** to enable teachers to teach at their best and students to learn at their utmost

5. **Managing people, data and processes** to foster school improvement
Use slide 20 to introduce Activity 2.

**Activity 2: Five Key Responsibilities**

**Small groups**
Focus on **one** key responsibility:

- List sources of evidence which a principal’s supervisor should look for in order to be able to evaluate the principal’s effectiveness in fulfilling this responsibility
- Record this evidence for future sessions
- Share your findings with another group

**NB**
Ensure all participants have copy of the Wallace Report (see Appendix 1)

Use the next slide (21) to focus on one aspect of change which is impacting on all schools: Data Driven Implementation, monitoring and improvement.

**Data driven implementation, monitoring and improving**

**Transformational leadership through implementation of:**
- Common Core State Standards
- Data-Driven Instruction
- Teacher/Leadership Effectiveness: Evidence-Based Observation

**Successful Implementation through strategic use of:**
- Teacher Planning Time
- Teacher Professional Development Time
- Principal Time and Energy
- Resources on EngageNY.org
- Observation and Feedback cycle between Principals & Teachers
- Interim Assessment Results
The new evaluation system is going to require rethinking the role of principals and, where resources are available, assistant principals.

Their instructional leadership will be critical to the successful implementation of the Common Core.

They must establish and refine school-level systems to collect real-time data on student performance, analyze that data, and make logical, action oriented progress towards addressing the gaps highlighted in student learning.

The work on teacher effectiveness relies on redefining the role of principal (and assistant principal). Careful observation of teacher practice, thoughtful discussions with teachers about their practice, and a focus on coaching teachers toward improvement will be essential.

Creating time for effective instructional leadership by school-level administrators will also require rethinking the role of the superintendent, the role of the central office, and potentially leveraging BOCES and shared services in new ways to shift administrative duties.

**Use slide 22 to reinforce the fact establishing the right culture in a school will be essential to the successful implementation of Data Drive Instruction in a school.**

**Leadership in Data Driven Instruction**

![Diagram of Leadership in Data Driven Instruction](image)

**Use slide 23 to emphasize: why is culture so important?**
The Importance of Culture:

Leadership styles impact on staff performance by creating the environment in which staff work, which in turn influences their discretionary effort:

Leadership Styles

The Context for School Improvement

50% to 70%

30% to 40%

Discretionary Effort

This slide again draws on the work of the Hay Group. The principal’s leadership styles impact 50% to 70% on the Context for School Improvement (Culture). If the Context for School Improvement/culture is right then staff members put in 30%-40% discretionary effort. They will go the extra mile.

Use slide 24 to introduce Activity 3.

Activity 3: Creating a positive school culture

Small groups:

• Focus on ONE specific way in which an effective principal could create a positive school culture

• As a principal’s evaluator, what objective evidence would you seek to help you evaluate the principal’s role in leading this change?

• Individually record these for use in future sessions
If creating the context for school improvement is so important, how can it be measured?

One method is the use of Teacher Surveys.

The following slides (25-26) show the findings of the Tripod Teacher Surveys* from every school in a relatively large urban district in the Midwest.

**Link between culture and student achievement**

![Bar chart showing the link between culture and student achievement](chart.png)

*Ranked by agreement in the highest growth schools, elementary and secondary combined

**Slide 25 provides an overview between lowest and highest growth schools.**

In the highest growth schools, trust amongst teachers is a key component. Press for Excellence has the single widest gap (40%) between low growth schools, 44% and high growth schools, 84%.

**Slides 26 focuses on some of the individual questions relating to shared responsibility and accountability.**
Shared responsibility and accountability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Highest (67)</th>
<th>Lowest (65)</th>
<th>Diff.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The school culture here makes everyone feel obligated to teach well.</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. School leaders push teachers to deliver excellent teaching.</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Teacher here hold one another accountable for working hard.</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. This school sets high standards for academic performance</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Teachers in this school share and discuss student work with other teachers.</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I collaborate with other teachers here on designing assessment of student learning.</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Use Slide 27 to introduce the importance of Trust and the concept of a ‘tax’ or dividend.

The Importance of Trust

\[ S \times E = R \quad \text{Strategy \times Execution equals Results} \]

But there is a hidden element to take into account: Trust between staff

\[ (S \times E) \times T = R \quad (\text{Strategy \times Execution}) \text{ multiplied by Trust equals Results} \]

Trust could be a ‘tax’ or a dividend

\[ S \times E = R \quad \text{Trust (tax or dividend)} = \text{Net Result} \]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arithmetic</th>
<th>Net Result</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 \times 10 = 100</td>
<td>less 40% tax = 60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 \times 10 = 100</td>
<td>less 10% tax = 90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 \times 10 = 100</td>
<td>plus 10% dividend = 110</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Stephen MR Covey – The Speed of Trust

This is taken from Stephen M.R. Covey, who is the son of Stephen R. Covey.

The key message is that a company can have an excellent strategy and a strong ability to execute, but the nest results can be either torpedoed by a low-trust tax or multiplied by a high trust dividend.
How Highly Effective School Leaders Raise Achievement
Models of Excellence

Highly effective school leaders:
1. Have a self-commitment and a passionate conviction to providing a high quality education for all students
2. Understand self and others
3. Create the vision and build commitment through collaborative leadership
4. Actively seek and respond positively to feedback

‘If you attempt to implement reforms but fail to engage the culture of a school, nothing will change.’
~ Seymour Sarason

Slide 28 shows the Models of Excellence taken from the Hay research on How Highly Effective School Leaders Raise Achievement.

Start with the middle circle 1 and follow clockwise round the numbers.

Highly Effective School Leaders Raise Achievement by:

1. **Having Personal Values and a Passionate Conviction**
   - They believe that ALL students can and will succeed.

2. **They understand themselves and others**
   - They have high Emotional Intelligence (EI) and know exactly how to get the best out of themselves and other people.
   - They know their own strengths and weaknesses and build a team which has complementary strengths.

3. **They create the vision**
   - They don’t just state the vision; they work with all stakeholders to develop and create a lasting vision which promotes the life-long achievements (academic, vocational and social) of all students.

4. **They get other people on board**
   - Using their high EI, they actively engage all stakeholders in the process and gain a commitment for the vision.

5. **They plan for delivery**
   - They take time to establish a clear plan with specific goals which focus on the Who, What, When, and How.
6. They actively gather information and seek understanding
   - In addition to the usual school data, they actively seek information from the local community, parents, local politicians, and they track national and state trends so that they ‘see’ things coming and are not taken by surprise.
   - They are not ostriches – they have their heads up and are aware of which way the wind is blowing.

7. They continually monitor and improve
   - Throughout the whole process, but especially during the implementation phase they continually Monitor, Evaluate, Review, and Revise (MERR-MERR) to ensure continual school improvement.

It is referred to as Models and not Model – because different leaders have different strength is the difference ‘boxes’ and it’s their ability to lead and manage the team that is key.

Remind participants that they now have a 15 minute break before returning for the next session which will be in the breakout rooms.
THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL AS LEADER:
GUIDING SCHOOLS TO BETTER
TEACHING AND LEARNING
The School Principal as Leader:
Guiding Schools to Better Teaching and Learning
The Principal as Leader: an Overview

Education research shows that most school variables, considered separately, have at most small effects on learning. The real payoff comes when individual variables combine to reach critical mass.

Creating the conditions under which that can occur is the job of the principal.

For more than a decade, The Wallace Foundation has supported efforts to improve leadership in public schools. In addition to funding projects in 24 states and numerous school districts within them, Wallace has issued more than 70 research reports and other publications covering school leadership, on topics ranging from how principals are trained to how they are evaluated on the job. Through all this work, we have learned a great deal about the nature of the school principal’s role, what makes for an effective principal and how to tie principal effectiveness to improved student achievement.

This Wallace Perspective is a culling of our lessons to describe what it is that effective principals do. In short, we believe they perform five key functions well:

- Shaping a vision of academic success for all students.
- Creating a climate hospitable to education.
- Cultivating leadership in others.
- Improving instruction.
- Managing people, data and processes to foster school improvement.

This Wallace Perspective is the first of a series looking at school leadership and how it is best developed and supported. In subsequent publications, we will look at the role of school districts, states and principal training programs in building good school leadership.

INTRODUCTION

Ten years ago, school leadership was noticeably absent from most major school reform agendas, and even the people who saw leadership as important to turning around failing schools expressed uncertainty about how to proceed.

What a difference a decade makes.

Today, improving school leadership ranks high on the list of priorities for school reform. In a detailed 2010 survey, school and district administrators, policymakers and others declared principal leadership as among the most pressing matters on a list of issues in public school education. Teacher quality stood above everything else, but principal leadership came next, outstripping subjects including dropout rates, STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) education, student testing, and preparation for college and careers.

Meanwhile, education experts, through the updated (2008) Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium standards, have defined key aspects of leadership to guide state policy on everything from licensing to on-the-job training of principals. New tools are available for measuring principal performance in meaningful ways. And federal efforts such as Race to the Top are emphasizing the importance of effective principals in boosting teaching and learning. Paying attention to the principal’s role has become all the more essential as the U.S. Department of Education and state education agencies embark on transforming the nation’s 5,000 most troubled schools, a task that depends on the skills and abilities of thousands of current and future school leaders.
Since 2000, The Wallace Foundation has supported numerous research studies on school leadership and published more than 70 reports on the subject. It has also funded projects in some 24 states and numerous districts within them. Through that work, we now understand the complexities of school leadership in new and more meaningful ways.

A particularly noteworthy finding, reinforced in a major study by researchers at the University of Minnesota and University of Toronto, is the empirical link between school leadership and improved student achievement. Drawing on both detailed case studies and large-scale quantitative analysis, the research shows that most school variables, considered separately, have at most small effects on learning. The real payoff comes when individual variables combine to reach critical mass. Creating the conditions under which that can occur is the job of the principal.

Indeed, leadership is second only to classroom instruction among school-related factors that affect student learning in school. “Why is leadership crucial?” the Minnesota and Toronto researchers ask. “One explanation is that leaders have the potential to unleash latent capacities in organizations.”

A University of Washington study employed a musical metaphor to describe three different leadership approaches by principals.4 School leaders determined to do it all themselves were “one-man bands;” those inclined to delegate responsibilities to others operated like the leader of a “jazz combo;” and those who believed broadly in sharing leadership throughout the school could be thought of as “orchestral leaders,” skilled in helping large teams produce a coherent sound, while encouraging soloists to shine. The point is that although in any school a range of leadership patterns exists – among principals, assistant principals, formal and informal teacher leaders, and parents – the principal remains the central source of leadership influence.

THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL AS LEADER
Traditionally, the principal resembled the middle manager suggested in William Whyte’s 1950’s classic The Organization Man – an overseer of buses, boilers and books. Today, in a rapidly changing era of standards-based reform and accountability, a different conception has emerged – one closer to the model suggested by Jim Collins’ 2001 Good to Great, which draws lessons from contemporary corporate life to suggest leadership that focuses with great clarity on what is essential, what needs to be done and how to get it done.

This shift brings with it dramatic changes in what public education needs from principals. They can no longer function simply as building managers, tasked with adhering to district rules, carrying out regulations and avoiding mistakes. They have to be (or become) leaders of learning who can develop a team delivering effective instruction.

Wallace’s work since 2000 suggests that this entails five key responsibilities:

- **Shaping a vision of academic success for all students**, one based on high standards.
- **Creating a climate hospitable to education** in order that safety, a cooperative spirit and other foundations of fruitful interaction prevail.
- **Cultivating leadership in others** so that teachers and other adults assume their part in realizing the school vision.
- **Improving instruction** to enable teachers to teach at their best and students to learn at their utmost.
- **Managing people, data and processes** to foster school improvement.
Each of these five tasks needs to interact with the other four for any part to succeed. It’s hard to carry out a vision of student success, for example, if the school climate is characterized by student disengagement, or teachers don’t know what instructional methods work best for their students, or test data are clumsily analyzed. When all five tasks are well carried out, however, leadership is at work.

**FIVE KEY RESPONSIBILITIES**

**Shaping a vision of academic success for all students**

Although they say it in different ways, researchers who have examined education leadership agree that effective principals are responsible for establishing a schoolwide vision of commitment to high standards and the success of all students.

Newcomers to the education discussion might find this puzzling: Hasn’t concern with the academic achievement of every student always topped principals’ agendas? The short answer is, no. For years public school principals were seen as school managers, and as recently as two decades ago, high standards were thought to be the province of the college bound. “Success” could be defined as entry level manufacturing work for students who had followed a “general track,” and low-skilled employment for dropouts. Only in the last few decades has the emphasis shifted to academic expectations for all.

This change comes in part as a response to twin realizations:

Career success in a global economy depends on a strong education; for all segments of U.S. society to be able to compete fairly, the yawning gap in academic achievement between disadvantaged and advantaged students needs to narrow. In a school, that begins with a principal’s spelling out “high standards and rigorous learning goals,” Vanderbilt University researchers assert with underlined emphasis. Specifically, they say, “The research literature over the last quarter century has consistently supported the notion that having high expectations for all, including clear and public standards, is one key to closing the achievement gap between advantaged and less advantaged students and for raising the overall achievement of all students.”

An effective principal also makes sure that the notion of academic success for all gets picked up by the faculty and underpins what researchers at the University of Washington describe as a schoolwide learning improvement agenda that focuses on goals for student progress. One middle school teacher described what adopting the vision meant for her. “My expectations have increased every year,” she told the researchers. “I’ve learned that as long as you support them, there is really nothing [the students] can’t do.”

So, developing a shared vision around standards, and success for all students is an essential element of school leadership. As the Cheshire cat pointed out to Alice, if you don’t know where you’re going, any road will lead you there.

**Creating a climate hospitable to education**

Effective principals ensure that their schools allow both adults and children to put learning at the center of their daily activities. Such “a healthy school environment,” as Vanderbilt researchers call it, is characterized by basics like safety and orderliness, as well as less tangible qualities such as a “supportive, responsive” attitude toward the children and a sense by teachers that they are part of a community of professionals focused on good instruction.
Is it a surprise, then, that principals at schools with high teacher ratings for “instructional climate” outnumber other principals in developing an atmosphere of caring and trust? Or that their teachers are more likely than faculty members elsewhere to find the principals’ motives and intentions are good? One principal described to University of Washington researchers a typical staff meeting years ago at an urban school where “morale never seemed to get out of the basement.” Discussion centered on “field trips, war stories about troubled students, and other management issues” rather than matters like “using student work and data to fine-tune teaching.” Almost inevitably, teacher pessimism was a significant barrier, with teachers regarding themselves as “hardworking martyrs in a hopeless cause.”

To change this kind of climate – and begin to combat teacher isolation, closed doors, negativity, defeatism and teacher resistance – the most effective principals focus on building a sense of school community, with the attendant characteristics. These include respect for every member of the school community; “an upbeat, welcoming, solution-oriented, no-blame, professional environment;” and efforts to involve staff and students in a variety of activities, many of them schoolwide.

**Cultivating leadership in others**

A broad and longstanding consensus in leadership theory holds that leaders in all walks of life and all kinds of organizations, public and private, need to depend on others to accomplish the group’s purpose and need to encourage the development of leadership across the organization.

Schools are no different. Principals who get high marks from teachers for creating a strong climate for instruction in their schools also receive higher marks than other principals for spurring leadership in the faculty, according to the research from the University of Minnesota and University of Toronto.

In fact if test scores are any indication, the more willing principals are to spread leadership around, the better for the students. One of the most striking findings of the universities of Minnesota and Toronto report is that effective leadership from all sources – principals, influential teachers, staff teams and others – is associated with better student performance on math and reading tests.

The relationship is strong albeit indirect: Good leadership, the study suggests, improves both teacher motivation and work settings. This, in turn, can fortify classroom instruction. “Compared with lower-achieving schools, higher-achieving schools provided all stakeholders with greater influence on decisions,” the researchers write. Why the better result? Perhaps this is a case of two heads – or more – being better than one: “The higher performance of these schools might be explained as a consequence of the greater access they have to collective knowledge and wisdom embedded within their communities,” the study concludes.

Principals may be relieved to find out, moreover, that their authority does not wane as others’ waxes. Clearly, school leadership is not a zero-sum game. “Principals and district leaders have the most influence on decisions in all schools; however, they do not lose influence as others gain influence,” the authors write.

Indeed, although “higher-performing schools awarded greater influence to most stakeholders... little changed in these schools’ overall hierarchical structure.”

University of Washington research on leadership in urban school systems emphasizes the need for a leadership team (led by the principal and including assistant principals and teacher leaders) and shared responsibility for student progress, a responsibility “reflected in a set of agreements as well as unspoken norms among school staff.”
A profile in leadership: Dewey Hensley
Nearly all 390 students at Louisville’s J. B. Atkinson Academy for Excellence in Teaching and Learning live in poverty. But from 2006 to 2011, principal Dewey Hensley showed this needn’t stand in the way of their succeeding in school. Under Hensley’s watch, students at Atkinson, once one of the lowest performing elementary schools in Kentucky, doubled their proficiency rates in reading, math and writing. Most recently, the school was one of only 17 percent in the school district that met all of its “adequate yearly progress” goals under the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

Hensley’s is not a tale of lonely-at-the-top heroics, however. Rather, it is a story about leadership that combines a firm belief in each child’s potential with an unrelenting focus on improving instruction – and a conviction that principals can’t go it alone. “Building a school is not about bricks,” Hensley says. “It’s about teachers. From inside out, you have to build the strengths. I’m not the leader. I’m a leader. I’ve tried to build strong leaders across the board.”

Today Hensley heads a just-launched Kentucky Department of Education office to help transform other low-performing schools. Principals there and elsewhere could learn a lot from how he led Atkinson with a style that mirrors in many ways the characteristics of effective school leadership identified in research.

Shaping a vision of academic success for all students
His first week on the job, Hensley drew a picture of a school on poster board and asked the faculty to annotate it.

“Let’s create a vision of a school that’s perfect,” he recalls telling them, adding: “When we get there, then we’ll rest.”

Hensley, the first person in his extended family to graduate from high school and then college, sought to instill in his staff the idea that all children could learn, with appropriate support. “I understand the power of a school to make a difference in a child’s life,” he says. “They [all] have to have someone who will give them dreams they may not have.”

Creating a climate hospitable to education
School suspensions at Atkinson were among the highest in the state when Hensley took over. Determined to create a more suitable climate for learning, Hensley visited the homes of the 25 most frequent student offenders, telling the families that their children would be protected, but other children would be protected from them, too, if necessary.

Hensley brought in teams to diagnose each child’s academic and emotional needs and develop individual “prescriptions” that might include anything from home visits to intensive tutoring to eyeglasses. Chess club, a special program for truant students and ballroom dancing lessons culminating in a formal candlelit dinner that included students’ parents were other tone-changers, along with school corridors with names like Teamwork Trail and street signs directing students 982 miles to Harvard or 2,352 miles to Stanford.

Cultivating leadership in others
Hensley set up a leadership structure with two notable characteristics. First, it was simple, comprising only three committees: culture, climate, and community; instructional leadership; and student support. Second, it made leadership a shared enterprise. The committees were populated and headed by
teachers, with every faculty member assigned to one. “I relinquished leadership in order to get control,” Hensley says. “I asked people to be about leadership.”

He also encouraged his teachers to learn from one another. Science teacher Heather Lynd recalls the day Hensley visited her classroom and then asked her to lead a faculty meeting on anchor charts, annotated diagrams that can be used to explain everything from the water cycle to punctuation tips. “He’s built on teachers’ strengths to share them with others,” says reading specialist Lori Atherton. “That creates leadership.”

**Improving instruction**
Hensley did a lot of first-hand observation in classrooms, leaving behind detailed notes for teachers, sharing “gold nuggets” of exemplary practices, things to think about and next steps for improvement. He also introduced cutting-edge professional development, obtaining a grant to set up the ideal classroom in the building, full of technology and instructional resources. And he formed a collaboration with the University of Louisville. In one project, professors observed how Atkinson’s teachers kept students engaged and shared the collected data with the faculty in addition to using it for a research study.

Hensley also encouraged teachers to do skill building on their own. As a result, Atkinson teachers began attaining certification at a feverish pace from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, a private group that offers teachers an advanced credential based on rigorous standards. Finally, Hensley focused on getting students the instruction that tests and observations showed they needed. For example, Hensley paired struggling 1st, 2nd and 3rd graders with National Board-certified teachers who gave them intensive help in reading and writing until they reached grade level.

**Managing people, data and processes**
Data use figured prominently in Hensley’s turnaround efforts. “We test them once, we see where they are,” science teacher Lynd says of the students. “If they’re not proficient, we re-teach and test again.” To track progress across the school, Atkinson used a data board that lined one wall in the school’s curriculum center. Under photos of each teacher, staff members could view the color-coded trajectory of students’ achievement measured on three levels: grade level, below grade level and significantly below. The display was part of what Hensley calls the faculty’s “tolerance for truth,” honestly examining results and “taking ownership of each student’s performance.”

Such methods did not win plaudits from everyone; half the faculty transferred after his first year. But as time went by, the number of teachers seeking to leave the school declined to a trickle and the list of those seeking to transfer in ballooned. Moreover, if winning over skeptics is any indication of success, Hensley points with pride to a comment years later from a veteran teacher who had initially opposed his changes at Atkinson: “She said, ‘They sent a lot of people here to fix this school. You’re the only one who taught us how.’”

Effective principals studied by the University of Washington urged teachers to work with one another and with the administration on a variety of activities, including “developing and aligning curriculum, instructional practices, and assessments; problem solving; and participating in peer observations.” These leaders also looked for ways to encourage collaboration, paying special attention to how school time was allocated. They might replace some administrative meeting time with teacher planning time, for example. The importance of collaboration gets backing from the Minnesota/Toronto researchers, too. They found that principals rated highly for the strength of their actions to improve instruction were also more apt to encourage the staff to work collaboratively.
More specifically, the study suggests that principals play a major role in developing a “professional community” of teachers who guide one another in improving instruction. This is important because the research found a link between professional community and higher student scores on standardized math tests. In short, the researchers say, “When principals and teachers share leadership, teachers’ working relationships with one another are stronger and student achievement is higher.”

What does “professional community” look like? Its components include things like consistent and well-defined learning expectations for children, frequent conversations among teachers about pedagogy, and an atmosphere in which it’s common for teachers to visit one another’s classrooms to observe and critique instruction.

Most principals would welcome hearing what one urban school administrator had to say about how team-based school transformation works at its best: “like a well-oiled machine,” with results that could be seen in “student behavior, student conduct, and student achievement.”

**Improving instruction**

Effective principals work relentlessly to improve achievement by focusing on the quality of instruction. They help define and promote high expectations; they attack teacher isolation and fragmented effort; and they connect directly with teachers and the classroom, University of Washington researchers found.

Effective principals also encourage continual professional learning. They emphasize research based strategies to improve teaching and learning and initiate discussions about instructional approaches, both in teams and with individual teachers. They pursue these strategies despite the preference of many teachers to be left alone.

In practice this all means that leaders must become intimately familiar with the “technical core” of schooling – what is required to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

Principals themselves agree almost unanimously on the importance of several specific practices, according to one survey, including keeping track of teachers’ professional development needs and monitoring teachers’ work in the classroom (83 percent). Whether they call it formal evaluation, classroom visits or learning walks, principals intent on promoting growth in both students and adults spend time in classrooms (or ensure that someone who’s qualified does), observing and commenting on what’s working well and what is not. Moreover, they shift the pattern of the annual evaluation cycle to one of ongoing and informal interactions with teachers.

The Minnesota-Toronto study paints a picture of strong and weak instructional leadership. “Both high- and low-scoring principals said that they frequently visit classrooms and are ‘very visible,’ ” the researchers write. “However, differences between principals in the two groups come into sharp focus as they describe their reasons for making classroom visits. High-scoring principals frequently observed classroom instruction for short periods of time, making 20 to 60 observations a week, and most of the observations were spontaneous. Their visits enabled them to make formative observations that were clearly about learning and professional growth, coupled with direct and immediate feedback. High-scoring principals believed that every teacher, whether a first-year teacher or a veteran, can learn and grow.

“… In contrast, low-scoring principals described a very different approach to observations. Their informal visits or observations in classrooms were usually not for instructional purposes.
Even informal observations were often planned in advance so that teachers knew when the principal would be stopping by. The most damaging finding became clear in reports from teachers in buildings with low-scoring principals who said they received little or no feedback after informal observations.”

It is important to note that instructional leadership tends to be much weaker in middle and high schools than in elementary schools. Unlike their elementary school counterparts, secondary school principals cannot be expected to have expertise in all the subject areas their schools cover, so their ability to offer guidance on instruction is more limited. The problem is that those who are in a position to offer instructional leadership – department chairs – often are not called on to do so. One suggestion is that the department head’s job “should be radically redefined” so whoever holds the post is “regarded, institutionally, as a central resource for improving instruction in middle and high schools.”

As noted above, a central part of being a great leader is cultivating leadership in others. The learning-focused principal is intent on helping teachers improve their practice either directly or with the aid of school leaders like department chairs and other teaching experts.

Managing people, data and processes
“In the great scheme of things,” noted one research report, “...schools may be relatively small organizations. But their leadership challenges are far from small, or simple.” To get the job done, effective leaders need to make good use of the resources at hand. In other words, they have to be good managers.

Effective leaders studied by University of Washington researchers nurtured and supported their staff members, while facing the reality that sometimes teachers don’t work out. They hired carefully, but – adhering to union and district personnel policies – they also engaged in “aggressively weeding out individuals who did not show the capacity to grow.”

When it comes to data, effective principals try to draw the most from statistics and evidence, having “learned to ask useful questions” of the information, to display it in ways that tell “compelling stories” and to use it to promote “collaborative inquiry among teachers.” They view data as a means not only to pinpoint problems but to understand their nature and causes.

Principals also need to approach their work in a way that will get the job done. Research behind VAL-ED (the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education), a tool to assess principal performance developed by researchers at Vanderbilt University, suggests that there are six key steps – or “processes” – that the effective principal takes when carrying out his or her most important leadership responsibilities: planning, implementing, supporting, advocating, communicating and monitoring. The school leader pressing for high academic standards would, for example, map out rigorous targets for improvements in learning (planning), get the faculty on board to do what’s necessary to meet those targets (implementing), encourage students and teachers in meeting the goals (supporting), challenge low expectations and low district funding for students with special needs (advocating), make sure families are aware of the learning goals (communicating), and keep on top of test results (monitoring).

Principals – and the people who hire and replace them – need to be aware that school improvement does not happen overnight. A rule of thumb is that a principal should be in place about five to seven years in order to have a beneficial impact on a school. In fact, the average length of a principal’s stay in 80 schools studied by the Minnesota-Toronto researchers was 3.6 years.
They further found that higher turnover was associated with lower student performance on reading and math achievement tests, apparently because turnover takes a toll on the overall climate of the school.40 “It is far from a trivial problem,” the researchers say. “Schools experiencing exceptionally rapid principal turnover, for example, are often reported to suffer from lack of shared purpose, cynicism among staff about principal commitment, and an inability to maintain a school-improvement focus long enough to actually accomplish any meaningful change.” The lesson? Effective principals stay put.

**IMPROVING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP**

The simple fact is that without effective leaders most of the goals of educational improvement will be very difficult to achieve. Absent attention to that reality, we are in danger of undermining the very standards and goals we have set for ourselves. Fortunately, we have a decade of experience and new research demonstrating the critical importance of leadership for school principals and documenting an empirical link between school leadership and student growth.

And we have the benefit of the professional standards developed by ISLLC and principal evaluation tools like VAL-ED.

Still, the lives of too many principals, especially new principals, are characterized by “churn and burn,” as the turnover findings bear out. So what can be done to lessen turnover and provide all teachers and students with the highly skilled school leadership they need and deserve? In other words, how do we create a pipeline of leaders who can make a real difference for the better, especially in troubled schools?

**A pipeline for effective leadership**

Wallace’s work over the last decade suggests such a pipeline would have four necessary and interlocking parts:

- **Defining the job of the principal and assistant principal.** Districts create clear, rigorous job requirements that detail what principals and assistant principals must know and do, and that emerge from what research tells us are the knowledge, skills and behaviors principals need to improve teaching and learning.

- **Providing high-quality training for aspiring school leaders.** Principal training programs, whether run by universities, nonprofits or districts, recruit and select only the people with the potential and desire to become effective principals in the districts the programs feed into. The programs provide the future leaders with high-quality training and internships that reflect the realities education leaders face in the field.

- **Hiring selectively.** Districts hire only well-trained candidates for principal and assistant principal jobs.

- **Evaluating principals and giving them the on-the-job support they need.** Districts regularly evaluate principals, assessing the behaviors that research tells us are most closely tied to improving teaching and student achievement. Districts then provide professional development, including mentoring, that responds to what the evaluations find for each individual.

**Coordination of state and district efforts**

Effective school leadership depends on support from district and state officials. Except for the most entrepreneurial, principals are unlikely to proceed with a leadership style focused on learning if the district and state are unsupportive, disinterested or pursuing other agendas.
As one of the major Wallace-funded studies reports, central offices need to be transformed so that the work of teaching and learning improvement can proceed. That is to say central offices need to “re-culture” themselves so they focus less on administration and more on supporting principals to improve instruction. As for states: through policy, accreditation and funding for principal training programs, and other levers, they have a major role to play in getting schools the leadership they need. If the states and districts can do the difficult work of coordinating their various efforts, so much the better.

**Leadership and the transformation of failing schools**

Armed with what we’ve learned about the potential for leadership over the last decade, there is cause for optimism that the education community’s long neglect of leadership is at last coming to an end. We still have a lot to learn, but we have already learned a great deal. In the face of this growing body of knowledge and experience, it is clear that now is the time to step up efforts to strengthen school leadership. Without effective principals, the national goal we’ve set of transforming failing schools will be next to impossible to achieve.

But with an effective principal in every school comes promise.

**Additional Readings**

The Knowledge Center at [www.wallacefoundation.org](http://www.wallacefoundation.org) contains more than 70 publications about school leadership. Here’s a sampling:


*Learning From Leadership: Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning*, Karen


