

PRINCIPALS *and* STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

Preface	v
Introduction	1
1. Research Findings about Principal Behaviors and Student Achievement	7
Safe and Orderly School Environment	8
Vision and Goals Focused on High Levels of Student Learning	9
High Expectations for Student Learning	11
Self-Confidence, Responsibility, and Perseverance	13
Visibility and Accessibility	14
Positive and Supportive School Climate	14
Emotional and Interpersonal Support	17
Parent and Community Outreach and Involvement	18
Rituals, Ceremonies, and Other Symbolic Actions	19
Shared Leadership, Decision Making, and Staff Empowerment	21
Collaboration	23
Some General Findings about Instructional Leadership	25
Outgoing Pursuit of High Levels of Student Learning	27

Norm of Continuous Improvement	29
Discussion of Instructional Issues.	30
Classroom Observation and Feedback to Teachers	31
Support of Teacher Autonomy	32
Support of Risk Taking.	34
Professional Development Opportunities and Resources	35
Protecting Instructional Time	37
Monitoring Student Progress and Sharing Findings . . .	38
Use of Student Progress Data for Program Improvement	39
Recognition of Student and Staff Achievement	40
Role Modeling	41
What These Principals <i>Don't</i> Do.	44
2. Other Key Research Findings	
about Principals	50
The Leadership of Male and Female Principals.	50
Elementary and Secondary Principals	54
Principals in High- and Low-SES Schools	55
Principals' Impact on Student Outcomes	57
Transactional and Transformational Leadership.	59
Effects on Principals' Leadership	61
The Dearth of Instructional Leadership	62
Developing and Improving Principals' Leadership. . . .	64
Summary	67
A Special Tribute	75
Annotated References	77
About the Author	106

P R E F A C E

PRINCIPALS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

OR SHOULD THE TITLE BE “PRINCIPALS ON THE SPOT”? SCHOOL REFORM has been on the agenda around the world for years. Recognition of the importance of principals, or headteachers, as they are sometimes called in European countries, to school reform has been long-standing. In the book *School Leader Development for School Improvement*, editors Blum and Butler reviewed leader development programs from eight countries and synthesized the skills and knowledge emphasized to prepare leaders for their role in leading school reform.¹ The focus on the principal as the key to the improvement of learning for all children has intensified in the past few years. The emphasis on results moves reform to a new level of accountability. It is no longer satisfactory to show that good, effective programs are being implemented in schools. The demand is for schools to show improved academic achievement for each student. Accountability for results is driving school reform in the United States, and it is central to improvement efforts in most other countries as well.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has special meaning to principals in the United States, giving states and districts increased flexibility in how they spend their education dollars in return for setting standards for student achievement and holding educators accountable for results. The law requires or allows:

- *Accountability.* All students must meet challenging academic standards in reading and math, grades 3–8, as measured by state tests. Disaggregated data will be used to determine how well various groups of children are doing. An annual report card will make results public so parents can make more informed choices about the education of their children. There are consequences for schools that do not make adequate yearly progress.

- *Flexible spending.* Within limits, federal funds may be moved from program to program and category to category to make changes that will result in improved academic achievement for every student. The law promotes local control and decision making.

- *Parental choice.* Parents of children in low-performing schools have the right to transfer their children to better-performing schools, including public charter schools. Children in low-performing schools also have a right to supplemental educational services such as tutoring, after-school services, and summer school. Transportation to a different school and supplemental services are funded by school districts.

- *Using effective practices and programs.* The law emphasizes the use of educational programs and practices that have been demonstrated effective. Schools are expected not only to use effective programs and practices, but also to know the research supporting such practices and to justify the changes they make.²

While meeting the requirements of the NCLB Act takes teamwork among state, district, and school staff, the greatest pressure for change is at the school level. It all comes together in schools where students, teachers, and administrators interact in ways that result in all students meeting challenging standards. Increasingly, principals are seen as the person in the center. They are expected to make it work. And some principals have led their schools toward substantial improvement.

Leadership in an elementary school in Salem, Oregon, is an example of moving a school forward. With 94 percent of students on free or reduced-price lunch; 59 percent of the student body Hispanic, including a large percentage with limited English proficiency; and a 34 percent mobility rate, the school faced many challenges. Only 6 percent of 5th grade students met state standards in reading, 6 percent met standards in math, and 3 percent met state standards in writing when a new principal joined the staff. Four years later, 34 percent were meeting reading standards, 54 percent were meeting math standards, and 23 percent were meeting writing standards. The principal began working with staff to

gain focus for the school using two basic principles, (1) no excuses will be made for student failure and (2) student learning will be at the heart of all decisions made in the school. With leadership from the principal, the staff figured out what changes would make a difference and implemented many research-based practices, including increased instructional time in key subjects, smaller groups through teaming, frequent assessment of progress, one-on-one tutoring, and more. The staff also increased their bilingual abilities and provided support for families to participate in school and help their children. The principal took the lead in finding outside resources to support needed changes, including ongoing professional development for the staff.³

In a quite different example of a school's progress, over a four-year period a large high school increased the number of students meeting state standards in writing from 62 to 84 percent, in reading from 42 to 52 percent, and in math problem solving from 21 to 47 percent. At the same time, American College Testing (ACT) scores increased, as did the percentage of students taking the test. The number of students earning 27 or more credits increased from 43 to 200, enrollment in Advanced Placement honors courses increased from 1,070 to 1,488, and the dropout rate went down from 7.2 to 5.7 percent. Change in this large high school took much longer than the four-year improvement in performance cited above and involved continuous effort under the leadership of three different principals. The changes made by the staff are substantial, lasting, and effec-