

Qualities of Effective Principals

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Introduction

Do principals factor into student success? In *Qualities of Effective Principals*, we answer this question with a resounding YES! In fact, among school factors, the effect of principals is considered second only to that of teachers in facilitating student learning (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Highly effective principals are considered “the key to initiating, implementing, and sustaining school success” (Tucker & Coddling, 2002, p. 253) and “imperative to high student achievement” (Anthes, 2005, p. 1). Consequently, principals are expected to promote and develop the school vision, empowering stakeholders to build and maintain the conditions necessary for the success of all students.

The nature of the principal’s role has changed significantly in the past two decades, from primarily managerial to that of management and leadership (Lashway, 2002b; Murphy, 2003; Shellard, 2003; Tucker & Coddling, 2002). Despite the recent emphasis on instructional leadership, principals continue to be responsible for traditional duties such as facility management, budgeting, school safety, and student discipline—tasks that continue to absorb a considerable amount of their time (Doyle & Rice, 2002; Lashway, 2002b; Tirozzi & Ferrandino, 2001).

Due to the increasing number of responsibilities required of principals, it is not surprising to find that long hours are spent on the job. Elementary school principals work an average of 62 hours per week (Groff, 2001), while middle and high school principals spend successively greater amounts of time on the job (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). Although it is generally agreed that the principals’ role has evolved in recent years, there is no clear

definition of that role and no method to balance the responsibility of instructional leadership with the myriad of other demands on their time (Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, & Gundlach, 2003). Given the competing demands for precious time, it is imperative not only that principals do their work well, but also that they do the right work.

One essential ingredient for success in education or any business, for that matter, is effective leadership. Ken Chenault, CEO for American Express, captured this sentiment well: “Most companies maintain their office copiers better than they build the capabilities of their people, especially the ones who are supposed to be future leaders” (cited in Colvin, 2007, p. 100). If we are to succeed as an educational enterprise in a highly competitive world, then we must embrace leadership development—not in a cursory fashion, but rather in an ongoing, comprehensive, sustained manner. It is for this purpose—leadership development—that we have written *Qualities of Effective Principals*. We hope you find it of value to your organization and your leadership team.

Conceptual Framework for the Book

The framework for *Qualities of Effective Principals* is provided in Figure I, which outlines eight key qualities for understanding and prioritizing the principal’s work.

Although we can comfortably identify the major components of the principal’s work, interestingly, “we know much less about how—or how much principals carry out these functions on a daily basis” (Lashway, 2002a, p. 2; also, see Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001). Nonetheless, these qualities, based on our review, do capture well the essence of the principal’s work.

Each quality serves as the basis of discussion for the eight chapters included in Part 1. Additionally, the style and format by which we present the findings are designed to be user-friendly, providing easy-to-use summaries and tools for reference.

Qualities of Effective Principals is based primarily on existing research, although we also include applicable policy and theoretical perspective. Specifically, the sources considered in creating this synthesis of principal effectiveness include empirical studies of principal practice as linked to student achievement, case studies of principals, meta-analyses of principal effectiveness, and other reviews of research.

Figure 1 **Qualities of Effective Principals**

Principal Quality	Description
Quality 1: Instructional Leadership	The principal fosters the success of all students by facilitating the development, communication, implementation, and evaluation of a shared vision of learning that reflects excellence.
Quality 2: School Climate	The principal fosters the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a positive and safe school climate for all stakeholders.
Quality 3: Human Resource Administration	The principal fosters effective human resources administration through the selection, induction, support, and retention of quality instructional and support personnel.
Quality 4: Teacher Evaluation	The principal conducts meaningful, timely, and productive evaluations of teachers and other staff members in order to support ongoing performance effectiveness and school improvement.
Quality 5: Organizational Management	The principal fosters the success of all students by supporting, managing, and overseeing the school's organization, operation, and resources.
Quality 6: Communication and Community Relations	The principal fosters the success of all students by collaborating effectively with all stakeholders.
Quality 7: Professionalism	The principal fosters the success of all students by demonstrating integrity, fairness, and ethical behavior.
Quality 8: The Principal's Role in Student Achievement	The principal's leadership results in acceptable, measurable progress based on established standards.

The research findings and recommended practices identified in the book should be familiar to many school leaders. For effective principals, the book should serve as a review and reminder for continued improvement. For developing school leaders, the same findings serve to build awareness as they take steps to enhance their effectiveness. By focusing on principal effectiveness, our ultimate goal is to improve the educational experiences and achievement of the students we serve in our schools.

Parts of the Book

Qualities of Effective Principals is designed to serve as a resource and reference tool for school leaders and their supervisors. It identifies elements of effective leadership within eight broad categories and points readers interested in



Part 1

What It Means to Be an Effective Principal

Part 1 of *Qualities of Effective Principals* focuses on the research useful in developing a profile of an effective principal. Following the Introduction, the eight chapters of the text address major qualities of principal effectiveness. Chapters 1 through 7 provide an extensive review of the key roles and responsibilities of building-level school administrators. Chapter 8 serves as a culmination for the book by exploring the effect of effective principals on school improvement and student success.



Part 2

Principal Effectiveness: Tools You Can Use

Part 2 of *Qualities of Effective Principals* contains resources that can be used to apply the content and concepts presented in the chapters included in Part 1. Divided into three major sections, Part 2 provides skills checklists, detailed lists of principal quality indicators and red flags, and an annotated bibliography.¹



Section I: Principal Skills Assessment Checklists

The Principal Skills Assessment Checklists are based on a synthesis of the research presented throughout *Qualities of Effective Principals*. The checklists are designed to help identify key indicators of effectiveness in a principal's leadership. Each effectiveness quality identified in a checklist includes multiple indicators of success. The checklists also provide a continuum for rating relative strengths and weaknesses, ranging from ineffective to master.

¹Readers familiar with the ASCD book *Qualities of Effective Teachers* will recognize the format used in this section to present principal skills checklists, quality indicators and red flags, and an annotated bibliography.

Section I

Principal Skills Assessment Checklists

Key to the Principal Skills Checklists

- Master:** The principal exhibits the quality such that others would be able to use the principal as an expert for how to lead a school. The principal not only has a sense of the quality but demonstrates an understanding of the essence of the quality.
- Professional:** The principal exhibits the quality most of the time.
- Apprentice:** The principal demonstrates the quality to the degree necessary to make the school function. The principal may lack fluidness of use, but the result is still effective.
- Ineffective:** The principal's performance is less than acceptable, and he or she would benefit from a focused effort to improve performance.
- Not Observed:** The observer has not seen evidence, through either demonstration or observation, of the quality.

Section II

Principal Quality Indicators and Red Flags

This set of principal responsibilities and behaviors, or qualities, is designed primarily to assist administrators and those who evaluate administrators in identifying key components of effectiveness as they visit schools and observe administrators in action. In essence, they are intended to facilitate a type of action research focused on behaviors that principals exhibit in their daily work. For some principals, the guidance that can emerge from feedback on the school qualities may be the impetus to refine a strategy or add something new to their toolkit of skills and techniques.

The positive and negative behaviors exhibited by principals determine, to a great extent, their effectiveness in leadership and, ultimately, the effect they have on teachers and student achievement. Several specific characteristics of principal responsibilities and behaviors that contribute directly to effective leadership are listed for each of the following categories:

- Instructional Leadership
- School Climate
- Human Resource Administration
- Teacher Evaluation
- Organizational Management
- Communication and Community Relations
- Professionalism and the Principal
- The Principal's Role in Student Achievement

Red flags signaling ineffective leadership are presented at the end of each section. Both positive and negative characteristics are based on a plethora of research-based studies that address the concept of improving the educational system for students, teachers, and schools. These qualities are general for any school level. The lists are provided as a vehicle to promote principal effectiveness.