

# BALANCED LEADERSHIP

— *for* —

## Powerful Learning



TOOLS FOR ACHIEVING SUCCESS  
IN YOUR SCHOOL

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# Introduction: Learning to Lead

If you've been around public education for any length of time, you have no doubt already encountered a broad range of leadership personalities. The public education landscape has them all:

- The Nurturer
- The Fixer
- The Executive
- The Doer
- The Idealist
- The Visionary

But what we've learned in more than a decade of working with principals of all types—in every region of the United States (and beyond), at all levels of experience—is that no one personality or style is better than another. Effective leadership isn't personality driven or a set of skills or dispositions that you either have or don't have. Rather, it's something that *all* principals can learn and do.

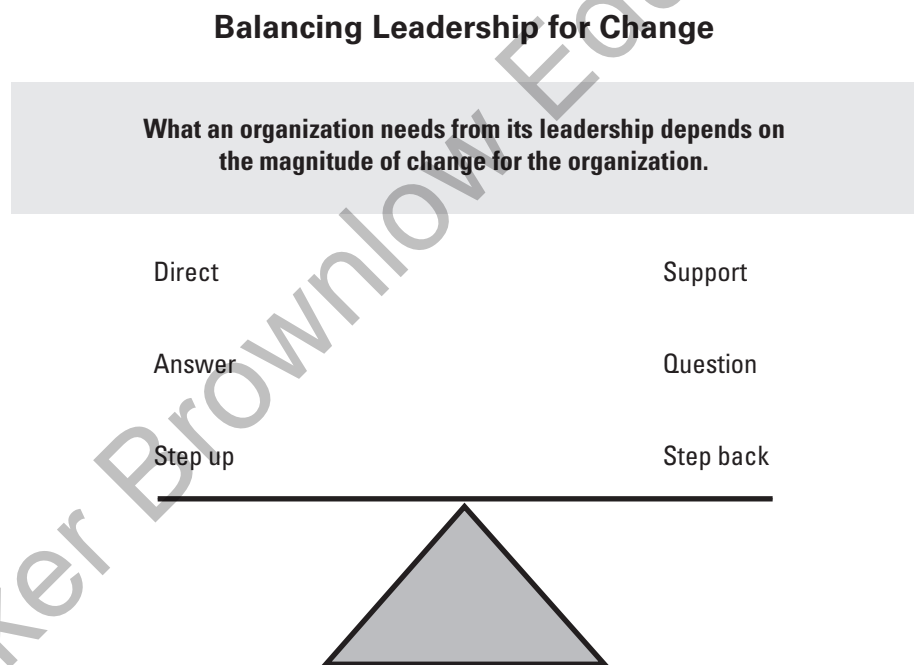
Research has proven that certain actions and behaviors have a positive effect on student achievement, and all principals can learn these actions and behaviors and how to implement them with efficacy. They can learn how to *establish a clear focus*, keeping the work and dialogue focused on issues that matter. They can learn how to *manage the changes*—large and small—that come with making improvements. They can learn how to *create a purposeful community* in their school, one in which all teachers and staff are invested in student outcomes and believe they can make a difference.

These three overarching responsibilities of effective school leaders—establishing a clear focus, managing change, and creating a purposeful community—as well as the specific actions and behaviors that support them, were uncovered in a sweeping analysis of research conducted by McREL and first reported in the ASCD publication *School Leadership That Works* (Marzano,

Waters, & McNulty, 2005). This research, which serves as the cornerstone of this book, has since been translated into practical guidance in the form of our Balanced Leadership professional development program and implemented by thousands of school leaders across the country and around the world. In this context, the term “balanced” refers to the delicate give and take between specific leadership actions: between directing and supporting, providing answers and asking questions, and stepping up and stepping up back—themes that we explore in Chapter 3 and are also illustrated in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1

### Balancing Leadership



This book captures what we’ve learned from these principals, synthesizing the successes and challenges they’ve had as they implement Balanced Leadership in their schools and districts. Our intent is to help others who know they need to and can improve, but who may not know where to start. How do you integrate the actions and behaviors on a daily basis? Which tools are most valuable? What elements will lead to the greatest change in practice?

We include stories of principals who have transformed their schools through effective leadership, as well as select tools and tips that leaders tell us have made the biggest difference. As you strive to improve your own practice and transform your own school, we hope this book will both inspire and guide you and your leadership team as you put your intentions into action.

Please note that portions of this book have been previously published in *School Leadership That Works* by Robert J. Marzano, by Timothy Waters, and Brian A. McNulty (ASCD, 2005); *The Balanced Leadership Framework* by Timothy Waters and Greg Cameron (McREL, 2007); *District Leadership That Works* by Robert J. Marzano and Timothy Waters (Solution Tree, 2009); and in various materials created by McREL for its Balanced Leadership professional development program.

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# Balanced Leadership: What the Research Says

Schools in the United States have been organized around some sort of “leader” or “manager” since the early 20th century, when one-room schoolhouses transitioned to schools with multiple grades and classrooms. Teachers fulfilled this role initially, but as schools became more complex organizations, the need for full-time administrators led to the birth of the role of “principal.”

The primary duties of principals have changed dramatically since then, and principals have long suspected that the many functions they fulfill, as building managers and instructional leaders, affect their schools’ bottom line—student achievement. But until fairly recently, no one had proven empirically that this is the case.

## The Meta-Analysis

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In 2001, McREL set out to study the links between school leadership and student achievement. We undertook a meta-analysis of school-level leadership for the purpose of answering the following questions: Is there an empirical relationship between principal leadership and student achievement? If so, is the relationship positive or negative? And is it strong enough to matter to those who lead schools (principals and school-level leadership teams) and those who supervise principals?

Today, these questions seem naïve; of course there is an empirical relationship between principal leadership and student achievement. Nowadays we read frequently about the effect of high-quality leadership on achievement being second only to the effect of high-quality instruction. Before our study, however, this was an unanswered question.

The results of our meta-analysis, which were first reported in the white paper *Balanced Leadership: What 30 Years of Research Tells Us About the Effect of Leadership on Student Achievement* (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003), answered soundly the questions we had about school-level leadership.

Yes, there is an empirical relationship between leadership and student achievement.

Yes, the relationship is generally positive, though not always.

Yes, from our perspective, the average effect of leadership is strong enough to matter to principals and those who supervise them.

Specifically, we not only discovered a *positive, empirical, statistically significant relationship* between school-level leadership and student achievement, but also identified *21 specific leadership responsibilities*, along with practices that fulfill them, each with their own positive, empirical relationship to student achievement. (See Figure 1.1 for a list of the 21 leadership responsibilities and the appendix for an expanded chart that includes the associated practices and the effect sizes.)

In addition, the meta-analysis, which included 69 quantitative studies culled from more than 5,000 research studies completed during three decades, showed that we could predict that *95 percent of the time, when these responsibilities are fulfilled effectively by strong leaders, we will find higher average levels of student achievement* than we would in comparable schools where these responsibilities are not fulfilled effectively.

## The Factor Analysis

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Although our study asked and answered meaningful questions, answers to one set of questions led to other questions. The meta-analysis left us wanting to know more about the 21 leadership responsibilities that surfaced and our explanation for the finding that we labeled as the “differential impact of leadership,” which occurred when principals were rated as strong leaders by staff and supervisors in schools with lower-than-expected student achievement. We wanted to know if there really were 21 specific leadership responsibilities, or if they were intercorrelated such that they could be reduced to a smaller number. We suspected several were intercorrelated, and the actual number of leadership responsibilities positively and empirically associated with achievement was smaller.

To answer this new set of questions, we conducted a second study, a factor analysis, which we began by developing a survey to collect data from 659 principals. We used these survey responses to factor analyze the 21 responsibilities and the relationship between the responsibilities and change associated with principals’ improvement initiatives. Once again, we were surprised.

We learned that the responsibilities were *not* intercorrelated enough to warrant combining or eliminating any of them. We also discovered the importance of magnitude of change: Although all 21 responsibilities were positively correlated with first-order change (change that doesn’t require a huge shift in action or perception), only 11 were correlated with second-order change

FIGURE 1.1

## 21 Leadership Responsibilities Positively Correlated with Student Achievement

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**Affirmation:** Recognizes and celebrates school accomplishments and acknowledges failures

**Change Agent:** Is willing to challenge and actively challenges the status quo

**Communication:** Establishes strong lines of communication with and among teachers and students

**Contingent Rewards:** Recognizes and rewards individual accomplishments

**Culture:** Fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation

**Discipline:** Protects teachers from issues and influences that would detract from their teaching time or focus

**Flexibility:** Adapts his or her leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation and is comfortable with dissent

**Focus:** Establishes clear goals and keeps those goals in the forefront of the school's attention

**Ideals and Beliefs:** Communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling

**Input:** Involves teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies

**Intellectual Stimulation:** Ensures faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices and makes the discussion of these a regular aspect of the school's culture

**Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment:** Is directly involved in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices

**Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment:** Is knowledgeable about current curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices

**Monitor and Evaluate:** Monitors the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning

**Optimize:** Inspires and leads new and challenging innovations

**Order:** Establishes a set of standard operating procedures and routines

**Outreach:** Is an advocate and spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders

**Relationships:** Demonstrates an awareness of the personal aspects of teachers and staff

**Resources:** Provides teachers with materials and professional development necessary for the successful execution of their jobs

**Situational Awareness:** Is aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school and uses this information to address the current and potential problems

**Visibility:** Has quality contact and interactions with teachers and students



(change that requires new knowledge and skills, challenges existing norms, or conflicts with personal values), and only 7 of those were positive.

Our factor analysis showed evidence that the four negatively correlated responsibilities—*Culture*, *Communication*, *Order*, and *Input*—could be explained by the concept of “implementation dip.” In other words, when schools undertake initiatives requiring second-order change, these four areas tend to get worse before they get better, and a decline in performance is not uncommon.

The results of the factor analysis were, in the view of many, as meaningful as what we learned through the meta-analysis. We included all of these findings, our conclusions, and our recommendations in *School Leadership That Works: From Research to Results* (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005).

## The Balanced Leadership Framework

We realized the complexity for principals in managing and implementing 21 responsibilities and their associated 66 practices. To help school leaders organize this information and connect their vision with a plan of action, we developed the Balanced Leadership Framework (see Figure 1.2), which provides a structure that connects our research findings with other relevant, research-based knowledge on school improvement, and on change and organizational management.

FIGURE 1.2

### Balanced Leadership Framework

