Introduction

Over the past several years, Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) has completed multiple meta-analytic studies on the practices of effective schools, teachers, and principals. These studies provide general guidance for what school leaders and teachers can do to increase student achievement.

We recognize, however, that simply knowing what to do is often not enough to transform schools and classrooms. Leaders also must know why certain practices are important, when they should be used, and how to apply them skillfully in their own schools and classrooms.

That is why we developed the Balanced Leadership Framework™ — to help school leaders apply findings from our recent research on effective principals to their own leadership behaviors. In so doing, we hope that this framework will help leaders connect vision (i.e., knowing what to do and why to do it) with action (i.e., knowing how to do it) in their schools.

McREL’s research on leadership

Between 1998 and 2003, McREL conducted three major quantitative studies on the effects of classroom, school, and leadership practices on student achievement. The first reported on nine clusters of research-based instructional strategies with statistically significant effects on student achievement...

“Wisdom is knowing what to do next, skill is knowing how to do it, and virtue is doing it.”

David Starr Jordan, scientist and educator
achievement (Marzano, 1998; Marzano, Gaddy & Dean, 2000). McREL described these strategies in the 2001 ASCD publication, Classroom Instruction that Works. The second study reported on school practices, also with statistically significant effects on student achievement (Marzano, 2000; 2003).

The meta-analysis
These two studies set the stage for McREL’s meta-analysis of school-level leadership and its effects on student achievement (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). This analysis began in 2001 with the review of more than 5,000 studies that purported to have examined the effects of principal leadership on student achievement. From these 5,000 studies, 69 were selected based on the quality of their design, rigor, reliability and relevance of data to the questions McREL was attempting to answer about school level leadership. In all cases, the studies shared four characteristics:

• The dependent variable in each study was student achievement.
• The independent variable in each study was leadership.
• Student achievement measures were all quantitative and standardized.
• Measures of school level leadership were all quantitative and standardized.

The 69 studies included more than 14,000 teacher ratings of principal leadership for 2,802 principals. Ratings of principal leadership were correlated with more than 1.4 million student achievement scores. To our knowledge, this is the largest-ever sample for conducting this type of analysis. The findings, conclusions, and technical notes from this meta-analysis have been published in School Leadership that Works: From Research to Results (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005).


The purpose of any meta-analysis is to determine relationships between dependent and independent variables. McREL’s meta-analysis of research on school leaders examined the relationship between student achievement and school-level leadership. It produced three major findings.

First, we found a statistically significant correlation between school level leadership and student achievement of .25, which translates to a one standard deviation increase in leadership behavior corresponding with a 10 percentile point difference in student achievement on a norm referenced test. No longer is there a question about the effect of leadership on student achievement. Clearly, leadership makes a difference.

Second, we identified 21 leadership responsibilities with statistically significant correlations to student achievement and 66 practices or behaviors for fulfilling these responsibilities. With this finding, the concept of “instructional leadership” is no longer an abstraction or left only to theory. As shown in Exhibit 1, we now have a well-defined set of research-based leadership responsibilities and associated practices correlated with student achievement.
### Exhibit 1: Principal leadership responsibilities & practices

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<th>Responsibilities (extent to which the principal ...)</th>
<th>Associated practices</th>
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| **Culture:** fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation | - Promotes cooperation among staff  
- Promotes a sense of well-being  
- Promotes cohesion among staff  
- Develops an understanding of purpose  
- Develops a shared vision of what the school could be like |
| **Order:** establishes a set of standard operating procedures and routines | - Provides and enforces clear structure, rules, and procedures for students  
- Provides and enforces clear structures, rules, and procedures for staff  
- Establishes routines regarding the running of the school that staff understand and follow |
| **Discipline:** protects teachers from issues and influences that would detract from their teaching time or focus | - Protects instructional time from interruptions  
- Protects/shelters teachers from distractions |
| **Resources:** provides teachers with materials and professional development necessary for the successful execution of their jobs | - Ensures teachers have necessary materials and equipment  
- Ensures teachers have necessary staff development opportunities that directly enhance their teaching |

### Bibliography

**Conclusion**

At no time in recent memory has the need for effective and inspired leadership been more pressing than it is today. With increasing expectations in society and in the workplace for knowledgeable, skilled, responsible citizens, the pressure on schools intensifies. The importance of truly effective educational leadership is clear and the time for improving schools is short. It is our hope that the Balanced Leadership Framework will provide the guidance principals need to enhance effectiveness, translate vision and aspirations into action, and improve achievement for all students.

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| **Involvement in curriculum, instruction, and assessment:** is directly involved in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices | Is involved in helping teachers design curricular activities  
Is involved with teachers to address instructional issues in their classrooms  
Is involved with teachers to address assessment issues |
| **Focus:** establishes clear goals and keeps those goals in the forefront of the school’s attention | Establishes high, concrete goals and expectations that all students meet them  
Establishes concrete goals for all curriculum, instruction, and assessment  
Establishes concrete goals for the general functioning of the school  
Continually keeps attention on established goals |
| **Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment:** is knowledgeable about current curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices | Is knowledgeable about instructional practices  
Is knowledgeable about assessment practices  
Provides conceptual guidance for teachers regarding effective classroom practice |
| **Visibility:** has quality contact and interactions with teachers and students | Makes systematic frequent visits to classrooms  
Maintains high visibility around the school  
Has frequent contact with students |
They can, however, be developed into “Purposeful Communities” through strong and effective leadership. For this to happen, principals must understand the value and attributes of Purposeful Community, and emphasize leadership responsibilities in ways that contribute to this development. Without Purposeful Community, it is difficult to imagine schools successfully implementing and sustaining the changes necessary to prepare all of their students to live and work in an increasingly competitive, fast-paced global economy. Within a Purposeful Community, it is difficult to imagine anything else.