

Effective Leadership for Effective Schools: A Survey of Principal Attitudes

Effective principals agree on what should be occurring in the classrooms in their schools, according to these writers, who queried principals in 202 schools identified as “effective.” The most important characteristic of teachers, they responded, is to be task oriented.

BY JOHN W. ARNN, JR., AND JOHN N. MANGIERI

IT HAS BECOME increasingly difficult in recent years to read an education journal, attend a national meeting, or discuss educational reform without encountering the terms “effective schools” and “instructional leadership.” Indeed, the literature abounds with reports of research, models, and strategies for the improvement of schools.

However, that same literature can lead the reader down several different, and often nonparallel, roads. The reader may encounter many dichotomies such as:

- Elementary schools vs. secondary schools
- Public schools vs. private schools
- Urban schools vs. suburban and rural schools

- Cross-sectional studies vs. longitudinal studies.

However, according to a synthesis of research on effective schools (Purkey and Smith, 1982), several characteristics of effective schools tend to bridge many of the dichotomies and bring a sharper focus to the topic of effective schools. The characteristics, as supported by numerous research investigations, are:

1. High expectations for student achievement on the part of staff members.
2. Strong instructional leadership on the part of the principal or another staff member.
3. Well-defined school goals and emphases.
4. Staff training on a schoolwide basis.
5. Control by staff over instructional training decisions.
6. A sense of order.
7. A system for monitoring student progress.

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8. Good discipline.

While these criteria are important, this investigation was primarily interested in the list's second characteristic. The role of the administrator in effective schools has been underscored by other researchers as well. Brookover and Lezotte (1979) viewed principals at effective schools as aggressive instructional leaders and evaluators of basic skills achievement. Edmonds (1982) described the impact of instructional leadership as the "bonding agent" for effective teaching and learning.

McCormack-Larkin and Kretch (1982), in describing Milwaukee's Project RISE, reported that as the effectiveness of the schools increased the principal's role changed from building manager to instructional leader. Asick (1984) concluded that without effective leadership there is no effective school.

These and other studies provide overwhelming support for the concept that effective schools have effective leaders. In fact, one could conclude that effective schools may simply reflect, in various ways, the impact of effective leadership upon them.

With such strong indications of the importance of instructional leadership by principals, several questions emerge: How do leaders of effective schools influence their teachers? What do principals, as instructional leaders, emphasize in terms of teacher classroom behaviors?

The Study

To answer these questions, it was necessary to first identify those schools acknowledged as effective. The schools chosen were the 202 schools selected in the 1983-84 Secondary School Recognition Program. This program is conducted under the aegis of the U.S. Department of Education and seeks to recognize secondary schools "to identify and call attention to a national group of schools that are unusually effective in educating their students."

The schools selected were found in virtually every geographical locale in the nation, including rural, suburban, and urban schools. They ranged in size from very small to very large. Figure 1 lists the criteria employed in the selection of these schools.

The principals of the 202 schools were sent a list of the teaching behaviors identified by Greenblatt, Cooper, and Muth (1984). The principals were asked to rank the behaviors from most to least important in terms of what they emphasized with teachers.

Of the 202 questionnaires, 160 were returned, of which 151 (75 percent) were used in the tabulation of results. Data derived from the administration of this questionnaire are presented in Figure 2.

Results and Implications

Many conclusions could be drawn based on the study's findings. In our judgment, five facets of the results merit additional discussion.

First, when we originally designed this investigation we thought it would be necessary to compile separate tabulations for the junior high and high schools involved in our study. Of significance to the investigators was the fact that there was no difference in the rankings reported by junior high principals and high school principals for the top three behaviors or the bottom three behaviors.

Overall, the greatest difference between junior high rankings and high school rankings was two ranks. Thus, due to the virtual similarity of responses, one need not differentiate when speaking of the behaviors emphasized by junior high and high school principals with relationship to teaching.

Second, the three behaviors identified as most important for principals to emphasize with teachers were:

- *Task orientation*—the extent to which the classroom is businesslike, the stu-

Figure 1
1983-84 Secondary School Recognition Program Criteria
Attributes of Success

1. Clear academic goals
2. High expectations for students
3. Order and discipline
4. Rewards and incentives for students
5. Regular and frequent monitoring of student progress
6. Opportunities for meaningful student responsibility and participation
7. Teacher efficacy
8. Rewards and incentives for teachers
9. Concentration on academic learning time
10. Positive school climate
11. Administrative leadership
12. Well-articulated curriculum
13. Evaluation for instructional improvement
14. Community support and involvement

High School Indicators of Success

1. Student performance on standard achievement tests
2. Student performance on minimum competency tests
3. Numbers of students who go on to postsecondary education, enlist in the military, or find employment
4. Student and teacher attendance rates
5. Rates of suspensions and other exclusions
6. Student awards in academic or vocational competition
7. Awards for outstanding school programs

Junior High/Middle School Indicators

1. Student performance on standard achievement tests
2. Student performance on minimum competency tests
3. Student success in high school
4. Daily student and teacher attendance rates
5. Rates of student suspensions and other exclusions
6. Awards for outstanding school programs and teaching
7. Student awards in academic or vocational competitions

All schools are also judged on progress in overcoming obstacles and strides toward excellence.

Figure 2
Effective Teaching Behaviors

| <u>Rank of Importance*</u> | <u>Behavior</u> | <u>Definition</u> |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Task Orientation | The extent to which the classroom is businesslike, the students spend their time on academic subjects, and the teacher presents clear goals to the students. |
| 11 | Opportunity to learn criterion material | The extent to which criterion material is covered in class. |
| 9 | Variability | The amount of flexibility or adaptability of teaching methods; the amount of extra material in the classroom. |
| 2 | Enthusiasm and interest | The amount of the teacher's vigor, power, and involvement. |
| 5 | Feedback | The extent to which the teacher provides the student with positive and negative feedback. |
| 10 | Structuring | The extent to which the teacher directs instruction. |
| 7 | Questioning | The extent to which the teacher asks questions at different levels and adjusts them appropriately in the classroom. |
| 6 | Management | The extent to which the teacher is able to conduct the class without instruction being interrupted. |
| 3 | Direct instruction | The extent to which the teacher sets and articulates the learning goals, actively assesses student progress, and frequently makes class presentations illustrating how to do assigned work. |
| 8 | Instructional time | The allocation of a period of time for a lesson adequate to cover the material yet flexible enough to allow for the unexpected. |
| 4 | Pacing | The extent to which the level of difficulty and the pace of the lesson is appropriate for the student's ability and interest. |

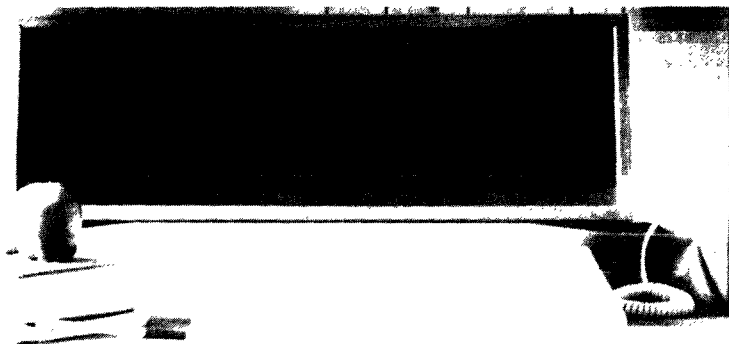
*1 was considered by principals to be the most important behavior, 2 was considered next in importance, 3 next, and so forth, with 11 being the least important behavior as it related to effective teaching.

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dents spend their time on academic subjects, and the teacher presents clear goals to the students

- *Enthusiasm and interest*—the amount of the teacher’s vigor, power, and involvement
- *Direct instruction*—the extent to which the teacher sets and articulates the learning goals, actively assesses student progress, and frequently makes class presentations illustrating how to do assigned work.

If one analyzes the content of these behaviors, both an explicit and implicit statement of administrative philosophy regarding instruction emerges. Namely, principals in effective schools emphasize the “activity” dimension of teaching. More simply stated, principals of effective schools expect to see teachers teaching.

Third, there was virtual consensus among our study’s participants as to the behaviors that were ninth, tenth, and eleventh in terms of importance. More than 90 percent of the principals ranked these three items as the behaviors of least importance:

- *Variability*—the amount of flexibility or adaptability of teaching methods; the amount of extra materials, displays, or resource materials in the classroom
- *Structuring*—the extent to which the teacher directs the instruction
- *Opportunity to learn criterion material*—the extent to which criterion material is covered in class.

Therefore, if one were seeking to emulate the instructional practices employed in these effective schools, it could be reasonably concluded that the preceding three items are held in relatively low esteem by the instructional leaders of such schools.

Fourth, we would be remiss if we did not comment on one unexpected outcome of our investigation: When one considers the myriad of responsibilities with which a secondary administrator is

faced, we were both pleased and shocked at the relatively high rate of response we received from these principals. This indicated that principals of effective schools continue to be interested and supportive of continuing research in the area of effective schools. Such a positive attitude may, in and of itself, be an indication of principals whose schools are effective or are on the threshold of being effective.

Finally, our research indicates that some generalization may be made regarding the instructional emphases of principals in effective schools. Such leaders place priority upon the following: strong goal orientation, active assessment, strong focus on academic subjects, and teacher-initiated instruction.

Additionally, these principals emphasize the following teaching characteristics in their faculty: enthusiasm, involvement, effective communication skills, and productive modeling.

According to Ernest Boyer (1983):

Every morning at 8:00 a.m. the doors of America’s high schools are opened. Walk inside and look into the future of the nation.

Results from our study indicate that there is consensus in at least 151 nationally recognized secondary schools in the United States as to what should be occurring instructionally after the doors open.

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Year-Round School Gets High Marks

An all-year education program is an acceptable alternative to the traditional school calendar and provides a solution to school overcrowding, according to the results of a study to investigate the effects of year-round learning in California schools.

The study collected data about California's 277 year-round schools, where students attend the same number of school days as their counterparts on a traditional calendar, but trade their three-month summer holiday for more frequent, shorter vacations.

The results of the study suggest that year-round education is as successful—or even more successful—as traditional schedules in communities where there is strong support from parents and teachers.

Drawbacks include problems delivering services to special students and storing instructional materials for the group of students who are on vacation.

Also, parents with students in year-round programs are concerned about planning vacations and increased difficulties for teens to obtain jobs.