

TITLE Effectiveness of Leadership on Increasing Student Achievement in High-Poverty Schools

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OBJECTIVE The purpose of the study was to identify the leadership actions, behaviors, and practices that public elementary high-performing, high-poverty school principals use to increase student achievement in reading and mathematics.

METHODOLOGY

The subjects were high-poverty public elementary, middle, or junior high school principals and teachers in Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, Iowa, Kentucky, and Missouri whose schools housed Grades K through 8, collectively or in part, that were recognized by their respective state departments of education and/or the U.S. Department of Education for exemplary academic performance on their respective state standards assessment tests in the 2009-2014 academic school years, and principals from all 473 identified elementary, middle or junior high public schools comprised the target population, and five teachers from each school were invited. Subsequently 19 principals (5% response rate) and 45 teachers (2% response rate) completed the Leadership Practices Inventory and open-ended questions in the Ten Effectiveness Indicators of High Performing School Benchmarks (Dunsworth & Billings, 2009). Principals in improving high-poverty schools had an average of 13 years at their current school ($M = 12.8$ years) and as 22 years as a principal, principals in transient-status high-performing, high-poverty schools have principals with eight years in their current position and nine years as a principal, and principals from consistent high-performing, high-poverty had served an average of 10+ years in their current position and 15.5 years as a principal. Internal reliability (Cronbach alpha) coefficients for the LPI scales in this study for principals were .71 Model, .89 Inspire, .80 Challenge, .71 Enable, and .89 Encourage and for teachers (observers) were .88 Model, .94 Inspire, .91 Challenge, .89 Enable, and .94 Encourage.

KEY FINDINGS

The frequency ratings for all five leadership practices by principals, across all three types of schools, were higher than those reported by teachers. At consistent high-performing, high-poverty schools, principals rated their Model the way and Challenge the Process leadership practices significantly higher than did the teachers, at transient-status high-performing, high-poverty schools, principals rated their Model, Inspire, and Encourage leadership practices significantly higher than did the teachers, and principals at improving

high-poverty schools rated their Enable others to Act leadership practices significantly higher than the teachers did. No significant differences were found in the leadership practices scores of principals across the three types of schools, and this was also true for teachers across the three types of schools.

The author notes:

The common leadership actions and behaviors perceived to contribute to high student performance in high-performing, high-poverty schools included: giving feedback, referring to the strategic plan, supporting professional learning communities, conducting administrative observations, addressing and resolving conflicts, painting the big picture of what is to be accomplished, treating others with dignity and respect, praising people for a job well done, supporting the decisions that people make on their own, actively listening to diverse points of view, communicating a clear leadership philosophy, and making a point to let people know about your confidence in their abilities (p. 129)

While statistical analysis of the quantitative data did not determine a statistically significant difference between the perception of practices reported by the principals and teachers at each type of school, analysis of the qualitative data revealed that modeling the way and enabling others to act scores were the highest practices observed. Ten of the 12 of the behaviors or actions (83%) were categorized under the practices of modeling the way or enabling others to act, two actions (16%) were characterized as encouraging the heart and the remaining behavior encompassed inspire a shared vision (1%) (p. 130).

All the leaders exhibited all of the leadership practices. However consistent and improving school principals were found to enable others to act more often, which involves fostering collaboration and building spirited teams, actively involving others, and understanding that mutual respect sustains exceptional efforts. Transient-status principals were reported to have practiced model the way more often, which entails establishing values concerning the way people should be treated and the way goals should be pursued, creating standards of excellence, and then setting an example for others to follow (p. 144).

It was also noted that the perceived leadership behaviors that differed between consistent, transient-status, and improving school, which had greatest impact on student achievement, were the principals' critical leadership focus factors. Additional findings were that the perceived leadership practices high-performing, high-poverty principals employed to render the most effect on student learning varied according to the type of school. Consistent and improving high-performing, high-poverty school principals employed *enable others to act* practices mostly (p. 167).

Transient-status leaders used model the way methods primarily. The hierarchy of

perceived actions that were used most by principals of highly successful high-poverty schools as a factor that assisted in promoting student achievement were comprised nine

actions, i.e., treats others with dignity and respect, sets a personal example of what he/she expects of others, follows through on promises and commitments he/she makes, talks about future trends that will influence how work gets done, spends time and energy making certain that the people he/she works with adhere to the principles and standards that have been agreed on, challenges people to try out new and innovative ways to do their work, supports the decisions that people make on their own, speaks with genuine conviction about the higher meaning and purpose of our work and praises people for a job well done (p. 167-8).