

TITLE The Roles of Principal Leadership Behaviors and Organizational Routines in Montana's Distinguished Title I Schools

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OBJECTIVE The purpose of this study was to describe the role played by the principals' leadership behaviors and organizational routines in Montana's award-winning Title I schools.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted at two elementary and one middle school. All were designated as Title I schools, due to the percentage of their students who came from low-income households. All three had been recognized by the Montana Office of Public Instruction as Montana Distinguished Schools for Exceptional Student Performance for Two or More Consecutive Years (2006-2010). Their enrollments ranged from 233 to 387 students, and each still employed the same principal. In addition to completing the Leadership Practices Inventory (Self and Observer), the Collective Teacher Beliefs Scale (Tschannen-Moran, 2011) was administered to each school's faculty. The principal and several teachers were interviewed using semi-structured questions, and the researcher spent time observing the school and examining relevant documents.

KEY FINDINGS

The researcher notes:

In overall terms of how principals' transformational leadership practices contributed to student achievement, five themes emerged across the three case schools. Consistent with the previous literature, these themes corresponded with the five practices of transformational leadership: Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart (p. 327).

First, each of the three high-achieving schools in this study had been led by a principal whose stated beliefs and actions emphasized the importance of goals tied to improved student achievement; this was consistent with transformational leadership practices that modeled the way (p. 327). Second, each school had had a principal who gathered faculty input to build a consensus that high student achievement was important, and to develop plans for how to improve student achievement; this was consistent with transformational leadership practices that inspired a shared vision (p. 328). Third, each school had been led by a principal who had worked with faculty to change previous practices in order to improve

student achievement; this was consistent with transformational leadership practices that challenged the process (p. 329). Fourth, each school had had a principal who supported and empowered teachers in the process of improving student achievement; this was consistent with transformational leadership practices that enabled others to act (p. 329). Fifth, each school had been led by a principal who praised and recognized teachers for their efforts; this was consistent with transformational leadership practices that encouraged the heart (p. 330).

However, in regards to Encourage the Heart, the researcher notes:

While it is important for principals to frequently praise teachers, this study found that principals should use caution in publicly recognizing teachers, as other teachers who are not recognized may become disenchanted with the principal or envious of perceived “favored” teachers; conversely, teachers who perceive that they themselves are favored by the principal may feel self-conscious and awkward as a result. This does not mean that principals should avoid praising teachers publicly; genuine public recognition is still an important aspect of encourage the heart practices. It does mean, however, that principals should be cognizant of the possibility for misunderstandings and hard feelings among their teachers, and so be as judicious and even-handed as possible in their use of public recognition (p. 345).

The researcher concludes:

These findings implied that school principals may be able to improve student achievement in their own schools. It was suggested that principals may accomplish this by: (1) Practicing transformational leadership behaviors; (2) Engaging in leadership behaviors that exemplify relational trust; and (3) Promoting teacher collaboration with an emphasis on continually improving teaching and learning as a professional learning community. Superintendents may facilitate this by hiring principals who have strong knowledge of, and are committed to, these three areas, and by providing professional development to instill or improve such knowledge and values in principals already employed. (p. 355).