

The Evolving Role of the Principal

Over time, the role of the principal has expanded and evolved to encompass a wide array of expectations. Second only to teachers, principal effectiveness is the most important in-school factor that influences student achievement. Today, a principal's role is to:

Foster an environment in which students learn and grow and educators share responsibility for providing high-quality instruction.

Provide overall leadership and strategic vision, manage day-to-day operations, and ensure the school has the necessary resources and supports to meet its goals.

Principals also lead implementation of many school-based education reforms such as new teacher evaluations or rollout of new curriculum aligned with Common Core standards, and they may be responsible for establishing new schools or turning around low-performing schools. Community and parent engagement is also an integral part of the job.

Not surprisingly, there is no single mold for a great principal, nor a single list of characteristics. Being a strong school leader is all about *what the principal does* to impact both the school environment and the classroom to influence student outcomes.¹

The right focus on instruction

Principals have more impact when they foster a college-going school culture and a safe, orderly climate.² Involvement in daily classroom instruction only marginally impacts student achievement and can negatively impact teacher morale.³

Success relies on a delicate balance of leadership (setting a high bar, focusing on meaningful data, clearing obstacles) and coaching (including leadership development among master teachers and trainers).

Building and maintaining a strong instructional team

Some principal-led activities, like teacher coaching, evaluation, leadership development, and developing the school's academic program, directly relate to student achievement gains.⁴

1 "The Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education: Measuring Learning-Centered Leadership," Murphy, Goldring, Cravens, Elliott, and Porter, *Journal of East China Normal University*, 29(1), 1-10, 2011.

2 [Sebastian and Allensworth, 2013](#)

3 Grissom, Loeb, and Master, 2013, discussed [here](#).

Strong principals also impact teacher retention. Teachers take their cues from the culture established by the leader; effective teachers are less likely to leave if they have faith in leadership.

Managing the school to meet its goals

Principal management and school success are linked: principals with stronger organizational management skills (e.g., personnel, budgeting) that are successful operating within the confines of the system tend to lead schools that demonstrate greater student achievement gains.⁵ Every principal should feel empowered to make the best decisions for their school and their students.

Learn more

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⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Grissom and Loeb, 2011, discussed [here](#).