

IMPROVING SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS

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Abstract

How to improve the quality of education is a much-talked-about concern in a number of developing nations. There is a general awareness among political leaders that in order to meet the challenges of globalization their educational systems must be upgraded.

In addition to reforming the curriculum, another frequently heard proposal is to increase the pay that teachers and principals receive. It is true that teachers are among the poorest income earners in developing countries. However, national budgets are already strained due to pressure to increase funding in other essential service areas: health care services and public safety to name but two.

Another proposal is to focus on the improvement of instructional techniques and school leadership. It has been demonstrated, for example, that certain instructional methods produce higher student achievement than other methods. Therefore focusing on teacher performance seems to be an essential first step toward achieving higher student achievement. Then, too, there is considerable evidence that establishes a definite link between the quality of school leadership and school effectiveness.

School effectiveness to a certain degree is dependent upon adapting teaching methods and materials to the needs of students. It follows that highly centralized national systems must

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decentralize authority in many aspects of education to levels closer to local and regional communities. Principals must become more than mere puppets that follow orders emanating from a nation's capital. Decentralization of school management is essential in any scheme aimed at improving overall student achievement. Several countries in the region such as Indonesia and Thailand have already begun to decentralize certain functions.

This paper presents some generally accepted correlates of effective schools – schools in which students achieve higher than expected levels in academic subjects and in personal and social development. Included is a detailed listing of performance criteria by which teachers and principals can carry out self-evaluations. Ministries of Education as a basis for making career advancement and salary decisions, for example, may use these criteria also.

The Appendix lists items principals should collect and retain in a portfolio of professional accomplishments. Evaluators when judging the performance of principals will find such portfolios helpful.

There have been literally thousands of research projects that attempt to identify what are the major correlates of the "effective school". Teachers and principals in effective schools engage in *those activities that result in enhanced student learning* by directing, guiding and coordinating the educational

programme. Many leading school systems, both state-governed and private, have incorporated the findings of recent research into the design of instruments by which teachers and principals may carry out self-evaluations. These same instruments can be the basis by which external teams evaluate the performance of teachers and of principals. This paper deals with both the research and the practice of performance evaluation in schools.

Correlates of Effective Schools

What have the many research projects found to be the correlates of effective schools? What role do teachers play in making schools more effective? What role do principals play in increasing the effectiveness of schools?

What follows is a brief review of the findings, first with respect to role of teachers, then with respect to the role of school leaders.

The Role of Teachers

Effective teaching may be summarized as having three dimensions: the classroom itself, teaching style, and the learning environment.

The classroom. In effective classrooms, teachers plan, manage and monitor an orderly learning activity system. Effective classroom manage-

ment includes guidelines for student behaviour, record keeping systems, and ensuring an adequate supply of suitable learning materials.

This latter element, adequate supply of learning materials, is normally outside the control of teachers. The school jurisdiction or the Ministry of Education is normally responsible for learning materials. However, it can be argued that it is, nonetheless, the duty of every teacher to make every effort to ensure an adequate supply of learning materials

Teaching style. Teaching in effective classrooms is characterized by high learning expectations for all students and a task orientation to instruction.

The style of teaching in a successful classroom is one that is adaptable, structured, and filled with variety, and based on specific learning goals. Teachers structure both high and low order cognitive activities, instruct in both small and large groups; are interactive with students; and, in general, guide the learning process by providing reinforcements and correctives.

Learning environment. In effective classrooms learning occurs within a supportive atmosphere, where students work in both small and large groups, in individualized learning activities, as well as cooperative learning environments.

Students are given ample time and opportunity to master skills; and, in addition, students assume a high degree of responsibility for their learning through participation, by being involved in setting their own learning goals, and helping to monitor their own progress.

The Role of Principals

The research literature consistently identifies four dimensions of effective school leadership. These are summarized below.

Establishing direction. In effective schools, principals establish direction (mission, goals and purposes), in collaboration with “stakeholders”: parents, students, and teachers. In addition, principals take responsibility for the development of a “school growth plan”, as well as a school-wide staff development plan. International and national issues such as respect for human rights and the protection of the environment are emphasized by word and by deed.

Student learning. In effective schools, principals develop and implement a coordinated school-wide plan to improve student achievement and ensure that there is a process in place to identify students who are experiencing difficulties. There are school-wide policies for assessment, evaluation, and reporting of student progress.

Organization and school climate. In effective schools, principals establish a

process for selecting and assigning teaching personnel, and for evaluating their performance. Principals attend promptly to issues of concern and establish an atmosphere of trust, openness, and collaboration.

Professional development. In effective schools, principals create a programme for their own personal professional development.

PERFORMANCE EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS

It is possible now to move on to identify the criteria that could be used to evaluate the performance of teachers and principals. This can be achieved by elaborating in greater detail the correlates of effective schools.

What follows is a list of specific activities, responsibilities and initiatives that are associated with effective practice. Teachers and principals may use the list as a self-assessment tool. It may also be used by external evaluators who have responsibility for evaluating performance.

This list has been assembled from many sources and represents widely held professional opinion in countries such as Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom.

Criteria for Evaluating Teacher Performance

Evaluation criteria can be general, that is, criteria that are applicable to all teachers, irrespective of grade level or subject matter, or, specific to, say, primary school teachers, or senior high school teachers of mathematics.

Ideally, performance criteria should be developed by joint working groups composed of teacher representatives, principals, and parents. When the groups have completed their work, normally they would report to the appropriate section within the Ministry of Education. The criteria have been grouped into six categories.

- **Evidence of planning:** the teacher develops long-range plans, adheres to prescribed curricula; maintains short-range plans (day plan, lesson plan); identifies strategies, which will meet course objectives.
- **Pedagogy:** the teacher targets instruction to appropriate levels of difficulty; instructs keeping in mind defined goals and objectives; demonstrates clarity of presentation; monitors learning; provides for student motivation; attempts to learn what are the expectations of students; identifies and provides for individual differences; provides for closure; selects and uses strategies to respond to the variety of learning

styles of students; utilizes effective questioning techniques that reflect both the instructional objectives and the ability level of the students.

- **Assessment and evaluation of student progress:** the teacher clearly defines evaluation criteria for students; assesses student progress on a regular and frequent basis; plans assessment that recognizes differences among individuals; designs and interprets tests appropriately; evaluates student growth and achievement in line with objectives of the programme; marks tests, assignments and projects according to criteria clearly understood; adheres to ministry, district, and school policies and procedures; maintains a system of accountability for student progress and completion of assignments; provides feedback on performance regularly to students; maintains appropriate written records; maintains open channels with parents regarding student progress; reports regularly to parents on student progress.
- **Classroom management, discipline, and climate:** the teacher defines and adheres to a clear set of classroom rules, routines and procedures consistent with school practices; emphasizes academic goals and/or achievement; sets high expectations for students; facilitates student involvement and participation; facilitates smooth transition from one activity to another, with attention to appropriate pacing; defines appropriate behaviour and consequences for misbehaviour; monitors student behaviour; responds effectively to unanticipated interruption; actively promotes positive student-teacher interaction; builds group cohesiveness and consensus; accepts, clarifies and supports students' ideas; monitors student work habits.
- **Classroom environment:** the teacher adjusts the physical environment and equipment to accommodate variety in the learning situation; provides facilities for displays, arranges for the exhibition of books and student work; attends to conditions that affect health and safety of students; organizes and arranges the classroom so as to facilitate learning and minimize disruptions.
- **Professional development:** the teacher participates in the development, implementation, and/or review of the school's policies and procedures; maintains positive professional rapport with colleagues; keeps self up-to-date in areas of specialization and in general trends in education; takes advantage of in-service education

opportunities; participates in school/district/provincial committees; participates in committee work of the local region or district education authority; shares ideas, materials and methods with professional colleagues; shares in the evaluation of the effectiveness of school-wide programmes; consults with other professionals (teachers, team leaders, department heads, the school principal, consultants, and specialists) to improve the teaching learning process; interprets school programmes to parents and the community as suitable opportunities occur; maintains positive relationships with parents; sets professional standards of integrity, and of personal growth; maintains an accepting attitude towards constructive criticism, and endeavours to meet professional obligations.

Criteria for Evaluating School Leaders

The criteria for evaluating the performance of principals that are listed below are general in nature. They can be applicable to all principals, irrespective of type of school (primary, junior secondary, senior secondary, vocational) and location (urban, rural, remote). Most comprehensive evaluation systems typically include both general and specific criteria.

However, only general criteria are presented in this article.

Principals who are to be evaluated by external evaluators should be made aware of the agreed-upon criteria well in advance of the actual visit of the evaluators.

Also, principals should develop and keep an up-to-date Leadership Portfolio. A portfolio is a collection of documents that include the principal's credentials, outlines the principal's experience, accomplishments, philosophy, values, and goals. Ideally, in systems that make use of external evaluators, portfolios should be made available to the evaluators in advance of school visits. (Portfolio details are contained in the Appendix found at the conclusion of this article.)

- ***Establishing direction:*** *the principal ensures that there are mission statements as well as a school philosophy that are well articulated and easily understood; statements are student focused and have been developed through the involvement of stakeholders: parents, students, and teachers; statements are in harmony with district and ministry directives; statements include specific reference to the importance of respecting basic human rights of all people, including gender equity, and the importance of protecting the natural environment in the local*

community and in the world generally; develops and implements a “school growth plan” in collaboration with stakeholders; encourages and facilitates staff development.

- **Supervising instruction:** the principal develops, communicates, and implements a programme for the supervision of instruction; the supervision programme encourages and facilitates the use of a variety of instructional strategies to meet students’ needs, and provides clear expectations; conducts informal and formal visits to classrooms; reviews teachers’ daily and long range plans; ensures that staff are familiar with changes to mandated curricula; demonstrates leadership in curriculum development; develops plans for the evaluation and improvement of school programmes; develops and implements a coordinated plan to improve student achievement; ensures that expectations and standards are communicated to students and parents; ensures that there is a process for the identification of students who are experiencing difficulties – academic and personal; develops a system by which contributions and achievements of students and staff are recognized and celebrated; reviews the school’s policies for assessment, evaluation, and

reports of student progress to students and parents.

- **Organization and management:** the principal establishes a process for the selection and assignment of instructional staff; develops and implements school policies and procedures to ensure the effective operation of the school, including the scheduling of students and classes; establishes and monitors policies concerned with the health, safety, and security of students and staff; monitors, controls, and provides accountability for all school funds; develops a staff and student/parent handbook of policies and procedures; and, develops a code of conduct, in collaboration with staff, students, and parents, which is published and made available to the school community.
- **School climate and culture:** the principal establishes and fosters effective communication with staff, students, parents, and the community; expresses ideas clearly in written and oral form, and listens and responds; encourages positive interpersonal relationships, characterized by an atmosphere of trust, openness, and collaboration; is flexible and fair, and demonstrates personal integrity; demonstrates personal concern for individuals and is accessible and visible; establishes effective problem solving

decision-making processes; addresses issues of concern and resolves conflicts; establishes an atmosphere which encourages others to participate in the decision-making process; solves problems cooperatively, delegates effectively, and promotes leadership opportunities; encourages positive school/community relationships; facilitates the operation of a parents' council and encourages active parental involvement; ensures that parents receive regular communications from the school.

- **Professional development:** *the principal has a programme of personal professional development; formulates personal goals and performance objectives; keeps current with education literature and research.*

PROTOCOLS TO GUIDE EXTERNAL EVALUATIONS OF PRINCIPALS

When performance evaluations of principals are state-mandated, it is important that performance criteria be understood and accepted by all those whose professional careers will be affected. There should be wide agreement among educators that the criteria are valid and reasonable.

Note: this present discussion deals only with the external evaluation of principals. Normally, the evaluation of teachers is the responsibility of principals and local district officials, and is therefore not a totally "external" process.

Ideally, the criteria and protocols governing the evaluation of principals should be established by a national team composed of representatives from stakeholder groups that include parents, senior district and ministry officials, teachers, and, of course, from principal associations.

The criteria and evaluation procedures should be widely disseminated. The date for the introduction of the evaluation scheme should be set well in advance to allow sufficient time for principals to adjust present practices in line with the newly established criteria and to begin to assemble professional portfolios.

A rotation scheme should be developed that establishes which principals will be evaluated in a given round. It is recommended that principals be evaluated every five years.

In addition:

- *Individual district-level evaluation teams should be established and made up of credible people who will receive specific training*

- *A timetable for submitting the portfolios, for gathering evaluative data from “clients” (parents, students, teachers), and for arranging formal visits should be developed jointly by the local team and the principals who have been identified for the current round of evaluation visits*
- *Evaluation teams should be required to submit their reports in writing within a reasonable time period*
- *There should be a process by which a principal may appeal an evaluation*
- *Principals who receive a “less than satisfactory” rating will be given one year to improve their performance; if the evaluation teams finds insufficient improvement, such principals may be transferred to non-leadership positions or given the option of “early retirement”.*

APPENDIX

THE PORTFOLIO

A professional portfolio is a collection of documents that include professional credentials and lists the principal's experience, accomplishments, philosophy, values, and vision.

The inclusion of items such as an educational philosophy, mission statement, and goals, may help to clarify and enhance the principal's vision for the school and can be a useful vehicle for professional reflection and analysis.

Suggested portfolio contents

- Academic transcripts
- Certificates or diplomas
- Letters of reference or appreciation
- Personal mission statement
- Review/chronology of the year's activity or professional development
- Examples of professional writing or samples of newsletters, memos, letters
- Bibliography of professional reading
- Memberships in professional organizations
- Surveys, evaluations, performance appraisal reports or feedback
- School accreditation reports; leadership summaries
- Articles or news clippings about the principal's school
- Special projects or school activities (video, posters, reports)
- Photos, artwork, video productions
- Evidence of initiative (workshop presentations, papers, projects, etc.)
- Community service involvement
- Artefacts of personal choice

The professional portfolio can be a uniquely significant and powerful possession, and its uses may serve many ends:

- An appropriate format for professional presentations
- A means of enhancing vision and goal development
- A structured approach to career advancement
- A means of facilitating the accreditation process
- A substantive submission for performance evaluation

Note: This section is adapted from a pamphlet developed by the British Columbia Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association (Vancouver, Canada) that outlines for its members the value of a Portfolio and makes recommendations for the content of such a portfolio.

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