
Introduction

The overarching framework for this book reflects the belief that as principals become more knowledgeable about the strategies that have the greatest impact on teaching and learning—and if they focus their time, energy, and attention on successfully implementing those strategies—then teaching and learning will improve.

In many ways, what we are asking of principals is no different from what we ask of teachers when they power and prioritize their standards. In that process, teachers identify what is most important for students to learn, and they focus on teaching the standards that provide students with the best chance of achieving the highest levels of learning. Likewise we argue that principals must *power and prioritize their practice*. In order to ensure that all students learn to high levels, principals must identify which strategies have the greatest leverage and focus on implementing those that will have the most significant impact on teaching and learning in their schools.

Our thinking is built around four beliefs. Each one, when considered on its own, has implications for our practice, but when taken together as a set of related propositions, our beliefs build a persuasive argument for encouraging principals to focus their school improvement efforts on a limited number of high-leverage strategies.

FIRST, PRINCIPALS ARE CRITICAL TO THE FUNDAMENTAL PURPOSE OF SCHOOLS

We believe the fundamental purpose of school is learning. The research on this is clear; the relationship between a building principal's leadership and student achievement is unequivocal. Show us an effective school where all students are learning, and we will show you an effective principal working tirelessly to make a difference. Thus, if schools are going to

fulfill their fundamental purpose of learning for all, then we must maximize the effectiveness of the principal's role.

SECOND, THE CAPACITY OF THE PRINCIPALSHIP IS AT, OR NEARING, ITS PRACTICAL LIMIT

We believe that while an effective principal is critical to a successful school, the capacity of the principalship is at its practical limit. The job of a building principal has become more and more complex, as seemingly endless expectations are placed on those who serve in that role. If we agree that principals have limited, or at least finite, resources, especially with regard to time, then we must help them become more disciplined with what initiatives they invest their time in and with how they invest their time and why.

THIRD, SOME STRATEGIES HAVE A GREATER IMPACT THAN OTHERS ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

We believe that there has never been a clearer consensus or greater agreement on what schools should do to positively impact student learning. According to Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde, "There is a strong consensus among seemingly disparate subject matter fields about how kids learn best. Virtually all the authoritative voices and documents in every teaching field are calling for the same things" (2012, p. 3).

FOURTH, THE MOST EFFECTIVE PRINCIPALS FOCUS ON A FEW, IMPACTFUL STRATEGIES

Finally, we believe we must acknowledge that principals are pulled in dozens of directions every day; therefore, it makes sense to help principals prioritize their practice. Given that time in school is so precious, *especially for principals*, it makes sense to identify the strategies that are effective and efficient and to focus our attention on those strategies that have the greatest impact.

The book is organized into three sections. In Section I, we build a case for the importance of the role of principals in promoting higher levels of student learning and suggest that it will be beneficial if we look at what principals are expected to do through the lens of leverage.

Chapter 1 reviews the positive influence an effective principal has on teaching and learning. The chapter makes a case for differentiating the type of leadership behavior that is most important if principals are to maximize their impact on teaching and learning.

Chapter 2 explores the day-to-day reality of the principalship, identifies the factors contributing to an overloaded and unrealistic set of expectations, and offers some alternatives to consider.

Chapter 3 introduces the concept of *leverage*, develops an operational definition of leverage, and provides support for the notion that, while many strategies improve teaching and learning, principals must focus on those that impact teaching and learning most.

Chapter 4 argues that principals can best fulfill their mission of ensuring high levels of learning for all students by focusing their time, energy, and attention on implementing the big ideas of Professional Learning Communities.

In Section II, we provide concrete examples, practical applications, and specific suggestions for principals seeking to identify and implement specific strategies that promote high levels of learning for all.

In Chapters 5, 6, and 7 we explore opportunities where principals can find the leverage points to promote a Focus on Learning, a Collaborative Culture, and a Results Orientation in their schools. Our belief is that if we provide principals with practical and pragmatic examples of the best-known research and evidence-based practices, we can accelerate the implementation of the strategies that make a difference. We know what works. If we can identify a few high-leverage strategies and the associated leverage points within the system, everyone benefits.

Section III highlights strategies principals can use to rekindle, reignite, and reenergize their Professional Learning Communities. In Chapters 8 and 9 we explore ways to clarify what matters most, methods to identify what is nonnegotiable, and techniques for communicating effectively, and we provide some thoughts on how to respond to resisters in productive ways.

Underlying our thinking is the notion that we make the process of improving schools too complicated. Certainly, ensuring that all students learn is a complex task, but it is not complicated. The solutions we seek are simple, not simplistic. To paraphrase Peter Senge (1990), a few small and well-focused actions by a principal can produce significant, enduring improvement in schools.

