

# THE LEARNING Principal<sup>®</sup>

FOR A DYNAMIC COMMUNITY OF SCHOOL LEADERS ENSURING SUCCESS FOR ALL STUDENTS

## BREAKING THROUGH THE BARRIERS TO CHANGE

*Principal specialists open doors to school improvement*

BY VALERIE VON FRANK

**A** few years ago, students at Dillon (S.C.) High School arrived at a building surrounded by barbed wire. Some faculty joked that they didn't know whether its purpose was to keep students in — or out. The building's front window was Plexiglass because administrators had gotten tired of replacing the glass that vandals constantly broke. Inside, the building wasn't much better. Years of waxy polish had diminished whatever luster was left on the floors.

One of the first things new Principal Specialist Julie von Frank did was demand the floors be shined. "They told me it couldn't come off," she

says. She got down and scratched it with her pink polished fingernail. "I said, 'If I can get this off, you can, too.'"

The maintenance staff stripped the front entryway three times before she was satisfied. Then von Frank set to work on other housekeep-

ing matters — those directly related to instruction.

### SUPPORTING CHANGE

For South Carolina schools deemed "unsatisfactory" or "below average" by the state, a corps of

principal specialists and leaders is just one approach to try to raise student achievement. Beginning in 1999, the state required schools

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**The principal's multidimensional skills and knowledge contribute to the organization's ability to prosper.**

## The 3-D profile of a principal leader

**C**an you remember the excitement of going to the movies and putting on the squared plastic glasses in order to experience a new intensity of the senses? Or perhaps more recently you have experienced the large and powerful resolution of IMAX films or IMAX 3-D films. When we describe these 3-D experiences, we use terms such as depth, width, and length. These concepts help define the object we're viewing.

Effective leaders, too, operate in three dimensions. As chief executive officers, they lead organizations. As chief learning officers, they learn as they do their work. As chief finance officers, they focus on an organization's finances.

When a principal operates in the first dimension as the chief executive officer, she is planning, leading, and organizing the school enterprise to achieve its intended outcomes and goals. To achieve the intended outcomes, a principal will be a systems thinker and consider diverse perspectives. These skills, when coupled with key knowledge and beliefs, enable a principal to act decisively on challenges of the organization to support a thriving teaching and learning enterprise. Finally, an effective CEO principal has the interpersonal skills to finesse his way through a political environment in order to strategically position and support diverse stakeholders so they are able to collaborate around a shared vision.

In the second dimension as the chief learning officer, a principal focuses on individual and organizational learning and growth. This principal has mastered the skills required to be both an effective teacher of others and an effective student engaged in her own personal professional learning. Because of this, she can model the behaviors she seeks in

others in the organization. The principal as chief learning officer is an organizer of the learning design, a protector of collaborative learning time, and a supporter of innovation that aligns with the organization's desired outcomes. In essence, the principal has primary responsibility for designing a well-functioning learning environment and ensuring that such learning impacts the organization as intended.

A principal operating in the third dimension as chief financial officer knows the security and productivity of a thriving organization are closely tied to the management of its resources. An effective principal conducts an ongoing analysis of how resources — time, people, and money — are invested to achieve the organization's intended outcomes. With the establishment of shared goals and vision, principals can strategically focus their organizations' investments to ensure a productive yield. The profit margins that chief financial officer's seek are increased learning, leadership, and student achievement.

The enterprise of teaching and learning is complex and a principal's job is by no means one-dimensional. The principal's multidimensional skills and knowledge contribute to the organization's ability to prosper. The dimension of leadership gives the organization long life, the dimension of learning adds to the depth of the organization and the dimension of financial security widens the organization's opportunities. A principal who is skilled as a chief executive officer, a chief learning officer, and a chief financial officer holds himself or herself responsible for strategies that provide organizational productivity, continuous learning for adults and students, and the appropriate use of resources aligned to organizational goals.



Pat Roy is co-author of *Moving NSDC's Staff Development Standards Into Practice: Innovation Configurations* (NSDC, 2003).

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Learn more about NSDC's standards, [www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm](http://www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm)

## Trust is the on-ramp to building collaboration and collegiality

I recently listened to teachers who concluded that new forms of job-embedded professional development could not be successful without trust. Trust, it seemed, needed to be developed between and among staff members as well as between the principal and staff in order for teachers to embark on new and seemingly risky form of professional development.

Bryk and Schneider's (2003) longitudinal study of 400 Chicago elementary schools reached the same conclusion: "Recent research shows that social trust among teachers, parents, and school leaders improves much of the routine work of schools and is a key resource for reform" (p. 40). They concluded that relational trust is central to building effective educational communities.

Trust, according to the authors, is elusive, engaging, and essential to meaningful school improvement. Trust is the expectation that another's word, promise, or statement can be relied upon (Rotter, 1980). Relational trust involves more than creating high morale; it is developed through ongoing interaction each day as people work together on improving student learning.

To encourage and build teacher collaboration and use job-embedded professional development strategies, principals need to **build a school culture that is characterized by trust** (Roy & Hord, 2003). Trust, in a school setting, involves **making educational decisions that put the interests of students above personal and political interests**. Trust is built when teachers believe student welfare and high levels of learning are the foundation of school decisions. When decisions seem to be based on personal or political factors, trust erodes.

The principal also **needs to keep his or her word**. When principals do what they say and follow-up with promised actions, staff members can believe their words. Principals also need to **believe in teacher ability and willingness to fulfill their responsibilities effectively**. Trust is built on a foundation of respect; a component of social respect is competence. Principals need to show that they believe in teacher competence and believe that educators operate with the best

**Collaboration:** Staff development that improves the learning of all students provides educators with the knowledge and skills to collaborate.

interest of students in mind. Yet trust can be undermined when incompetence is allowed to persist. As a result, the principal also needs to **address incompetence fairly and firmly**. Bryk and Schneider's study showed that trust within a school eroded quickly when the principal did not tackle personnel issues related to incompetence.

Principals demonstrated competence by **communicating a strong vision for the school and clearly defining expectations that are upheld for all faculty members**. These administrator skills allowed the school staff to accomplish common goals and maintain a cohesive professional community characterized by collective responsibility for student learning. This cohesive community is lubricated by respectful interaction and courtesy among administration and staff members.

Trust and respect is the on-ramp to building collaboration and collegiality. Trust is the "connective tissue that binds individuals together to advance the education and welfare of students" (Bryk & Schneider, 2003, p. 45). This means principals need to spend time considering how interpersonal interactions build trust and respect among staff. The principal needs to monitor his or her actions and those of the staff to build and sustain trust.

## ASSESSING YOUR ROLE AS INSTRUCTIONAL LEADER

In *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching* (ASCD, 1996), Charlotte Danielson developed a framework or model for understanding teaching based on current research. She identified four components clustered into four domains of teaching responsibility: planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities.

Jeffrey Glanz, author of *What Every Principal Should Know about Instructional Leadership* (Corwin, 2006), developed this questionnaire based on the Danielson framework.

Glanz encourages principals to take the survey privately and use it as “a reflective tool to judge what you consider as instructionally important.”

After you have responded to each question, circle the responses that most concern you. Ask yourself:

- *Why is this a problem for me?*
- *How can I remedy this situation?*
- *What additional resources or assistance might I need to improve in this area?*

Because of the length of the questionnaire, NSDC is publishing questions for two of the domains in this issue of *The Learning Principal* and two other domains in the March issue.

**SCORING GUIDE:**

**SA:** Strongly Agree (“For the most part, yes.”)

**A:** Agree (“Yes, but...”)

**D:** Disagree (“No, but...”)

**SD:** Strongly Disagree (“For the most part, no.”)

**Domain I: Planning and preparation**

This domain demonstrates our comfort in working with teachers on content and pedagogical knowledge, knowledge of students and resources, ability to select instructional goals, and the degree to which you help teachers assess learning.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>1. Teachers should be offered guidance in planning and preparing for instruction, and I feel comfortable in doing so.</p> <p><b>SA</b>      <b>A</b>      <b>D</b>      <b>SD</b></p>                         | <p>5. Good teachers are content knowledgeable but may need additional assistance with pedagogical strategies and techniques, and I feel comfortable providing such assistance.</p> <p><b>SA</b>      <b>A</b>      <b>D</b>      <b>SD</b></p> |
| <p>2. Good teachers should display solid content knowledge and make connections between the parts of their discipline or with other disciplines.</p> <p><b>SA</b>      <b>A</b>      <b>D</b>      <b>SD</b></p> | <p>6. I am familiar with pedagogical strategies and continually search for best practices to share with my teachers.</p> <p><b>SA</b>      <b>A</b>      <b>D</b>      <b>SD</b></p>   |
| <p>3. Good teachers should consider the importance of prerequisite knowledge when introducing new topics.</p> <p><b>SA</b>      <b>A</b>      <b>D</b>      <b>SD</b></p>  | <p>7. Good teachers know much about the developmental needs of their students.</p> <p><b>SA</b>      <b>A</b>      <b>D</b>      <b>SD</b></p>   |
| <p>4. Good teachers actively build on students’ prior knowledge and seek causes for students’ misunderstanding.</p> <p><b>SA</b>      <b>A</b>      <b>D</b>      <b>SD</b></p>                                  | <p>8. Principals are familiar with learning styles and multiple intelligences theories and can help teachers apply them to instructional practice.</p> <p><b>SA</b>      <b>A</b>      <b>D</b>      <b>SD</b></p>                             |
|  | <p>9. I do not fully recognize the value of understanding teachers’ skills and knowledge as a basis for their teaching.</p> <p><b>SA</b>      <b>A</b>      <b>D</b>      <b>SD</b></p>  |

10. Goal setting is critical to teacher success in planning and preparing, and the principal should offer to collaborate with teachers in this area.  
SA      A      D      SD
11. I am familiar with curricular and teaching resources to assist teachers.  
SA      A      D      SD
12. I know I can help teachers develop appropriate learning activities suitable for students.  
SA      A      D      SD
13. I can help teachers plan for a variety of meaningful learning activities matched to school, district, and state instructional goals.  
SA      A      D      SD
14. I would encourage teachers to use varied instructional grouping.  
SA      A      D      SD
15. I can assist teachers in developing a systematic plan for assessment of student learning.  
SA      A      D      SD
16. I can provide professional development for teachers in planning and preparation.  
SA      A      D      SD

**After reviewing your responses to the statements in this domain, overall, how would you respond to the following statement:**

My ability to work with teachers on planning and preparation is satisfactory.

SA      A      D      SD

## Domain II: The classroom environment

This domain assesses the degree to which you encourage and create an environment of respect and caring and establish a culture for learning related to many aspects of the classroom environment.

1. I realize the importance of classroom management and discipline.  
SA      A      D      SD
2. I expect that teacher interactions with students are generally friendly and demonstrate warmth and caring.  
SA      A      D      SD
3. I expect teachers to develop a system of discipline without my assistance.  
SA      A      D      SD
4. I will play an active role in monitoring grade and school discipline plans.  
SA      A      D      SD
5. I support classroom teachers in matters of discipline.  
SA      A      D      SD
6. I always communicate high expectations to all of my teachers that they are the critical element in the classroom.  
SA      A      D      SD
7. I expect teachers to have well-established and well-defined system of rules and procedures.  
SA      A      D      SD
8. I expect that teachers are alert to student behavior at all times.  
SA      A      D      SD
9. I can provide professional development to teachers on classroom management.  
SA      A      D      SD
10. As a teacher, I was a competent classroom manager.  
SA      A      D      SD

**After reviewing your responses to the statements in this domain, overall, how would you respond to the following statement:**

My ability to work with teachers on the classroom environment is satisfactory.

SA      A      D      SD

**Source:** *What Every Principal Should Know about Instructional Leadership*, by Jeffrey Glanz. Corwin, 2006. Pages 101-108. Reprinted with permission.

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# Breaking through the barriers to change

“I couldn’t spend a year looking around. I had teachers who didn’t want to talk to each other. They wanted to go into their own rooms, and if they had anything that worked (with students), they wanted to keep it secret so only their own kids would know (the material).”

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with three years of an unsatisfactory rating to have either a principal leader, who heads a school for two years, or a specialist, a coach who works in tandem with existing administration. From 1999 to 2006, the state had 128 positions for principal specialists and leaders.

Each position costs about \$134,000. Superintendents and boards hire these experts from a pool of qualified candidates identified by the state. Applicants go through a rigorous screening process of interviews and a portfolio review. Each must have demonstrated success as a principal, including data to show increased student achievement.

Beginning in 2006-07, the legislature began providing schools with money they could decide to use for teacher specialists, professional development, a principal specialist or leader, homework centers, or extended year programs. The change allows for more direct local control, according to state officials, more than being able only to select which individual will head an underperforming school.

## NEW LEADERSHIP

Von Frank was hired in 2003 by Dillon School District 2, a rural district where eight of 10 students receive free or reduced-price lunch. She left her job as deputy superintendent in a nearby district to head the high school where she thought she could make more of a difference and be personally challenged before retiring.

She describes her style when she took over the 928-student school as “relentless.”

“I couldn’t spend a year looking around,” she says. “I had teachers who didn’t want to talk to each other. They wanted to go into their own rooms, and if they had anything that worked (with students), they wanted to keep it secret so only their own kids would know (the material). One teacher wanted to teach nothing but Beowulf, and it didn’t matter if it was a freshman composition course or a senior lit class. . . . Everybody was doing what they wanted.”

With the superintendent’s backing and the looming presence of the state over her shoulder,

von Frank began to require the school’s 56 teachers to work together to review state standards and align the curriculum. Using state assistance money, she paid teachers \$25 an hour for the extra work. They wrote common lesson plans and developed common assessments. They created pacing guides and revised the course sequencing.

“I had good people who knew the content, but they just didn’t know the standards,” she says. “We had to teach to the standards so the children had the opportunity to learn the material (the state was testing). And I had to prove (teachers) could get content taught in 90 days” a semester.

She also had to hold them accountable. The state provided a curriculum specialist and two teacher content-area specialists, and von Frank used them as her eyes and ears in classrooms, not for evaluative reasons, but to home in on where improvements were needed. The specialists modeled lessons, gave teachers feedback, and worked with department teams on lessons during common planning time.

She sent teachers to conferences, an experience most had never had, devoted faculty meetings to professional learning, and introduced book studies, beginning with Ruby Payne’s *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* (Aha Process, Inc., 2005).

“I put them on a bus to drive around their own town to look at the poverty and where the kids were coming from,” von Frank said. “These were places some of them had never seen. I had a banker’s wife (on the staff), and she’d never seen the trailer park where some of her students live.

“Some of the African-American teachers were offended and thought we were making people look bad. I said, ‘We can’t use (poverty) as an excuse, but we have to understand what these children are bringing to the table.’”

Von Frank said teacher morale is up, perhaps because teachers see students achieving more. Students scored above the state average in 2006 on standardized end-of-course tests in math, biology, and physical science, everything but

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# Breaking through the barriers to change

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English. The school made Adequate Yearly Progress in 2004 and 2005, winning a Palmetto Gold Award for improving achievement, although not in 2006. Von Frank says she's in good company there.

## SPIRALING STANDARDS

Gwendolyn Hudson Harris, a first-year principal specialist at Denmark-Olar Middle School in Denmark, S.C., agrees. She says every year the state raises the bar against which schools are measured, and even those that are improving can't catch up fast enough.

Harris served three years as principal specialist at an elementary school twice recognized by the state with a Palmetto Silver Award. With the increasing pace of reform in the state, she says that when she took the reins this time around, she had to "come in even more aggressively."

"My job is to turn the school around," she says. "People do what they are accountable for."

She began the work with a summer retreat at the school, dividing the staff into teams to envision their dream school. Then they planted a tree on the grounds and buried the statements alongside it with the idea they will watch both grow this year.

But Harris knows her school needs more than a vision to raise achievement for its 239 students, nearly all of whom are African-American students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

She had the staff dissect state standardized test data, a new task for them. Teachers now spend 1½ hours in department teams every other Monday discussing individual students' achievement, and meet in teams weekly during common planning time for staff development.

In her school, she tries to communicate that "education is a lifestyle" that doesn't end with degrees earned.

## LEADERS' LEARNING

Before the specialists and leaders tackle their new assignments, the state immerses them in

learning. New principal leaders and specialists attend a five-day institute to work with consultants reviewing school data and meet teacher specialists assigned to their buildings. They learn data analysis and best practices for the individual school's challenge areas.

"We spend part of the training talking about building trust and relationships before they'll be able to make a difference," said Marsha Johnson, team leader in the Department of Education office that oversees the principal and teacher specialist programs. "We remind the team that they have good people in their schools, and they have to find the people doing great things and help them see what they're doing right."

The specialists and leaders typically take part in at least two follow-up sessions in fall and two to three in spring, Johnson said. In addition, she said some network themselves by phone or through e-mail to share common concerns and challenges, or get together with others in their region.

"This is a team of exemplary educators who can really go in and build the capacity of the staff to perfect the knowledge and skills teachers need to help children," Johnson said. She said now that schools choose to have leaders or specialists assist, their commitment will be strong. Additional state support continues.

## A FRESH FUTURE

At Dillon High School, students hadn't had new microscopes in the science department since one of the teachers had attended the school. The state assistance meant the school could buy not only microscopes, but class sets of novels and graphing calculators for students. Now, the emphasis is on infrastructure that will allow for updated technology. A team of staff members is learning to write grants, hopeful of continuing the changes.

The barbed wire around the school has come down. The district hired von Frank to stay on as principal, and in winter 2006, she got glass in the front window. Now her students can see clearly the world outside — and where they are headed. ■

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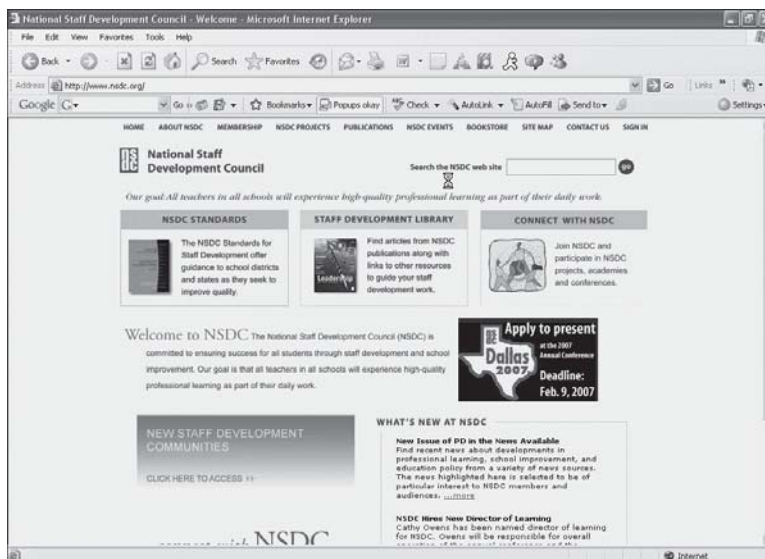
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