



We need every school system to establish its vision for the principal as instructional leader

Leadership matters. Research funded by The Wallace Foundation (sponsors of this issue of *JSD*) has demonstrated that school leadership is second only to high-quality teachers in what matters most for student learning. NSDC demonstrated its commitment to this belief when we adopted our 2007-10 strategic plan. The plan's third priority is developing school leaders. In this issue of *JSD*, we share significant findings from The Wallace Foundation's 10-year investment in leadership. Because of this vision and commitment, the field of education has much useful and important information to explore.

Elsewhere in this issue, you can read about findings from Wallace-sponsored research, starting with "Reimagining the job of leading schools" on p. 10. These findings leave little room for debate, but I suspect there are many educators who are concerned about the time it will take to establish effective systems to improve leadership and who recognize we cannot afford to wait. I believe there are things we can do now to advance leadership support.

What is common to our knowledge about leadership development is the importance of high-quality professional learning for principals. Although the expectations for the position have

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changed over the last decade, few school systems have shifted their practices to address new priorities. We need every school system to establish its vision for the principal as instructional leader and to provide the professional support required to ensure that vision is realized. In my view, there are three components essential to its success.

First, I believe principals who serve as instructional leaders prioritize participating in professional learning that is planned for teachers in their schools. There are many important reasons for doing this — demonstrating the importance of the issue being addressed, modeling behaviors of a committed learner, gaining deeper understanding of the issues teachers will address in classrooms, learning what is necessary to provide follow-up support, and evaluating the value of the professional development. This commitment extends also to the principal's responsibility to monitor implementation of desired changes in classrooms and team-based meetings of learning teams.

Second, I believe principals benefit from participation in principal learning teams that share the characteristics of teacher learning teams. As members of learning teams, principals can develop camaraderie and shared responsibility for

the success of their students. They can provide perspectives on others' data, identify common student and teacher learning priorities, investigate and invest in examining strategies that will benefit their staff and students, guide new learning on their campuses, and assess and reflect in a community of supportive practitioners.

Finally, I am an advocate of individual coaching and support for principals who seek it. I have had the benefit of an executive coach for three years, and I see the impact of it on a

daily basis. My principal friends tell me how their coach served them in their quest toward higher student performance. Effective principal coaching can

address principals' immediate concerns as well as long-term goals.

When NSDC released the revised edition of NSDC's Standards for Staff Development in 2001, we included the Leadership standard: Staff development that improves the learning of all students requires skillful school and district leaders who guide continuous instructional improvement. At that time, we had some research to support this principle. Thanks to The Wallace Foundation, we now have knowledge we can no longer ignore. ■

