



Let's shift our expectations of school leaders

In 1902, principal George E. Atwood of the Liberty Street School in Newburgh, N.Y., writes in an annual report to the local board of education:

"It gives me pleasure to say that the teachers of the several classes have pursued their work with interest and energy, and the results have therefore been reasonably satisfactory. We do not mean to assert that we have reached our ideal or that we consider our work perfect. Our ideal is a perfect human being, one who has developed intellectual and moral power" (Newburgh, N.Y., Board of Education, 1902).

In their reports, Atwood and his colleagues at other buildings share details of the curriculum and where teachers and students succeeded and struggled, the number of books in the library, how illness affected their buildings, and how class size was sometimes a challenge. We see the beginnings of the principal as building administrator, but with most energy focused on student learning.

Jump ahead 20 years, and in the fifth yearbook of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (documenting remarks at NASSP's annual meeting), Ray H. Bracewell, principal at Burlington High

School in Burlington, Iowa, notes:

"In my judgment, the biggest problem facing the principal of a high school of five hundred or more students is to decide whether he shall carry out an efficient administration at the expense of supervision or whether he shall neglect the work of administration in order to find time to do the work of a supervisory nature that needs to be done. It is certain that he cannot do both with the amount of assistance that is regularly granted him."

By supervision, Bracewell means the work of keeping in "close touch with the work of each teacher in his school, to contribute materially to the work of outlining various courses offered in the school, and finally to assist his teachers to improve their methods of instruction."

Move forward in time again to the principals we had as young students, when we formed our first image of what a principal was. Many of us share a picture of the principal as disciplinarian, whether kindly or strict. If we gave any thought to what the principal did for the teacher, perhaps we imagined a supervisor who supported the aims of the classroom without much interference.

Now each of you as readers has a very specific image of the principal today and in the last several years, formed in the school or district as your workplace. Many of you are school

leaders, and you've worked to make the job your own, informed by those who came before you and the demands you feel each day to support teachers and students. How has your view of the school leader changed?

The research and knowledge resulting from the long-term

commitment of The Wallace Foundation, sponsors of this issue of *JSD*, light the way to a new vision for the school leader. We know more now than ever before about the policies, strategies, and conditions that support the school leader who prioritizes

teaching and learning. Changing all of those elements is both possible and difficult. As we do so, however, let's first change our minds. Let's shift our expectations away from the disciplinarian and the business manager and remember that the first principals were head teachers.

REFERENCES

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