



## Leadership practices that make a difference

### Learning From Leadership: Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning

Karen Seashore Louis, Kenneth Leithwood, Kyla L. Wahlstrom, Stephen E. Anderson, July 2010. Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement/ University of Minnesota and Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/ University of Toronto. Commissioned by The Wallace Foundation. Available at [www.wallacefoundation.org/KnowledgeCenter/KnowledgeTopics/CurrentAreasofFocus/EducationLeadership/Pages/learning-from-leadership-investigating-the-links-to-improved-student-learning.aspx](http://www.wallacefoundation.org/KnowledgeCenter/KnowledgeTopics/CurrentAreasofFocus/EducationLeadership/Pages/learning-from-leadership-investigating-the-links-to-improved-student-learning.aspx).

### OVERVIEW

With widespread agreement among educators, researchers, and policymakers about the importance of school leadership, the Wallace Foundation funded a six-year study to examine the leadership practices and policies that affect student learning. Each of the three major sections of the study focuses on practices at one level of leadership – school, district, and state. This summary focuses particularly on the school-level findings and implications. See the fall issue of *The Learning System* to read district-level implications.

### STUDY APPROACH

Researchers used both qualitative and quantitative research approaches to collect data in nine states, 43 districts, and 180 schools at all levels over the six years of the study. They interviewed a range of stakeholders, including

legislators, state agency employees, district leaders and board members, and teachers and school administrators. The research team conducted a number of surveys, observed classrooms, and examined student achievement data from high-stakes state tests.

### Selected findings

- Collective leadership, that is, leadership coming from a network of sources, has more influence on student achievement than individual leadership.
- Principals affect student achievement primarily through their influence on teacher motivation and working conditions.
- Shared leadership and instructional leadership have an indirect impact on student achievement because of the role they play in creating the conditions and structures that support professional learning communities.
- Middle and high school principals face particular challenges and require specific support designed for their unique contexts.
- Teachers and principals agree that the most helpful leadership behaviors for instructional improvement include: focusing the school on student achievement goals; monitoring professional learning needs; and providing resources and support for teacher collaboration.

### Implications for school leaders

- Broaden stakeholder involvement in decision making.

### Exploring the research base

Find syntheses of research studies that have implications for professional learning beginning with the fall issues of *The Learning Principal* and *The Learning System*. The newsletters will explore both current and seminal works. The syntheses are not necessarily comprehensive; rather descriptions are selective to serve the specific interests of newsletter readers.

To learn more about the research base that informs effective professional learning, search the evidence database on the Learning Forward web site ([www.learningforward.org/evidence/](http://www.learningforward.org/evidence/)).

- Interact with teachers to promote motivation and create conditions that promote teacher collaboration, recognizing that these factors are important in improving student achievement.
- Take an active, direct role in exploring instructional practices in community with teachers.
- Create a schoolwide focus on specific expectations and goals for students.
- Visit classrooms frequently and provide constant feedback to teachers on instruction.
- Provide deliberate support for teachers' learning needs and create time and structures for collaborative professional learning.



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