



Effective instructional leadership puts research into practice

I remember the day I officially became an elementary school principal. While the district marked the occasion with a vote by the board, it became official to me when the building engineer handed me the keys to the building. He cried as he placed the keys in my hand. Referring to the building's previous leader, he whimpered, "If you are even half the principal she was, I'll be shocked." Thus, my principalship had begun.

While I made a few attempts to be an instructional leader the first year, I knew I wasn't quite ready to

focus my attention on the core purpose of my school: effective teaching and learning. As year one ended, I had to accept



Having the keys to the building doesn't guarantee effective school leadership.

the building engineer's assessment and recognize I needed professional development to become an effective instructional leader and attain the skills of the previous principal...or at least half her skills. I also needed to learn to whom I could turn for support as I sought to increase teacher instructional effectiveness and improve student learning outcomes.

As a field, we've learned much about effective instructional leadership and the systems of support needed to ensure it happens at scale throughout a

district. In 1996, the Interstate School Leader Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards for School Leaders were developed. These standards, which were updated by National Policy Board for Educational Administration in 2008, present a clear and concise picture of effective leadership practice. The recent study from researchers at the Universities of Toronto and Minnesota, *Learning From Leadership: Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning* (Louis et al., 2010), provides the field with even more evidence of the specific leadership behaviors associated with generating effective teaching practice and, ultimately, increased student learning outcomes. The study's researchers reported that leadership makes its greatest impact largely by strengthening a school's "professional community" – the environment where teachers work together to improve classroom instruction. Learning Forward's definition of professional learning is very clear about how this can look. (See the full Learning Forward definition of professional learning at www.learningforward.org/standfor/definition.cfm.)

Recent research has also provided the field with a clearer picture of how district personnel can better support principals and their leadership teams. The University of Washington study, *Central Office Transformation for District-wide Teaching and Learning Improvement* (Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton, & Morena, 2010), shares strategies for completely re-culturing central office and linking everyone's

practice in ways that directly support the work of building principals.

Yes, the field has learned a great deal since 1995. As members of the largest nonprofit professional association committed to ensuring success for all students through staff development and school improvement, it's our collective responsibility to put into practice all that we've learned. If we can do this, perhaps...just perhaps... building engineers across the country can confidently hand those keys over to new building principals without shedding a tear!

REFERENCES

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