

### Excerpt

*The School Principal as Leader: Guiding Schools to Better Teaching and Learning* (The Wallace Foundation, 2013), 14–15.



“In the great scheme of things,” noted one research report, “...schools may be relatively small organizations. But their leadership challenges are far from small, or simple.”<sup>1</sup> To get the job done, effective leaders need to make good use of the resources at hand. In other words, they have to be good managers.

Effective leaders studied by University of Washington researchers nurtured and supported their staff members, while facing the reality that sometimes teachers don’t work out. They hired carefully, but — adhering to union and district personnel policies — they also engaged in “aggressively weeding out individuals who did not show the capacity to grow.”<sup>2</sup>

When it comes to data, effective principals try to draw the most from statistics and evidence, having “learned to ask useful questions” of the information, to display it in ways that tell “compelling stories” and to use it to promote “collaborative inquiry among teachers.”<sup>3</sup> They view data as a means not only to pinpoint problems, but to understand their nature and causes.<sup>4</sup>

Principals also need to approach their work in a way that will get the job done. Research behind VAL-ED (the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education), a tool to assess principal performance developed by researchers at Vanderbilt University, suggests that there are six key steps — or “processes” — that the effective principal takes when carrying out his or her most important leadership responsibilities: planning, implementing, supporting, advocating, communicating and monitoring.<sup>5</sup> The school leader pressing for high academic standards would, for example, map out rigorous targets for improvements in learning (planning), get the faculty on board to do what’s necessary to meet those targets (implementing), encourage students and teachers in meeting the goals (supporting), challenge low expectations and low district funding for students with special needs (advocating), make sure families are aware of the learning goals (communicating), and keep on top of test results (monitoring).<sup>6</sup>

1. Bradley Portin, Paul Schneider, Michael DeArmond and Lauren Gundlach. *Making Sense of Leading Schools: A Study of the School Principalship*, University of Washington, 2003, 14.
2. Bradley S. Portin, Michael S. Knapp, Scott Dareff, Sue Feldman, Felice A. Russell, Catherine Samuelson and Theresa Ling Yeh, *Leadership for Learning Improvement in Urban Schools*, University of Washington, 2009, 52.
3. Portin, Knapp et al., v.
4. Karen Seashore Louis, Kenneth Leithwood, Kyla L. Wahlstrom and Stephen E. Anderson, *Learning From Leadership: Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning: Final Report of Research Findings*, University of Minnesota and University of Toronto, 2010, 195.
5. Andrew C. Porter, Joseph Murphy, et al. *Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education*, 16-19.
6. Porter, Murphy, et al., 141-142.