

# Effective leadership

Business



This paper reflects on how effective leadership has brought about a difference in high poverty schools by looking at various case scenarios of principals who have successfully improved performance in challenging, high poverty elementary schools.

This essay has been broken down into: an overview of past research into school leadership in challenging environments, a description of core practices that are deemed vital but insufficient for success as illustrated by (Leithwood and Riehl, 2005) and a case study carried on three high poverty elementary schools in the U. S. An analysis of these case scenario shows that national policies and traditions influence how essential practices are conducted but these principals nevertheless used the same measures to improve performance by creating safe learning environments and encouraging community involvement. These principals also exhibited a need for commitment, persistence and passion in increasing chances of success of these youngsters who face multiple challenges. In this essay, focus is herein given to actual findings in the U.

S. A growing body of research has successfully illustrated the need for strong leadership in enhancing student achievement (Fullan, 2001; Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005, Hallinger and Heck, 1996) reported that school leaders account for almost 5% of the variation in test scores, or roughly 25% of all in-school variables, although others find that these effects may to be stronger in the U. K. and U. S.

than in countries such as the Netherlands (Creemers & Kyriakides, 2007; Witziers Bosker & Kruger, 2003). There are a number of student challenges

that need to be addressed such as: poor nutrition, inadequate health services, high rates of illiteracy, and criminal activities that include drug and substance abuse. Teachers also deal with high rates of student transience, absence and indiscipline. This greatly hinders productivity. Nevertheless, legislative mandates in the U. S.

now hold schools directly accountable for student performance, even in the face of such daunting challenges. The 2002 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) federal legislation in the U. S. is one of this laws. While, NCLB has been the target of withering criticism that has attacked, among other things, the high stakes standardized testing regimes used to evaluate annual student progress as well as the lack of sufficient funding necessary to provide teachers with on-going professional development, the fundamental underpinnings of the legislation, that is, to make sure that every American child, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity or wealth, be given the chance to succeed, was supported by both sides of the political aisle. But, as Rebell and Wolffe, 2008 point out:” The cruel irony of the American education system is that low-income and minority children who come to school with the greatest educational deficits generally have the fewest resources and least expertise devoted to their needs – and therefore the least opportunity to improve their futures.

” After a quick overview of key concepts of school leadership and vital practices that are necessary, this essay shall focus on three principals whose work has been most successful in high poverty elementary schools.

Interviews conducted with teachers, support staff, parents and the principals themselves have been included. In the research methodology: The ISSPP

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teams used purposive sampling and common criteria in case study selection (Jacobson & Day, 2005). As it evolved, the guiding framework and methodology for the ISSPP drew from several sources including leading schools in times of change (Day, Harris & Hadfield 2001). Schools were chosen based on student performance on standardized tests that exceeded expectations after a principal's arrival.

For the schools in New York, this data are readily available from the annual reports cards the State Education Department (SED) generates for public use. SED also awards schools recognized to be amongst the most improved on any or all of four standardized tests: 4th and 8th grade math and English/Language Arts (ELA) scores the State uses to determine annual school progress. By using these reports cards and accolades, selection of schools for the study were, in essence, State sanctioned. In addition, SED applies the percentage of students viable for free or reduced lunch as its proxy for levels of school poverty. To this measure of poverty, SED adds the percentage of students in a school with limited English proficiency and then divides this numerator by the financial resources available to the school in order to determine its Need to Resource Capacity index (N/RC). The schools selected for this study were those identified by the State as being High Need, that is, those schools whose index is in the highest quartile.

In other words, when compared to all other schools in New York State, the schools selected for this study were in the top 25% in terms of how great their needs are relative to the resources available to them (Jacobson, Brooks, Giles, Johnson & Ylimaki, 2005) Conceptually, our analysis of leadership in these high need schools rests upon a priori and largely circumstantial

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argument that if student performance improved subsequent to the beginning of a principal's tenure, then he or she may have had something to do with it. Using semi-structured interviews, principals were first asked about their self-perceived role in a school's success, specifically; how they defined success and what they felt they had done to contribute to it. Teachers, support staff, parents, and students were then queried to see if they felt the principal had played a key role in their school's success and what they perceived the principal had done to make it happen. For each site, collective responses as well as official school and State documents and field notes were used to triangulate findings, that is, to determine through these multi-perspectives what had transpired that ultimately resulted in improved student achievement. The cases reported herein are a subset of the larger ISSPP study, including only those schools that are both elementary and in high poverty areas.

Background data about the US schools: Table 1 report 2003 data for the U. S. elementary schools and their respective principals. Several issues need to be considered when examining the school demographics. For example, Leithwood, Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004) suggest that children struggling academically can benefit from being in small schools, recommending an optimum enrollment of 250-300 students in an elementary school. Note, however, that the number of students enrolled in Fraser and Costello are twice and thrice those recommended figures respectively.

With regard to measures of poverty, which is the percentage of students viable for free or reduced lunch – one can readily see the level of economic <https://assignbuster.com/effective-leadership/>

need in these school communities as the range of students living in poverty runs from 3 out of 4 in Costello to 9 out of 10 in Fraser. Finally, note that three of the three case sites, Hamilton and Fraser, have relatively homogeneous student bodies (94% and 98% African-American respectively), while Costello is considerably more diverse (53% African-American, 33% Caucasian and 14% a combination of Hispanic-, Asian- and Native-American). This factor, greater racial and ethnic heterogeneity, may be a significant impediment to success because the inner city elementary schools studied the Effective Schools Research tended to be racially homogeneous (Rosenholtz, 1985). When taken together, these differences in school size and racial and ethnic diversity may impede a principal's ability to communicate effectively with the school community. All things being equal, the larger a school, the less opportunity for contacts a principal can have with individual students, teachers or parents. Furthermore, greater racial and ethnic diversity could increase the potential for miscommunications due to differences in cultural cues.

Though the analyses used in this study were unable to parse out how variations in school size and diversity affect successful leadership, these factors may be relevant and ought to be central to future examinations in this area. Also, the fact that the three successful principals studied were African-American women working in predominantly African-American communities is probably more than just mere coincidence.