RESEARCH SYNTHESIS
ON EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

The direct responsibility for improving instruction and learning rests in the hands of school principals. Do principals of schools with high achievement exhibit any particular leadership behavior? Research suggests that they do.

Background
School effectiveness has been a concern of educators for the past two decades. While the 60s were marked by large national studies investigating the effects of input variables, such as quantities of resources and pupil characteristics, recent research has focused directly on school processes. Each of the studies discussed below uses the organization or case study approach since data collected by on-site inquiry and observation provide an understanding of not only how an organization functions but why it behaves the way it does. Assessing the validity of case studies is, at best, a risky business because there are no formal criteria to guide judgment. To counteract that liability, I developed four criteria of my own for selecting the research included here: (1) evidence that the study was internally valid, that is, whether the researcher(s) used appropriate measuring instruments and statistical analyses; (2) evidence of control for pupil characteristics; (3) research was conducted in schools categorized as effective or exemplary based on operational definitions of achievement; and (4) significant positive relationships between school achievement and instructional leadership behavior were reported.

The Evidence
A number of studies met these criteria. The evidence presented is based on studies that represent, in my opinion, the most valid and extensive research. Do principals make a difference and if so, which leadership behaviors are associated with positive outcomes? A look at the evidence.

Reading, Inner-City Children
(Weber, 1971). Weber’s work provided educators with a point of departure from the devastating Coleman Report (1966). It achieved its purpose for it was intended as an alternative to Coleman’s widely accepted conclusion that schools do not make a difference; a student’s achievement is exclusively a function of family background. Conducted in four inner-city schools in New York, Los Angeles, and Kansas City, results pointed toward the school as the determinant of success in third-grade students’ reading achievement.

The schools Weber examined exhibited a significant number of poor students scoring below national reading norms. To further substantiate student competency in reading, a test was devised to determine reading ability. The results showed that reading ability in the four schools was similar to that of students in average-income schools. Interviews with staff and observations of classes during reading instruction revealed that in successful schools there was a decided emphasis on reading, careful and frequent evaluation of pupil progress, and a pleasant, orderly, and quiet atmosphere. Leadership appeared to be a significant factor; school administrators set the tone for the school and assumed responsibility for instruction and allocation of resources to reach school goals.
istics but differed on standardized achievement measures, the research team identified five factors that seemed to differentiate effective from less effective schools. In more effective schools: (1) teachers reported receiving significantly more support; (2) there was an atmosphere conducive to learning; (3) the principal had more impact on educational decisionmaking; (4) there was more evidence of pupil progress monitoring; and (5) there was more emphasis on achievement.

ESAA In-Depth Study (Wellisch and others, 1978). As part of an effort to evaluate the impact of the Emergency School Aid Act (ESAA) Wellisch and others examined leader behavior in nine elementary schools that had made significant gains in reading and mathematics as contrasted with 13 less effective elementary schools. The researchers examined four facets of instructional leadership. The first was concern for instruction. Teachers were asked if their principal felt strongly about instruction, had definite views, and promoted a point of view. On a scale of 0 to 4, where high scores indicated strong concern, the median score in successful schools was 2.9 compared to 1.0 in non-successful schools, a highly significant difference. Similar findings were reported for communication about instruction. Schools in which teachers reported their performance was regularly reviewed and discussed were significantly more likely to show achievement gains. The third area of inquiry was responsibility for instruction. Teachers were asked to estimate how they and their administrators participated in decisions concerning instruction, in selecting basic instructional materials, in plan-
ning programs for the entire school, and in evaluating school programs. Schools where teachers attributed more responsibility to the principal in a greater number of areas were significantly more likely to be successful. Finally, perceptions of staff were used to categorize schools on instructional program coordination, and the relationship between that and student achievement was examined. Instructional program coordination was defined in terms of content, sequence of objectives, and use of materials throughout all grades. Based on staff estimates, schools were significantly more likely to show gains in achievement where instructional programs were extensively coordinated by school leaders.

Search for Effective Schools (Edmonds, 1978). Edmonds, through his efforts to identify and analyze urban schools that are instructionally effective for poor and minority students, has been a major contributor to school effectiveness research. His initial efforts were as project director of Harvard University’s “Search for Effective Schools.” These studies involved 20 elementary schools in Detroit’s Model Cities Neighborhood, a re-analysis of the 1966 Equal Educational Opportunity Survey (EEOS) data (Frederiksen, 1975), and an analysis of differences in six pairs of elementary schools in Lansing, Michigan.

On the basis of these extensive analyses, Edmonds concluded that schools and school leadership do make a difference—that there are tangible and indispensible characteristics of effective schools attributable to leadership. Effective schools, according to Edmonds, are marked by leaders who:

1. Promote an atmosphere that is orderly without being rigid, quiet without being oppressive, and generally conducive to the business at hand
2. Frequently monitor pupil progress
3. Ensure that it is incumbent upon the staff to be instructionally effective for all pupils
4. Set clearly stated goals and learning objectives
5. Develop and communicate a plan for dealing with reading and mathematics achievement problems
6. Demonstrate strong leadership with a mix of management and instructional skills.

School Social Systems and Student Achievement (Brookover and others, 1979). Brookover’s contribution to school effectiveness research is significant due to its breadth and because it includes a relatively large sample of schools of disparate racial composition and rigorous case studies. Preliminary investigation by Brookover and Schneider (1975) and Brookover and Lezotte (1977) indicated there were marked differences in leadership in effective and ineffective schools. Leaders in the effective schools were more assertive, more effective disciplinarians, and more inclined to assume responsibility. Emphasis on instruction and student achievement was pervasive in their schools. On the basis of this early research, Brookover and others (1979) designed a study to examine the hypothesis that differences in school social systems explain differences in student outcomes among schools. Schools in the study included three groups of Michigan elementary schools: a representative state sample (68), a majority black school sample (30), and a majority white school sample (61). Analyses of data from these schools suggested that a major portion of the variance in achievement between schools was explained by three components of the school social system: (1) school inputs, (2) school social structures, and (3) school climate.

This set the stage for case studies in four low SES schools. Two were majority black schools differing in effectiveness as determined by achievement scores, the others were majority white schools exhibiting similar achievement differences. Supervision in the successful schools was decidedly different from that in unsuccessful schools. In one of the effective schools, the principal “dropped in” on classrooms frequently, visiting each class approximately 30 times over the school year. Although the principal was not innovative in terms of presenting teachers with “new” programs, interaction techniques, and so
forth, during the three-month observation period he tried to organize teacher effectiveness training and held meetings with small groups of teachers to discuss their students' achievement. The principal's concern for achievement was known to both students and teachers as were his high expectations for students—he exhibited a commitment to ensuring that students could and should be achieving at relatively high levels and assumed responsibility for reaching those levels.

Effectiveness in the other successful school was attributed to the present and previous principals. Teachers felt that the previous principal had truly been an educational leader as evidenced by his ability to effectively present workshops and in-service sessions for them. The present principal was almost exclusively an administrator, and apparently a good one. Although he periodically observed and critiqued teachers' classroom skills, he felt the primary responsibility for the quality of education rested with individual teachers and perceived his primary responsibilities were to supervise teachers, and encourage and support their attendance and participation in seminars, workshops, and in-service programs designed to increase their effectiveness in the classroom.

Principals in the less effective schools behaved quite differently. One was almost totally bogged down with discipline and administrative problems and showed little interest in instruction or achievement. Teachers in this school seemed preoccupied with maintenance and survival. The principal in the other school was also ineffective despite an apparent concern for instruction and achievement. Although he frequently reminded teachers that increasing teaching achievement was a priority she provided little push to make that priority a reality. Teachers, in turn, made few demands on students. While the principal was perceived 'as someone nice to work for' there was little evidence that there was concern for student achievement. Brookover's insight into leadership differences in the schools he observed is concise and straightforward: "lack of pressure relative to teacher performance and little emphasis on increased achievement appeared to differentiate low achieving schools from those more effective" (Brookover and others, 1979).

Secondary Schools and Their Effects on Children (Rutter and others, 1979). No study in the school effects literature has successfully captured the process of education within individual schools to the extent that Rutter and his colleagues (1979) have. Fifteen hundred junior high school age students in 12 inner-city schools of London were the object of a detailed longitudinal analysis. Youngsters were assessed on school entry variables at ten years of age and reassessed at exit three years later. Based on an analysis of the standardized test scores, schools that appeared to exert a positive influence on pupil progress and those less successful were identified. During a two year period observations, interviews, and surveys were directed toward analyzing the kinds of environments provided for teaching and learning, as well as such variables as academic emphasis, teaching skills, student participation, and so forth. A wide range of observations, including one complete week of observing lessons in each school, provided an understanding of school processes and school life.

The researchers concluded that the influence of the head teacher (supervisor) was very considerable. Investigation of more than 70 variables suggested the influence of the combined effect of the process variables was more powerful than any individual variable. There also appeared to be a connection between this combined effect, or "ethos," and school leadership. For example, school outcomes tended to be better when the curriculum and approaches to discipline were agreed upon and supported by the staff acting in concert. Examination successes were more frequent and delinquency less common in schools where discipline was based on expectations set by "the school" rather than left to individual teachers to work out for themselves. In schools with higher outcomes, decisions tended to be made at a higher level than the staff room. Students had better academic success in schools where general attitudes and spe-

### HIGHLIGHTS FROM RESEARCH ON EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Effective schools have effective leaders. Much of what the school does to promote achievement is within the principal's power to influence and control. Specifically, there are six leadership behaviors that have been consistently associated with schools that are well managed and whose students achieve.

**Effective principals:**

1. **Emphasize achievement.** They give high priority to activities, instruction, and materials that foster academic success. Effective principals are visible and involved in what goes on in the school and its classrooms. They convey to teachers their commitment to achievement.

2. **Set instructional strategies.** They take part in instructional decision making and accept responsibility for decisions about methods, materials, and evaluation procedures. They develop plans for solving students' learning problems.

3. **Provide an orderly atmosphere.** They do what is necessary to ensure that the school's climate is conducive to learning: it is quiet, pleasant, and well-maintained.

4. **Frequently evaluate student progress.** They monitor student achievement on a regular basis. Principals set expectations for the entire school and check to make sure those expectations are being met. They know how well their students are performing as compared to students in other schools.

5. **Coordinate instructional programs.** They interrelate course content, sequences of objectives, and materials in all grades. They see that what goes on in the classroom has bearing on the overall goals and program of the school.

6. **Support teachers.** Effective principals communicate with teachers about goals and procedures. They support teachers' attendance at professional meetings and workshops, and provide in-service that promotes improved teaching.

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specific actions (by staff) emphasized academic expectations. Finally, the school atmosphere was found to be greatly influenced by the degree to which the school functioned as a coherent whole, with agreed upon ways of doing things.

The School Improvement Project (Edmonds, 1979). Conducted in nine elementary schools in New York City, this research is a continuation of Edmonds' work. Based on earlier findings, five factors associated with school effectiveness were identified: (1) administrative style, (2) school climate, (3) schoolwide emphasis on basic skills, (4) teacher expectations, and (5) continuous assessment of pupil progress. School effectiveness was defined by scores on a citywide reading achievement test in public schools. Citywide rankings of this measure were used to differentiate highly effective schools from less effective schools. Schools that demonstrated substantial upward movement in the rankings over a four year period were categorized as "improvers"; those which over the same period of time demonstrated no substantial upward movement were categorized as "maintaining/declining." Pairs of improving and maintaining/declining schools from separate communities, matched on important environmental variables were then chosen from five districts. The data directly support the importance of supervision. The researcher found that 90 to 100 percent of teachers in the improving schools reported effective within-grade and schoolwide instructional coordination. These schools also provided regular administrative response to teacher difficulties, useful faculty meetings, opportunities for staff interaction on curriculum matters, and adequate inservice training. Teachers in maintaining/declining schools indicated a lack of instructional supervision by administrators and general dissatisfaction with school instructional goals. In addition, 50 to 82 percent of the teachers in maintaining/declining schools found inservice training, teacher involvement in curriculum development, within- and between-grade coordination of instruction, and instructional materials to be inadequate. The vast majority of teachers in improving schools reported effective communications with their building administrator and an orderly atmosphere in their schools.

Conclusions and Consistencies
The evidence clearly indicates that principals do make a difference, for leadership behavior was positively associated with school outcomes in each of the eight studies. Of equal importance was the emergence of specific leadership behaviors consistently associated with effective schools. It should be pointed out that researchers use different terminology to label leadership behavior, therefore, in a few instances categorization was somewhat of a judgment call. Figure 1 shows that six leadership behaviors were found to be associated with school effectiveness.

Clearly, implications are that school effectiveness is enhanced by principals who emphasize achievement (8), set instructional strategies (8), provide an orderly school atmosphere (7), and frequently evaluate pupil progress (5). Coordination of instruction (4) and support of teachers (3) also received strong support when one considers that the studies were aimed at school processes, not at curriculum. For example, it is possible that findings related to the school's atmosphere may have incorporated supports teacher, for discipline was frequently mentioned.

Taken as a whole, these results strongly suggest that principals who emphasize instruction, achievement, results-oriented, and able to develop and

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*Identifies primary researcher only.
maintain an atmosphere conducive to learning make a difference—one reflected in elevated school outcomes. Besides being intuitively pleasing this view is consistent with administration and supervision literature.

Caveats
There are those who contend that the science of research will always be a slave to the art of research. Although the studies presented in this report appear to be of sound design, with measurement of significant variables and statistical analyses properly attended to, they should be embraced with caution. First, there is the question of generalizability. Findings primarily reflect school effectiveness and leadership behavior in urban elementary schools inhabited by poor children. While there are no compelling reasons to assume that studies of other school types would not yield similar results, effective behavior in those school types still remains something of an open question.

There is also the possibility of interactive effects. Schools are spectacularly dynamic organizations where a nearly infinite number of inputs and processes vary, change, and interact on a continuous basis. There is considerable evidence (Averch and others, 1974) that teachers, students, instructional methods, and leadership are among the most volatile and interactive school variables. Therefore, the output may be contingent on the situation—behaviors related to positive outcomes in school A may have no effect or be negatively related to effectiveness in school B.

Final Thoughts
There is obviously a need to continue, even intensify, school effectiveness research. Having examined a number of papers and journal articles, I submit three recommendations for those focusing their efforts on instructional leadership. The first is to focus future research on the so-called average schools. Case studies in those schools would be of great interest to educators. The next is to clearly define and describe instructional leadership behaviors since in most cases they are stated in vague and general terms. For example, while emphasizing instruction emerged as a key behavior, it's not clear what the principals actually did. The last recommendation concerns expectations of students. While it is not in a strict sense a leadership behavior and therefore was not included in the report, results of each of the eight studies pointed toward an association between high expectation by staff and positive school outcomes. While this is consistent with Rosenthal's (1968) concept of a self fulfilling prophecy one would wonder what specific role the principal plays in evaluating or depressing staff expectations.

A reasonably extensive body of evidence gathered by respected researchers through in-depth study supports the proposition that the principal makes a difference in schools. Of equal importance, six leadership behaviors associated with effective schools have a salutary effect for two reasons: (1) they provide direction for educators; and (2) they lend credence to school effectiveness research—by showcasing inter-study consistency.

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References


Brookover, W. B., and others. School Social Systems and Student Achievement—