

Effective Schools—Effective Principals: How to Develop Both

Achievement is up in Washington's District 414 where administrators have reorganized their responsibilities in order to spend more hours on instructional leadership.

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In his book, *Making Schools Work*, Robert Benjamin (1981) summarized several characteristics of principals of effective schools, as reported in research studies. Principals of effective schools:

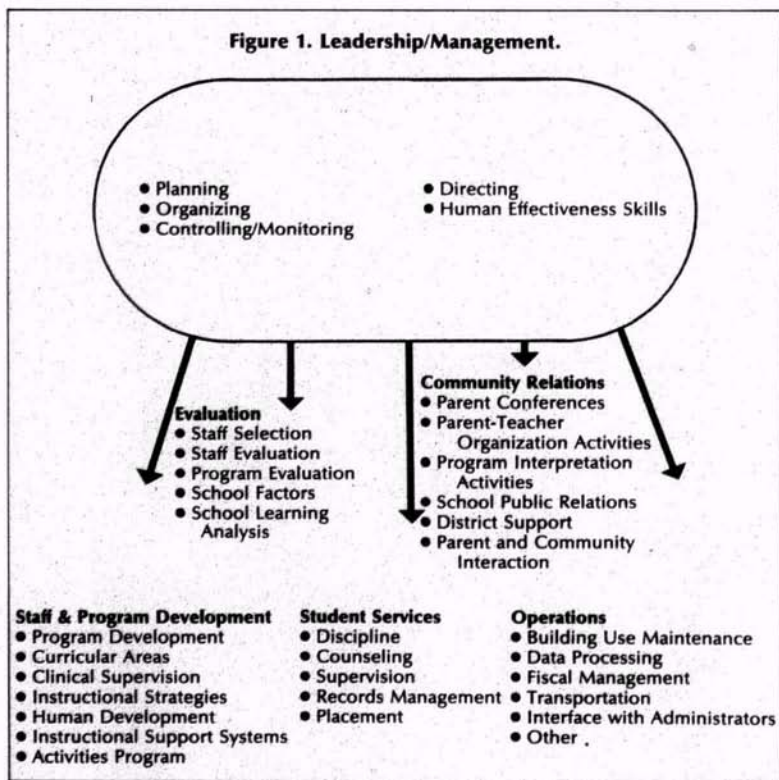
- Take strong initiative in identifying and articulating goals and priorities for their schools. They run their schools better than allow them to operate by force of habit
- Hold themselves and their staffs personally accountable for student achievement in basic skills
- Understand educational programs inside and out. They are instructional leaders rather than administrative leaders. Their first priority is instruction and they communicate this to staff
- Are highly visible in the classrooms and hallways of the schools
- Care more about their schools' academic progress than human relations or informal, collegial relationships with their staff members

- Attempt to handpick their staff members. They put pressure on incompetent teachers to leave and find ways to reward excellent teachers

- Set a tone of high expectations for their staff and students.

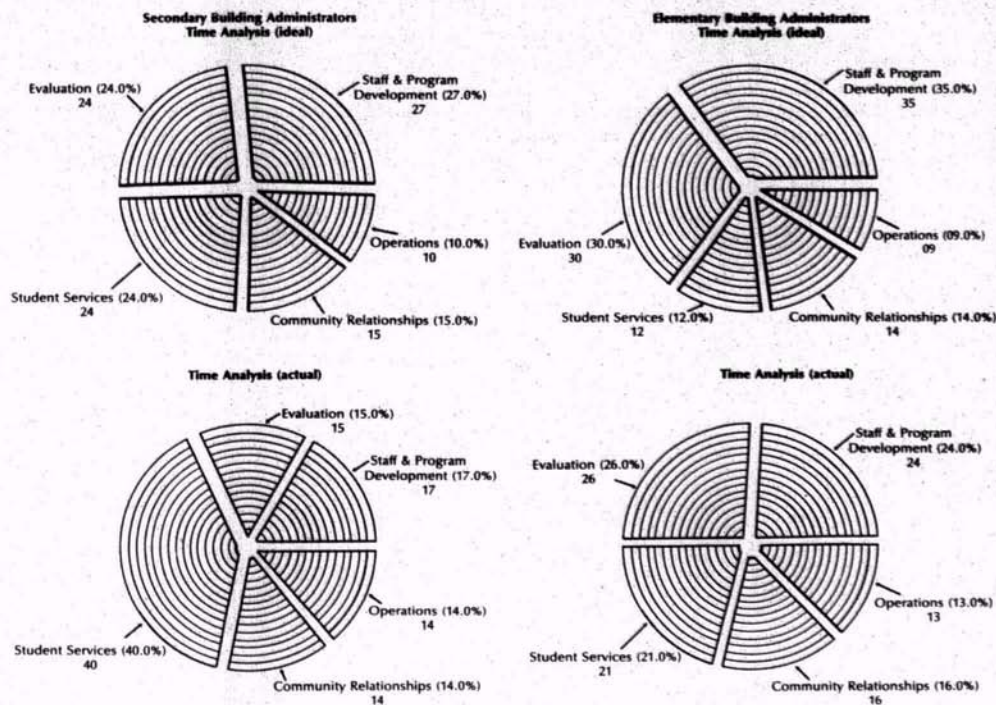
If these findings are valid, then the role of the building administrator is

Figure 1. Leadership/Management.



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Figure 2. Analysis of Administrator's Actual Vs. Ideal Use of Time.



changing. Most principals are facing new and complex issues and responsibilities, which increasingly defy solutions from the past.

These new demands, educational-centered legislation, and models of effective school leadership suggest that the principal of the future will not be managing a set program, but rather will be working with the community, staff, and students in identifying needs; establishing high expectations; and developing, executing, and evaluating programs.

To assist principals, the Lake Washington School District developed a number of professional growth programs. While all of the district's building administrators participated in them, many principals still complained of simply not having enough time to complete the tasks at hand.

This is not a problem unique to one school district. "A Special Report: Changing Role of the Administrator" (1981) concluded that several forces are changing the role of administrators, who, as a result, feel that their authority has diminished and that they have been placed in impossible situations. Principals

believe they are overworked and unappreciated. They have too much to do; they're under too much pressure; and they don't have enough help (*Executive Educator*, 1979).

Building Administration Analysis Goal

Given the comments of Lake Washington's building administrators and evidence provided by research, a Lake Washington School District goal for 1979-80 was to "evaluate and assess the administrative structure at the building level." The performance standard required a task analysis of administrative functions at the building level so that appropriate resources could be allocated or present resources redistributed. Administrators' tasks needed to be prioritized in a way that would be agreeable to both the district and the individual. The district wanted to capitalize on the skills emphasized in the administrator professional development programs.

If the study verified a need for change, the district, given its funding capabilities as well as contractual restrictions, would modify the building administrator structure to promote more effective and efficient management of the district's schools.

Building Administrator Analysis

To analyze the existing role of building administrators, the district conducted four investigations.

1. In December 1979, a representative sample of principals, teachers, parents, support staff, and student body presidents participated in a study conducted by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (Schmitt and others, 1982) to provide information regarding job functions of elementary and secondary principals.

2. Detailed time logs were completed by each administrator, school secretary, and school aide for a given period of time.

3. Three consultants¹ met with principals and central office administrators to discuss the dimensions of the role of school administrators cited in theory and research. The consultants also analyzed the time logs submitted by the administrators, secretaries, and aides, and helped develop some general categories for which administrators might be responsible.

4. The district reviewed research on the ways school administrators across the country use their time.

Profile of Building Administrators

These investigations revealed that building administrators in Lake Washington needed leadership and management skills, which include the following components crucial to an effective school operation.

Planning—the process of establishing priorities for how time is spent in the building and the importance of one task in relation to all others. At the building level, planning includes involving staff in setting priorities to ensure a high level of commitment to high priority tasks.

Directing—the process each administrator uses to set goals and objectives based on information from a variety of sources. The process includes systems for monitoring and evaluating progress toward goals.

Organizing—establishing systems to carry out plans.

Human effectiveness—relating in a positive, motivating way to the people who must carry out the goals set for the school, as well as to the students, parents, and citizens in the community with whom administrators are in contact. Also included is the management style by which administrators raise morale and communicate high expectations for staff members and by and for students.

Controlling and monitoring—the skills necessary for administrators to accomplish school goals through other people. These leadership/management skills are necessary for administrators in the Lake Washington school district to carry out staff and program development, evaluation, student services, community relations, and operations. The profile of a Lake Washington administrator is shown in Figure 1.

Priority Functions

Following the agreement among the building administrators that the profile accurately portrayed the critical functions of a school administrator, each was asked to identify the percentage of time that *should* be devoted to each category in the "best of all possible worlds." They were also asked to specify the percentage of time they *actually* spent on each category. Figure 2 illustrates the results of this inquiry.

Results

To narrow the gap between the ideal and actual use of time, the district first addressed elementary concerns. Solutions appeared to be simplest for this group. In 1980-81, each elementary principal was allocated an additional half-time secretary to use at his or her discretion. In most cases, principals had had to assume additional office activities. Secretaries were involved in so many legitimate office activities that they were actually available to principals only 10 percent of the time.

In 1981-82, the district began working with the senior high principals to study new and more effective administrative structures. Again, the district wanted to narrow the gap between the ideal and actual use of time.

In the past, each high school followed this administrative structure:

FTE	Position
1	Principal
2	Assistant Principals
0.5	Activity Coordinator
0.5	Certificated Media Specialist
3-4	Counselors
1	Career Counselor/Specialist

By the beginning of this school year, 1982-83, each high school was restructured to conform to a new model:

FTE	Position
1	Principal
1	Associate Principal
1	Administrative Assistant
1	Dean of Students
1	Registrar (Classified)
1	Career Specialist (Classified)
1	Media Technician (Classified)
3	Counselors

By more clearly delineating the division of responsibility, the new structure gives the principal and associate principal time to perform critical functions necessary to make high schools more effective and efficient. It does not significantly increase administrative expenditures because of a differentiated work year.

Also during the 1982-83 school year, the district will address changes in the junior high administrative structure.

The Goal Achieved

While the principal is the pivotal person in ensuring that schools are successful, the question remains: "Has the analysis

and subsequent reorganization made a difference?"

Although the district recognizes that improvements in administrative structure and function alone are difficult to quantify, both staff and community believe that the changes have made a significant difference. Since this analysis began, elementary test scores have improved over 20 percentile points. Administrators report dramatic improvement in teachers' instructional and classroom management skills. And the public has demonstrated its support by approving three consecutive school levies and over \$30 million in bond issues.

The district has measured parent and staff attitudes about the schools in two different districtwide needs assessments. Results between the three intervening years of the assessments revealed a significant, positive change in the way schools are perceived. Parents believe teachers and administrators are more effective as a result of the district's staff development program.

Other indicators of success include declines in student disciplinary actions, decreased vandalism, and more parent involvement with the schools.

We are convinced that the time, energy, and money dedicated to improving the skills and functions of building administrators has significantly improved the quality of education available to each student in the Lake Washington district.

Our experience convinces us that the investment in people is the wisest investment a district can make. □

¹ The three consultants were Gordon Cawelti, Executive Director of ASCD; David Smith, Dean of the College of Education, University of Florida; and Les Wolfe of the Northwest Regional Laboratory.

References

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