Instructional Leadership for Productive Schools

Greater productivity results when staff members understand school goals and work together to achieve them.

The instructional leadership model in Figure 1 is based on research on organization and management theory and on work with thousands of principals across the country. In the model, the school year is divided into three parts with a major instructional leadership function for each: planning (September and October), developing program and staff (November through April), and evaluating (April and May).

Collaborative decision making, problem solving, and planning are necessary to the success of activities. Continuous collaboration among teachers, parents, students, and principals tends to produce a healthy school climate, which also influences success or failure. While the instructional leadership model outlines the principal's tasks, success depends, first of all, on a vision of what is possible; second, on collective reflection and action; and, third, on the ability of those involved to work together productively. Thus, the instructional leadership model outlines the tasks of the principal and assumes that collaboration is the norm, with role isolation diminishing.

School Planning
Decisions about school improvement targets are made at several levels. The state agency as well as the local school district determine certain thrusts during certain years. These external expectations are assigned to each school for specific attention. Principals, after assessing school productivity needs, also determine areas for improvement over a year or more.

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Figure 1. An Instructional Leadership Model That Builds School Success

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Perhaps the most important source of goal recommendations is the staff. Through organized dialogue, an entire staff can reflect on their experiences and on available data in order to identify major program problems. Translating concerns for educational (not administrative) problems into specific and measurable goals, the staff makes a commitment to work collaboratively on those problems.

For a useful analogy, consider the coaching world. Coaches prepare their players within the broad framework of their particular sport and view each season as a new set of opportunities. Each game presents a new and particular challenge. Within each game, specific tactics and strategies are constantly adjusted toward achievement of the overall game plan. Attention is given to both general and specific concerns, but ultimate success depends on understanding the specific tasks that promote general goal attainment. In schools, likewise, the instructional leader provides the context and process for examining instruction and influencing practices, and for identifying areas for school improvement.

Two categories of school goals must be kept in mind: curriculum goals, which provide direction for the learning program itself, and school improvement goals, which provide a focus for the school as an organization or system. Most educators are more familiar with curriculum goals than with organizational goals. Organization improvement embraces such concerns as (1) altering school climate to promote adult and student growth, (2) organizing the school to make full use of human and material resources, (3) involving parents more effectively in their children's learning, and (4) developing needs assessment and evaluation systems.

To illustrate the collaborative dimension of school planning, let us assume that a staff has decided to raise student achievement by 20 percent in math at all levels and to increase the options for student participation in all learning activities. With emphasis on the math program and options for learning, the school establishes a focus for improvement efforts during the year.

**Team Planning.** After school goals are defined (a combination of internal and external expectations), decisions need to be made about who will work on which parts of each goal. Schools often have permanent teacher teams who plan curricular and learning goals. However, goals that emerge from total staff reflection on school productivity will require temporary groupings or task forces. Such groups may develop, for instance, school recordkeeping systems, program evaluation systems, or a new program for gifted and talented students. Together, the permanent teaching teams and the temporary task forces and committees develop action plans for carrying out their assigned tasks for the set of school goals.

A member from each team in our hypothetical school is selected to form a task force to refine the school math program. Another task force is assigned to develop a new student recordkeeping and assessment system. Each teaching team is charged with developing alternative learning experiences for all program areas.

As work teams are formed, it might be useful, once again, to consider how football coaches set up various sub-teams. Each unit is trained to function for a different purpose (such as kick-off, defense, offense). Members of the coaching staff specialize in working only with certain units. No player on a team is ever a self-contained performer. The same can be true in schools, and principals might well seek to organize instruction around teaching teams for various age levels (for instance, 5-7, 8-9, 10-12) so that teachers can specialize in particular teaching functions (math, recordkeeping, ordering, student management, and team management) for the benefit of the entire team. Likewise they will profit from organizing teachers into temporary work groups to complete tasks for school goals. Together, permanent and temporary groups of teachers

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develop a synergistic exchange system that influences total school productivity.

Individual performance planning is a relatively new practice in many schools. In order to link work patterns to school improvement efforts, each staff member sets performance targets for a given year that are directly connected to overall school and team improvement priorities, and to standards for that role. Each individual goal should be measurable, specific, results-centered, attainable, and time-bound. In this sense a goal can be achieved, observed, and evaluated.

In her performance plan above, Donna Johnson, an art teacher, is attempting to translate teaching patterns from large groups (one task/level) to small groups (many tasks/levels). She has set the following personal goal (one of six) which is linked to the school goal of "greater student participation."

To assist both teachers and principals in more productive work patterns, action plans can serve to guide actual practice and coaching or supervision. An action plan involves more than getting in gear and going; it is a specific allocation of time to a specific set of tasks for a specific purpose. Action plans are strategies for accomplishing performance goals, which include the following elements: key events, resources, responsibilities, a time-line, the desired results, and criteria for success. The emphasis in evaluation is on results, and planning for those results increases the probability of success.

Success in reaching performance goals becomes the basis for determining a person's contribution to school improvement efforts. If the school goal attainment process is to be successful, principals need to convey optimistic expectations, both of teacher contributions and of growth targets. In performance planning with individuals, staff motivation is likely to increase if teachers perceive they can and must contribute to the school's productivity. Principals therefore need to attend to professional strengths in job assignment and determine additional skills that are required.

In summary, goal directed planning in initial phases of the school year will favorably influence the quality of teaching and staff production results. While teachers and principals have always planned their activities to some extent, a school-goal orientation to all planning is relatively new. Studies in industry have shown that workers who plan their activities around organizational goals increase both their effectiveness and their efficiency by a large margin. Planned school actions, where every professional is certain about the school's improvement targets for the year, and where professionals work together for their attainment, are likely to eliminate teacher and administrator burnout and enable the staff to perform at increasingly higher levels of productivity.

Teacher and Program Development

Given a clear set of school improvement goals for the year, staff development is no longer global, nebulous, and burdensome. Staff and program development become facilitating mechanisms for attaining the goals. Goals and action plans defined in September (for example, increased math scores and student participation) are reviewed periodically throughout the year and serve as guides and standards for all school activities.

Clinical supervision is a development technology for improving actual teaching and learning. Few coaches would sit in their offices while the team is practicing or playing the game itself. One of the most embarrassing explanations for the current poor reputation of schools, and the presumed failure of many excellent innovations, is that teachers have not had adequate, well-informed, and direct supervision to help them understand and implement new practices. Principals need to learn the teacher-coaching skills of conferencing, observation, data collection, and data analysis in order to provide periodic feedback and correctives to teachers and teams on their performance.

The five-stage observation cycle, as described in the growing literature of clinical supervision (Goldhammer, Anderson, and Krajewski, 1980), offers principals a useful methodology for coaching their teachers in instructional targets of each team and teacher for the year. Supervisors should seek to employ the same kinds of strategies with teachers as are recommended for teachers with students, and that good coaches use with players. Donna Johnson, for example, would benefit from a "clinical supervision" tour of the "student contracts" in March and April, and an observation on "learning centers" from November through January, on "teaching teams" in December, and on "student contracts" during April and May. Likewise, the various teams and task forces need coaching to increase levels of work productivity.

The effective coach, no less than the effective supervisor, continuously engages in the behaviors that Bloom (1976) identified as key variables in quality instruction: (1) provision of explicit cues and directives, (2) reinforcement of appropriate performance patterns, (3) promoting participation by the students (teachers), and (4) delivering feedback and correctives to ensure maximum effectiveness. Of the four, Bloom observes that feedback and correctives are the most critical to mastery of a new skill. Clinical supervision provides such a mechanism for teams and individual teachers.
Staff Development
The best way to help staff members change outdated practices, learn new skills, and function more productively is through school-based staff development. Figure 2 shows a five-part model for a school-based staff development program with management for teacher development at the heart.

Inservice training provides the new knowledge required to attain goals effectively. For example, workshops on mastery learning and on math materials may augment plans toward the specific math program improvement goal. Likewise, Donna might benefit from a workshop on how to design effective learning centers.

Supervising skill development and goal attainment processes requires continuous observation and feedback for effective continuation or elimination of behaviors.

Organizing activities include those in which a teacher makes specific contributions to the goal-attainment process and learns important skills and concepts.
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along the way. For example, as teachers shift from whole-class teaching to alternative instructional patterns, learning will result from actual experiences in organizing small student groups to explore concepts and skills at many levels and for various purposes. Likewise, teachers learn tangible process and product skills in producing new materials. For example, teachers would learn much in their efforts to produce a new record-keeping system for documenting individual performance in math throughout the year.

The principal, as chief coordinator of the school's staff development program, provides the resources and activities that are necessary to meet perceived needs. Possible approaches include workshops, seminars, designation of task forces, provision of readings, or more formal assistance such as university graduate work. Most teachers are eager to learn more about goal setting, performance planning, classroom management, recordkeeping systems, and ways to identify students' learning styles and cognitive and affective strengths and needs. The staff itself must participate in decisions about inservice topics and activities. A word of caution, however: priorities must be determined so that staff energies are not exhausted in an overload of activities, but are interlaced, enabling the staff to work at peak performance on limited areas of concentration.

Curriculum development (or program planning) often becomes burdensome and inefficient in a school when staff members fail to establish priorities and to concentrate on a manageable portion of total program development. In general, the school's learning program needs to be coordinated and defined in terms of expected levels for student achievement. A learning continuum across grades and ages needs to replace literal grade-bound programs so that students can achieve optimally at every age. Teachers as well as students and parents will then know what is expected of students in relation to substantive outcomes, rather than course completion. Principals, however, need to develop a process for staff involvement in the development, implementation, and evaluation of learning programs.

![Figure 4. Teacher Progress Report](image-url)

**Subsystem I: Instruction for Mastery**

**Teacher:** Donna Johnson  
**Quarter:** First

**Objectives:**
Develop proficiency in demonstrations and learning centers

**Activities:**
1. Observed three teachers in demonstrations and two in learning centers
2. Developed criteria for demonstrations
3. Observed once in demonstrations and once in learning centers
4. Read two books on learning centers

**Outcomes:**
1. Have a sense of an effective demonstration; need to develop more clear cues about next steps and to involve learners in problem solving and re-demonstration concept/skill
2. Work on learning centers only beginning—having difficult time locating effective learning centers in action.

**Subsystem I: Quality Instruction**

**Teacher Plan**  
**Team:** Donna  
**Quarter:** Second

**Objectives:**
Develop proficiency in demonstrations, learning centers, contracts

**A. Demonstrations**
1. Work on cues and student problem posing
2. Involve two teachers in observations—feedback

**B. Learning Centers**
1. Locate two or more effective learning centers to observe
2. Study learning center books—Select one curriculum area to begin learning centers

**C. Contracts**
1. Browse bookstore, library for readings on contracts—Read
2. Locate professors at universities who use contracts
"An action plan involves more than getting in gear and going; it is a specific allocation of time to a specific set of tasks for a specific purpose."

Engaging in goal-setting activities helps staff members recognize that some topics or curriculum areas are, at a given moment in time, either in adequate shape or in urgent need of attention. As the chief planner, the principal helps the staff determine priorities and devote their collective energies toward the accomplishment of planned tasks. This does not mean that other program areas will be neglected, since the total curriculum must keep moving forward. But attending to priority areas (such as the school math program) will give a sense of direction; ensure higher quality planning; and, in all likelihood, result in greater tangible outcomes, rewards, and satisfactions.

Performance monitoring allows the instructional leader to keep in touch with the implementation of plans and to make continuous judgments of intervention. Performance monitoring assists in the compilation of records necessary for the principal’s accountability function, and it keeps everyone on task in a constructive and productive way. Just as no sports team can thrive if individual players fall out of step with the basic game plan and the role of other players, no school can expect to achieve its goals if teachers are not, in the best sense of the term, controlled within a framework that makes sense for both them and the school. This is not to deny that individuality and uniqueness are respected, but rather to ensure that each individual’s role performance can be consciously and demonstrably related to the total school/team’s direction.

Quality control calls for several kinds of monitoring activities. Teachers establish calendars of goal activities to share with principals; periodically they report their progress against plans and current conditions. The combination of informative data and perceptions assists the principal in determining corrective procedures or positive reinforcement; that is, in planning supervisory actions. To illustrate the teacher report dimension of monitoring, note Donna Johnson’s first quarterly report and her next quarterly plan in Figure 4.

Teacher/team reports provide a set of perceptions that either agree or disagree with the principal’s. Supervisory plans will reflect both the need for correction and reinforcement and the strategy for those actions. Monitoring is critical to the successful achievement of school goals. Periodically inspecting each team’s or teacher’s performance guides the total staff toward productive ends.

Resource management. How resources are allocated to teams and individuals should be contingent on goal priorities. For example, if a school priority is to develop a math lab, then resources (dollars, materials, and people) must be allocated for lab development. Priority is given to the purchases and consultation necessary to ensure development of the lab. In a sense, the math lab goal becomes a funnel for funds as well as for staff training, supervision, production, organization, program development, and individual activity. Thus, resources need to be sought and provided for highpriority goal-related activities rather than spent indiscriminately in other needy areas.

Achievement and Assessment

In the context of planning and development, evaluation applies to both the process and the results of all preceding events. Students, teachers, team leaders, and principals evaluate individual performance, team performance, and school performance based on measures of student achievement and staff achievement. Evaluation is linked to goals, standards of performance, and to development activities, and is conducted collaboratively to assess results and prepare for the next set of school improvement efforts.

Assessing school productivity requires performance evaluation at various levels. Students are assessed in terms of achievement levels. Teachers participate in assessing personal productivity and team productivity in relation to stated goals. Team leaders assess their own productive management as well as the principal’s instructional leadership. The principal assesses team and teacher productivity in relation to goals, plans, and the results of corrective action during the year.

Within this context, evaluation is a natural outgrowth of the pursuit of collective plans. How did we fare as a total school? How many wins did we have this month? This year? Who excelled in performance? Who needs additional assistance? Who didn’t carry his or her load and can such failure be corrected? Which aspects of the program worked out especially well? Did our new math program make a difference in test scores? Where do we need to focus next year? Are our needs assessment and recordkeeping procedures useful in identifying needs/targets appropriately and in recording learning? What should now be the personal development goals for Betty Green? What do all of us need to work on next? These are questions the instructional leader examines with individuals and with each team.

Finally, the principal prepares a report to share with the school staff and the central office. Achievement is noted, problems recorded, and recommendations made for next year’s school improvement process.

Summary

The principal can make a fundamental difference in the performance of a school by involving staff members in school improvement planning, specific teacher and program development, and in careful assessment. Schools can produce the levels and kinds of learning that society expects as principals become increasingly more skilled at organizing teachers in various permanent and temporary arrangements to work toward specific goals. Raising achievement norms depends on knowledgeable leadership and planned collective action.

References

