

## Behavior Patterns of Effective Principals

Continuing research on effective schools has verified the common sense observation that schools are rarely effective, in any sense of the word, unless the principal is a "good" leader. While the effectiveness criteria used thus far have ordinarily been test scores in reading and mathematics, the behavior patterns revealed by this research may be relevant to broader conceptions of effectiveness.

Several caveats should be noted about these research findings:

- Research on leadership in education is hampered by the persistent goal ambiguity of schooling. The time is certainly propitious for extending research into behavior patterns that lead to successful attainment of important goals of schooling other than basic skills.

- Evidence is emerging that behaviors effective in one school situation may not be effective in others. We must resist the tendency to look for simplistic principles of teaching, grouping, promoting, or leading as if we were assembling hand calculators, not teaching children.

- There have been few careful syntheses of the research where rigorous requirements were set for what could be included. I see a tendency for bias to creep in, as it has in the effective schools research: factors someone *thinks* are important are offered along with empirical findings.

Value judgments are fine, so long as they are stated as such and not reported as research. For example, I believe effective leaders are usually risk takers, but that is difficult to document.

- We must not expect that there will be lots of "superstars" who manifest all the behaviors of effective leaders. Most of us may be strong in one or two leader behaviors, but rarely do we have all these qualities.

There are ways to improve schools without relying too heavily on principals, but they take a different form of organization.

With these caveats, I will list a few behavior patterns drawn from the re-



search description of principals of effective schools.

**Vision.** Effective principals have a sense of vision as to the kind of school and learning environment they intend to create. They articulate goals, directions, and priorities for their school to citizens, faculty, and students.

**Resourcefulness.** Effective principals do not stop with the limited resources provided them through normal channels. It is rare that an urban principal accomplishes much by way of school improvement if he or she is not a bit of a maverick. While not necessarily defying the system, effective principals demonstrate ingenuity in convincing central office personnel, parent groups, business leaders, and others of the school's needs. One elementary principal I know developed an outstanding media center for his school by aggressively seeking contributions of new forms of technology from every possible source.

**School Improvement Processes.** Effective principals *plan* for school improvement. All leaders need to spend considerable time earning "people power" beyond the "position power" conveyed with their title. Daniel Maccoby<sup>1</sup> found that forward-looking leaders in private industry recognize that employees do best in a climate of trust and cooperative endeavor. Effective leaders seek to develop a feeling that the organization cares about its employees and values their contributions. I suspect this is the reason the quality circle idea is gaining recognition as a valuable problem-solving tool in schools.

**Instructional Support.** Effective principals are a visible entity in all phases of school life and provide active support to

teachers. They spend much time observing classes and discussing instructional problems in a manner regarded by teachers as helpful. The difference between effective principals and others seems to lie in their knowledge of quality instruction, and this drives their judgment on how to spend their time.

**Monitoring.** Effective principals know more about how students are doing in mathematics or composition or art than other principals, and they use the information as the basis for setting new priorities and as valuable feedback to teachers. Principals who are concerned with the outcomes of schooling, who spend time analyzing evaluative data as the basis for interventions, and who allocate resources and work with staff members based on such information seem to convey an important message that energizes school purposes. This is obviously the classic management function of "control," which means that leaders must be knowledgeable and constantly concerned about the extent to which the institution is attaining its goals.

In summary, it is clear that despite all the restraints we all face each day, effective leaders are optimistic that constructive change is possible. If leaders lack this attribute, their prospects for improving schools are limited.

Finally, fueling these behavior patterns is the principal's value base. What he or she believes in and will fight for is perhaps the prime determinant of what the school will become. One of my fears in observing today's yearning for simplistic solutions is that fewer educational leaders are emerging in the style of Carleton Washburne, Marcus Foster, and Harold Rugg. While one may or may not have agreed with their particular values, there was no question about what they stood for. □

<sup>1</sup>Michael Maccoby, *The Leader* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981).

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