

Ronald S. Brandt
Executive Editor

Anne Meek
Managing Editor

Al Way
Art Director

Jo Ann Irick Jones
Associate Editor

Cheryl J. Weber
Editorial Assistant

Teola T. Jones
Advertising Coordinator

Deborah A. Johnson
Administrative Assistant

September 1987

Volume 45

Number 1

Educational Leadership is intended primarily for leaders in elementary, middle, and secondary education but is also for anyone interested in curriculum, instruction, supervision, and leadership in schools. ASCD publications present a variety of viewpoints. The views expressed or implied in this publication are not necessarily official positions of the Association. Copyright © 1987 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.

ISSN 0013-1784

September 87/Stock No. 611-87042

Why Instructional Leaders Are So Scarce

As the demand for better schools continues unabated, theorists search for new understandings of instructional leadership, and new studies on this complex phenomenon continue to appear. In an effort to translate the research on leader behavior into competencies, new training programs for administrators are emerging in centers and academies at district and state levels. In addition, many universities have undertaken a fundamental re-examination of their graduate programs as other agencies have moved in to provide the professional development necessitated by new demands.

The reason for this flurry of activity is that research has documented what common sense has long dictated: that school leaders *do* determine whether or not schools are successful. Unfortunately, we face a critical shortage of instructional leaders.

I propose a simple formula that helps explain why: Clear Goals + Strong Incentives + Appropriate Skills = Instructional Leadership.

Clear goals are almost universally advocated, but schools are invariably plagued by goal ambiguity. Board members vary in their priorities, and superintendents often become expendable because they can't meet such diverse expectations. Teachers also press their own subjects, values, and agendas. Reaching consensus on goals and priorities is a tough job. Finding acceptable indicators of progress is even tougher.

The absence of *strong incentives* for school improvement is a rather severe impediment to leadership. To move out rapidly is often a major risk, and many principals learn it is not worth the grief. I know one principal whose firm policy for his school is to seek *no* recognition or publicity ... good or bad. In another district, a principal who made an energetic effort at instructional improvement was socially

ostracized by her colleagues.

Although a majority of educators resent the continued public press for incentive pay, they might benefit if their salaries were in fact determined on the basis of tangible evidence of progress toward important goals. Merit pay, however, is only one way of recognizing superior performance. Superintendents and school boards who realize this and find ways of providing other strong incentives for meritorious performance will see that such plans pay off in altering the norm of maintenance rather than leadership.

Of course, instructional leaders need *appropriate skills*. These range from the "technical tasks" of instructional leadership, such as curriculum development and staff development, to the broader skills conceptualized by theorists such as Bennis, Burns, Peters, and Maccoby.

The present emphasis on professional development will no doubt result in some improvement in the skills associated with leadership, but our expectations must be tempered by the realization that we know more about describing the desired behaviors than we do about providing the training to enhance their internalization and application.

The increased emphasis on training in leadership skills is welcome, but without attention to goals and incentives, we will be disappointed in the results. When all three elements are in place, we will see dramatic improvements in learning opportunities for students and the sought-after outcomes that are understood and respected by the public. □



Copyright © 1987 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.