



Indicator: The principal makes sure everyone understands their role in continuously elevating professional practice. (4376)

Explanation: The evidence suggests that principals are the stewards of the learning vision for the school, which includes how the adults in the building will grow and develop in their practice. Principals must encourage staff members to take formal and informal leadership roles and facilitate professional opportunities for staff. It is also critical for principals to lead by example, modeling a learner stance to encourage all staff members to take advantage of their own learning opportunities.

Questions: How will the principal encourage staff members to pursue opportunities for professional learning and growth? How can the principal create a leadership structure within the school to allow staff to share with each other what they have learned? How will the principal model a learning stance to all stakeholders to highlight the importance of reflective practice? What professional development opportunities will the principal arrange or facilitate for staff within the building?

Chrispeels and Martin (2002) highlight “the importance of the relationship between structure, roles and relationships, and values and beliefs” in a school (p. 360). It is the principal’s job to manage these three domains and create a “shared vision of learning” that allows for commonality across stakeholders and provides motivation for hard work and continual improvement (Hallinger & Murphy, 2013, p. 17). It is important to note that this vision for learning is not only about the students – although their needs are central – but it is also about the adult learning happening within the building. While the principal oversees the structures, roles, and values of the school, he or she must also make clear to all staff that everyone has a stake in them, particularly as it pertains to their own professional growth and development.

Lambert (2002) perfectly explains this shared responsibility for professional growth:

For decades, educators have understood that we are all responsible for student learning. More recently, educators have come to realize that we are responsible for our own learning as well. But we usually do not move our eyes around the room—across the table—and say to ourselves, “I am also responsible for the learning of my colleagues” (p. 37).

It is the principal’s task to help educators see this shared role in professional learning and to provide opportunities where it can be fostered. Murphy (2007) writes that:

Effective principals facilitate opportunities for professional growth by enabling teachers to attend conferences, establishing mechanisms that facilitate the exchange of professional dialogue, and personally sharing ideas and materials with staff... They take advantage of the fact that they are in a unique position to garner and allocate resources to bring communities of professional practice to life (p. 78-79).

In taking these actions, the principal not only promotes the value of shared learning, but also encourages teachers to seize the opportunities they are given. Lambert (2002) discusses key tenets for effective school leadership, including participating with teachers as “mutual learners and leaders” and emphasizing “broad involvement, collaboration, and collective responsibility” (p. 38). By providing and promoting opportunities for professional growth, involving staff members in conversations about practice, and modeling these behaviors themselves, principals solidify the school’s culture around adult learning and create paths for others to grow and develop.

In facilitating staff-wide involvement in professional learning and growth, the principal should encourage the establishment of both formal and informal roles for others. This may be challenging to principals who view their roles of authority in more traditional ways. Redding (2006) writes: “The principal, of course, is the ‘chief’ leader in the school, by virtue of organizational position, so the sharing begins with the principal reassessing the nature of that position” (p. 43). Chrispeels, et al. (2000) and Chrispeels and Martin (2002) found that principals who struggled to let go of the more authoritative vision of their role were seen as an obstacle to the effective functioning of the school and the growth of teachers who were trying to improve.

Yet principals who embrace the ideas of shared leadership understand that they must help others learn to lead as well. Hallinger and Murphy (2013) write that, “The enterprise of education is centrally concerned with the development of human capacity. Leadership for learning should be focused on capacity development as well” (p. 16). Principals understand that not only do individual teachers benefit from these development opportunities, but so does the staff at large, and ultimately, the students they serve. Lucas and Valentine (2002) cite Bass (1985), stating that principals inspire “faculty to transcend their own limited self-interests to work for the greater good of the school as a whole” (p. 23). In allowing for staff members to take on formal and informal leadership roles, they are then able to share all that they have learned in their own professional journeys to the benefit of the school at large.

References and Resources

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