



Indicator: The principal spends at least 50% of his/her time working directly with teachers to improve instruction, including classroom observations. (4382)

Explanation: We know that it is important for the principal to be an instructional leader, even in a large school with other administrative staff to assist in this work. Most principals want to be instructional leaders, but their plate can fill up with other tasks. If the principal is not able to devote about half of his/her time to working with teacher Instructional Teams, coaching teachers, and visiting classrooms, the Leadership Team may need to find ways to remove other tasks from his/her routine.

Questions: If the principal keeps a log of how he/she uses time over the course of a couple weeks, would the results show that about half the time is spent on instruction? [Keeping such a log is a good way to gather data for this indicator, and for providing evidence of its implementation. It also shows the Leadership Team the other tasks a principal performs that might be managed by someone else.]

The principal has been called the “torch bearer” for a school. He or she is expected to set the course of action, keep people engaged, and be the instructional leader of the building. The principal needs to recognize where there are problems to be solved and provide support and guidance where needed. Redding, 2007 writes, “The principal is the focus keeper, consistently pointing to improved student learning as the central goal of the school. The principal sets the climate of high expectations for student achievement and sees that teams function effectively” (p. 102). Murphy (2007) writes that

Learning-focused leaders devote abundant time to supporting colleagues in their efforts to strengthen teaching and learning in and across classrooms. Foremost, they are aggressive in identifying and removing barriers that prevent colleagues from doing their work well. They provide intellectual stimulation and make certain that teachers have a high quality stream of job-embedded opportunities to expand, enhance, and refine their repertoires of instructional skills. They also make sure that the materials that teachers require to perform their jobs are on hand in sufficient quantity and in a timely fashion. Consistent with the involvement and investment theme, effective leaders demonstrate personal interest in staff and make themselves available to them. (p. 74)

Instructional leader or learning-focused leader are both great descriptors of what we hope the building principal aspires to be. In every building, even a school that has an active and strong Leadership Team, needs the direction and guidance of a learning-focused leader. One who can keep the team on track and keep the focus on the goal of all students achieving their highest potential. The learning-focused principal spends time in classrooms, learning and observing the styles and skills of his/her staff. The principal gives feedback to his staff after observation in order to increase a teacher's skill. The principal, through observations, knows what professional development is needed, either across the board or for an individual teacher.

All of this sounds great. So, how does a single person manage it all? Levin (2012) writes that the challenge to leadership is:

...the problem of balancing the need for change with the need to manage effectively all the necessary ongoing functions of an organization. Both aspects are critical, but they turn out to be conflicting, in that the more one does one, the less one seems to be able to do the other. Leaders are typically exhorted in books... or in workshops and professional development or even in graduate programs, to be change agents. They then go back to their districts and discover that the press of the immediate or routine seems to make the work of change impossible. (p. 172)

As the explanation above states, the Leadership Team can begin to unravel all the duties of the principal to see what can be delegated off to someone else while allowing the principal to spend the thrust of his or her time in the classrooms or giving other instructional supports to teachers. Leithwood and colleagues (2006) gave several principles of school leadership which included that the principal a) set the direction for the school (vision); b) needed to understand people and know how to develop them; c) could see inefficiencies in the organization and determine ways for it to run better; and d) could direct the teaching and learning going on in the building. It is a tall order for any one person—that is where the Leadership Team can play such a key role.

Part of leadership is knowing how to structure the day so that everyone's time is spend on instruction—and not on listening to announcements, classroom disruptions, long periods of time moving from class to class.

Implicit in [school reform literature] is the understanding that academic learning time is the caldron in which student achievement materializes. And we know that effective leaders work tirelessly with staff to ensure that this precious resource is maximized. They begin by making sure that the great bulk of time is devoted to instructional activities, that non-instructional time is kept to a minimum. They also see to it that the majority of instructional time is dedicated to core academic subjects. Within this learning space, they work with teachers to accentuate the use of instructional strategies that maximize student engagement at high levels of success. On a parallel track, learning-focused leaders undertake an array

of activities that protect valuable instructional time from interruptions, including (a) assigning academic subjects time slots that are least likely to be disturbed by school events; (b) protecting teachers from distractions from the school office; (c) developing, implementing, and monitoring procedures to reduce student tardiness and absenteeism; and (d) ensuring that teachers are punctual. They also foster more productive use of time by coordinating time usage among teachers and across classes (e.g., all language arts instruction unfolding during the first two hours of the day). (Murphy, 2007, p 74-75)

References and Resources

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