



Indicator: The principal plans opportunities for teachers to share their strengths with other teachers. (4391)

Explanation: More than anyone else in the building, the principal knows each teacher's special strengths. The principal notes the strengths during classroom observations, team meetings, faculty meetings, and discussions with individual teachers. The principal reviews lesson plans. Noting teachers who are strong in particular practices (and their indicators) is a good habit for the principal. Making use of that information comes next. The principal pairs teachers for coaching, asks a teacher to lead a discussion of an indicator (or cluster of indicators) during a faculty meeting, and asks teachers strong on an element of practice to prepare a workshop for the rest of the faculty.

Questions: How does your principal make note of individual teachers' strengths relative to effective practices and their indicators? How does your principal use this information to enable these teachers to share what they know and what they do with other teachers?

As a principal conducts classroom observations it is an opportunity to discover not only where a teacher may need professional development or support for lacking skills, but also a way to discover teachers who have strengths or expertise that could and should be shared with other staff. The skills being shared should always fall within the vision of the school improvement plan and demonstrate effective practices. The teacher may share with one other teacher as in peer mentoring or collegial learning or the teacher may share with an entire staff. Recognizing and highlighting the strengths and skills of particular teachers is also a way to reward their expertise in a way that is not hindered by financial constraints or budgets. As the instructional leader of the building, the principal is spending approximately half or more of his or her time either in the classroom or working with teachers on their instructional skills.

Recruiting the expertise of skilled teachers within the building shares the leadership responsibilities with teachers who are ready and able to take on more of a leadership role in the school as well as frees up the principal to work with other staff who, especially in the case of a large school, may already be spread thin by the demands of time. An administrator is no longer expected to carry all the responsibility in the building; an "effective leader is one who shares the load, both the rights and the responsibilities, by building on the strengths of all" (Avolio, 2007; Hazy, 2007; Lichtenstein, Uhl-Bien, & Marion, 2006, in Franklin, 2012). In some cases, the teacher may exhibit skills in areas in which the principal does not feel especially strong, and so allowing teachers to demonstrate and share those skills enhances the skills of the entire building without being hindered by the skill set of the principal, "The school administrator cannot be an expert in everything. Individual teachers, of course, have their own particular areas of knowledge, but a group of teacher leaders can supply the variety of professional knowledge needed for sustained school improvement" (Danielson, 2007). Also, receiving feedback from the principal may be intimidating for a novice teacher however, "a fellow beside-me-in-the-dugout teacher offers a far less intimidating means of support and advice (Franklin, 2012).

The opportunities for teacher leadership or sharing do not happen of their own accord. The principal needs to plan for this to happen or create the atmosphere in which this can take place. The conditions for teacher leadership include:

- An environment that allows and fosters risk taking—teachers must feel secure in branching out to lead others without fear of criticism
- Principal must openly encourage teacher leaders
- Principal must provide opportunities for teachers to learn leadership skills and to share their strengths with other teachers (Danielson, 2007)

Promoting teacher leadership is not about involving teachers in “managerial and administrative duties” but rather “playing to the strength of their classroom expertise....By inviting expert teachers to assist in improving learning conditions throughout the school, we aren’t removing our best teachers from the classroom. We are extending their reach” (Scherer, 2007). The benefits for cultivating teacher leaders are well worth the effort. Teacher leaders can “mentor new faculty members, contribute deep knowledge of their school and community to the decision-making process, provide example of outstanding teaching to colleagues, and support school improvement efforts (Barth, 2001; Lieberman & Miller, 2004)” (Lattimer, 2007). On the opposite end of the spectrum, teachers who feel their expertise is not respected may lead to “frustration and resistance” (Cuban & Usdan, 2003; Hubbard, Mehan, & Stein, 2006 in Lattimer, 2007).

References and Resources

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