

Fact Sheet #1 - Performance Standard 1: Instructional Leadership

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

The leader fosters the success of all students by facilitating the development, communication, implementation, and evaluation of a shared vision of learning that leads to school improvement.

What does *instructional leadership* mean?

In general terms, instructional leadership is a focus on factors that promote and support teaching and learning.¹ Research indicates that instructional leaders do impact student achievement, though indirectly.² Thus, it behooves leaders to prioritize their instructional role as one of critical importance.

Effective instructional leaders focus their efforts on school improvement and student success. They do this in several ways: by creating a vision for the school community, by sharing leadership so that responsibilities are distributed, by leading a learning community, and by monitoring curriculum and instruction.

What does research say about instructional leadership?

Creating a Vision. Effective, forward-thinking leaders understand that creating a vision is at the heart of what they do; a first step that becomes the impetus through which all future decisions, goals, and dreams are funneled.³ They also understand that if a vision is to reach fruition it must be inspiring enough to be embraced by others within the organization; it must become a shared vision.⁴

Principals of high achieving schools are clear about the school's vision and goals.⁵ A shared vision helps guide all in the school community to the destination—student success and school improvement. From the vision, goals for learning are established. Buy-in to both the vision and the learning goals are important—the savvy leader understands this and seeks commitment from the school community.⁶

Various research studies on high-achieving schools find that principals play an important

role in building and sustaining the school's vision. High-achieving schools have principals who: communicate to all that the school's most important mission is learning,⁷ believe that established school goals are attainable,⁸ and expect that both teachers and students can meet established goals.⁹

Sharing Leadership. Effective instructional leaders believe in sharing leadership. Sharing leadership is not to be confused with delegating responsibilities or garnering extra help. Rather, it can be defined broadly as “teachers’ influence over and participation in school-wide decisions.”¹⁰ Effective principals understand the value of collaborative effort in successfully realizing the common vision.

They realize that in order to meet instructional goals, they need buy-in from the staff.¹¹ By sharing leadership, the principal acknowledges that everyone has important contributions to make. Further, providing opportunities for stakeholders to participate in decision-making about issues affecting them and that they are knowledgeable about, is an affirmation of the integral role they play in goal accomplishment.¹² Capitalizing on the leadership and instructional strengths of other staff members is smart leadership.

Research indicates that principals who tap the expertise of the school's teacher leaders are beneficiaries of the following:

- Teacher leaders positively affect change from the classroom when they inquire about school improvement and then participate in answering the question.¹³
- As teacher leaders work with principals toward school improvement, they provide

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valuable insights and ideas.¹⁴

- Teacher leaders willingly take on additional tasks and responsibilities that are not required of classroom teachers that benefit the school and other teachers within it.¹⁵
- Principals who develop and tap the expertise of teacher leaders and refocus their emphasis on learning throughout the school improvement effort are more successful than those who do not.¹⁶

Leading a Learning Community. Learning is a lifelong process. Effective principals take the lead in promoting professional growth and learning for both themselves and their staffs. Two primary functions around which schools are organized include: (1) teaching and learning, and (2) organizing for teaching and learning.¹⁷ Communicating this focus to every stakeholder in the school community is a crucial leader responsibility.

Principals who prioritize student learning are successful.¹⁸ Prioritizing student learning means paying attention to and communicating the importance of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. This is where leaders focus their instructional attention. It also means being visible in and around the school.¹⁹ When staff see leaders out and about, interested in the daily goings-on, they see leaders who are engaged and involved.

In order to promote the practices that lead to effective teaching and mastery learning, leaders not only plan and organize professional development, they also participate in the process. They become learners alongside their staffs. Barth commented that the leader as learner “is critical because there is a striking connection between learning and collegiality.”²⁰ Effective principals recognize the value of collaborative participation in the learning community as a way to build trust and collective responsibility, and to further the goal of improved student learning.²¹

Monitoring Curriculum and Instruction.

Effective principals focus on curriculum and instruction. Monitoring teacher practice helps to identify instructional strengths and weaknesses. Leaders are aware of instructional practices in their school buildings, are knowledgeable about the curriculum standards, and ensure that they are taught.²² Leaders trust their teachers to effectively implement instruction but visit classrooms regularly to observe the results of that instruction.²³

In effective schools, leaders are able to judge the effectiveness of teaching and serve as role models for expected behaviors of school staff.²⁴ The emphasis on teaching and learning means that leaders consciously limit activities that diminish instructional time.²⁵ They allocate resources based on identified needs which may include: materials, staffing, and staff development.²⁶ They encourage teacher reflection regarding instructional practices and their impact on student achievement.²⁷

Research related to leaders’ roles in monitoring curriculum and instruction indicates the following: (1) both teachers and leaders believe it important that someone is positioned to guide the curriculum and to make decisions about staff development needs,²⁸ (2) effective leaders ensure continuity in the school instructional program,²⁹ and (3) leaders must spend time in classrooms to monitor instructional programs, curriculum implementation, and the quality of instructional practices.³⁰

Sample Performance Indicators for the Professional Knowledge of Leaders

- Articulates a vision and works collaboratively with staff, students, parents, and other stakeholders to develop a mission and programs consistent with the district’s strategic plan.
- Analyzes current academic achievement data and instructional strategies to make appropriate educational decisions to

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improve classroom instruction, increase student achievement, and improve overall school effectiveness.

- Uses student achievement data to determine school effectiveness and directs school staff to actively analyze data for improving results.
- Monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of instructional programs to promote the achievement of academic standards.
- Possesses knowledge of and directs school staff to implement research-based instructional best practices in the classroom.
- Provides leadership for the design and implementation of effective and efficient schedules that maximize instructional time.
- Works collaboratively with staff to identify needs and to design, revise, and monitor instruction to ensure effective delivery of the required curriculum.
- Provides the focus for continued learning of all members of the school community.

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⁴ Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2002). *The leadership challenge* (3rd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

⁵ Leithwood, K. A., & Riehl, C. (2003). *What do we already know about successful school leadership?* Washington, DC: AERA Division A Task Force on Developing Educational Leadership.

⁶ Kearney, & Harrington, 2010; Stronge, J. H., Richard, H. B., & Catano, N. (2008). *Qualities of Effective Principals*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

⁷ Cotton, 2003; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008.

⁸ Leithwood, & Riehl, 2003; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008.

⁹ Leithwood, & Riehl, 2003; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008.

¹⁰ Whalstrom, K. L., & Louis, K. S. (2008). How teachers experience principal leadership: The roles of professional community, trust, efficacy, and shared responsibility. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 44, 458-495.

¹¹ Hargreaves, A., & Fink, D. (2003). Sustaining leadership. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 84(9), 693-700.

¹² Kearney, & Harrington, 2010; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003.

¹³ Reason, C., & Reason, L. (2007). Asking the right questions. *Educational Leadership*, 65(1), 36-47.

¹⁴ Chew, J., & Andrews, D. (2010). Enabling teachers to become pedagogical leaders: Case studies of two IDEAS schools in Singapore and Australia. *Educational Research for Policy & Practice*, 9(1), 59-74. doi:10.1007/s10671-010-9079-0; Muijs, D., & Harris, A. (2006). Teacher led school improvement: Teacher leadership in the UK. *Teaching & Teacher Education*, 22(8), 961-972. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2006.04.010.

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¹⁶ Leithwood et al., 2004.

¹⁷ Stronge, Richard, & Catano, 2008.

¹⁸ Kearney, & Harrington, 2010.

¹⁹ Marzano et al., 2005.

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²¹ Prestine, N. A., & Nelson, B. S. (2003). *How can educational leaders support and promote teaching and learning? New conceptions of learning and leading in schools*. Task Force for the Development of an Agenda for Future Research on Educational Leadership. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Organization, Chicago, IL.

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²³ Portin, B., Schneider, P., DeArmond, M., & Gundlach, L. (2003, September). *Making sense of leading schools: A study of the school principalship*. Seattle, WA: Center on Reinventing Public Education.

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Marzano et al., 2005.

²⁵ Marzano et al., 2005.

²⁶ Kearney, & Harrington, 2010.

²⁷ Cotton, 2003.

²⁸ Portin et al., 2003.

²⁹ Leithwood & Riehl, 2003.

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**Leader Self-Assessment Checklist
Performance Standard 1: Instructional Leadership**

Quality		Level IV	Level III	Level II	Level I
Creating a Vision	Creates a shared vision for the school.				
	Establishes learning goals from the vision.				
	Communicates that learning is the most important school goal.				
	Believes goals are attainable.				
	Expects teachers and students to attain goals.				
Sharing Leadership	Seeks goal attainment through individual and group effort.				
	Provides opportunities for stakeholders to participate in decision-making.				
	Taps the expertise of the school’s teacher leaders.				
	Develops collaborative opportunities among teachers.				
Leading a Learning Community	Prioritizes student learning.				
	Focuses instructional attention on curriculum, instruction, and assessment.				
	Promotes and plans professional growth for self and staff.				
	Learns alongside and with faculty.				
Monitoring Curriculum and Instruction	Monitors teacher practice and student learning through regular classroom visits.				
	Serves as a role model for expected behaviors of school staff.				
	Limits activities that diminish instructional time.				
	Ensures continuity in the school instructional program.				