



Research to Practice Brief

Welcome to the third University of Minnesota College Readiness Consortium and Educational Equity Resource Center's *Research to Practice Brief*. *Research to Practice Briefs* provide school leaders with information and resources on current Minnesota issues related to closing achievement gaps and preparing students for postsecondary success. Each brief provides guidance on one topic and includes resources available at the University of Minnesota and beyond. School leaders can use the *Research to Practice Brief* as a framework for applying current research to best meet their school's needs.

Issue Three: School Leadership

2015 Legislation

The 2015 legislature funded a previously authorized program called the Minnesota Principals Academy. Developed jointly by the University of Minnesota, Minnesota Department of Education, Minnesota Elementary School Principals Association and Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals in 2007, the Principals Academy is an executive development program for experienced school leaders who want to lead schools where all students graduate on the path to earn a certificate or degree in college. Two cohorts of school leaders, in Thief River Falls and in the Twin Cities, are currently enrolled and ten cohorts have completed the Academy.

Principles from the Research

There is a growing body of research demonstrating that creating a high performing school requires a high performing leader. Great teachers are essential, but without a great leader these pockets of excellence will not create a high quality system. Yet on a daily basis the principal's duties range from setting the vision to scheduling lunchroom coverage, from managing a complex budget to resolving student disputes. Effective school leadership requires not only a deep understanding of instructional systems, but also skill in personnel management, coaching, finance, data analysis, ethics, communications, community and family engagement, and the ability to align it all. Research tells us that:

1. The impact of school leadership on student learning is second only to teaching among school-related factors. Successful leaders are able to establish goals, strategically align resources, develop and support people (creating high performance expectations) and (re)design the organization, including structures and culture. Leithwood et. al., 2004, Robinson et. al., 2008.
2. Leading change is a key role of principals today, and requires strong leaders with an understanding of organizational change. Wagner, 2012.
3. School leaders need appropriate training and support to be successful. Darling-Hammond, 2009.

How Should School Leaders Apply the Research?

As with most professions, preparation programs provide foundational knowledge and after a few years managing the breadth of the job, a practicing principal should be ready to go deeper into his or her learning. School boards (or any governing or oversight organization) need to assure that the school and/or district leadership are getting high quality professional development. Other fields, such as business, law, medicine and the military, consider professional development (including providing new experiences) as an integral part of the workweek, not an add-on to be squeezed in during evenings and weekends.

“Sit and git” lectures and seminars rarely create a change in behavior. Professional development that provides ongoing involvement with the content, preferably with interaction with daily responsibilities, and ideally coaching, provide the highest likelihood of actual implementation.

Becoming an effective leader requires time performing the job, not just classroom learning. Extended time to engage in leadership responsibilities, such as extended internships alongside experienced principals, before assuming the job is extremely valuable.

What Does Effective Leadership Look Like in a School?

Today’s school leader frequently roams the school, but with intent and focused on instruction. The principal has established school goals for student outcomes that are clearly understood by teachers and are used to focus and coordinate their work. The principal visits multiple classrooms for short visits, rotating visits and providing feedback. In the classroom her focus is on student learning and she looks for alignment with school objectives. Teachers work in collegial teams to use data to evaluate student learning and adjust accordingly. Staff welcome feedback on instruction as a learning opportunity, and the principal is astute at perceiving and resolving conflict. The principal also engages with students so they feel respected and assures an orderly environment.

Resources

Professional Development

[Minnesota Principals Academy](#) : Executive development program for experienced principals

[Urban Leadership Academy](#): University of Minnesota workshops for urban school leaders

University of Minnesota [licensing and leadership development](#) program

The [Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals](#) and [Minnesota Elementary School Principals Association](#) provide professional development opportunities for their members.

Books and Articles

[A Wallace Perspective: The School Principal As Leader: Guiding Schools to Better Teaching and Learning](#). January 2013. The Wallace Foundation.

[Capturing the leadership premium: How the world’s top school systems are building leadership capacity for the future](#). Barber, M., Whelan, F., & Clark, M. 2010. McKinsey & Company.

[*Change leadership: A practical guide to transforming our schools.*](#) Wagner, T., Kegan, R., Lahey, L. L., Lemons, R. W., Garnier, J., Helsing, D., & Rasmussen, H. T. 2012. John Wiley & Sons.

[*Developing Excellent School Principals to Advance Teaching and Learning: Considerations for State Policy.*](#) Manna, P. 2015. The Wallace Foundation.

[*The Impact of Leadership on Student Outcomes.*](#) Robinson, V., Lloyd, C., and Rowe, K. 2008. Educational Administration Quarterly, vol. 44, no. 5.

[*Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning: Executive Summary of Research Findings.*](#) Wahlstrom, K., Seashore, K., Leithwood, K., Anderson, S. 2010. The Wallace Foundation.

[*Preparing principals for a changing world: Lessons from effective school leadership programs.*](#) Darling-Hammond, L., Meyerson, D., LaPointe, M., & Orr, M. T. 2009. John Wiley & Sons

[*Review of Research: How Leadership Influences Student Learning*](#) Leithwood, K.; Seashore Louis, K.; Anderson, S.; Wahlstrom, K. 2004. University of Minnesota, Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement.

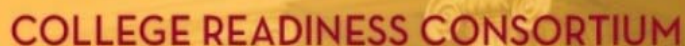
[*School leadership that works: From research to results.*](#) Marzano, R. J., Waters, T., & McNulty, B. A. 2005. ASCD.

[*Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools: A practice guide*](#) (NCEE #2008-4020). Herman, R., Dawson, P., Dee, T., Greene, J., Maynard, R., Redding, S., and Darwin, M. 2008. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.

The [Wallace Foundation](#) has many resources and publications from research on effective school leadership.

Other References

[National Institute for School Leadership](#) NISL developed the curriculum used in the MN Principals Academy

The logo for the College Readiness Consortium features the text "COLLEGE READINESS CONSORTIUM" in a bold, dark red font. The text is set against a background of a warm, golden-yellow color with faint, classical architectural columns visible behind the text.

The Brief is created by the U of M's College Readiness Consortium and Professor Michael Rodriguez, who advises President Kaler on University efforts to close achievement gaps. Many thanks to Katie Pikel, Karen Seashore and Kyla Wahlstrom, who contributed ideas and research for this edition.

For more information about current education research, read CEHD's Vision 2020 blog: <http://cehdvision2020.umn.edu/cehd-blog/>
For questions about the Brief, contact Julie Sweitzer, Director, College Readiness Consortium and Co-Director, Educational Equity Resource Center, sweitzer@umn.edu.

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