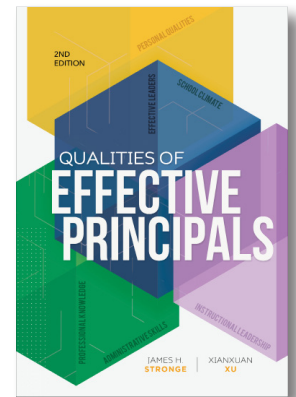


# ASCD® LEADERSHIP SUMMARIES for EDUCATORS

## Qualities of Effective Principals

2nd Edition

by James H. Stronge and Xianxuan Xu



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### THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

In the second edition of *Qualities of Effective Principals*, you'll find the research-backed qualities, skills, and capacities that help principals lead successful students, teachers, and schools, including instructional leadership, shaping school climate, human resource administration, teacher evaluation, organizational management, communication and community relations, and professionalism. Along the way, you'll discover the true depth of the role of a principal in student achievement.

Beyond safety, there are only two things that really count in schools and school leadership—teaching and learning, and supporting teaching and learning. It's not just principals who can benefit from the concepts found in this book. Other groups who can gain from these insights include assistant principals, administrators, staff development specialists, leadership coaches, human resource specialists, professors of educational leadership, and policymakers.

### IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- The power of instructional leadership.
- How school climate and role modeling expand the role of principal into something transformative.
- How supporting staff help elevate principals and their schools.



Based on *Qualities of Effective Principals, 2nd edition* by James H. Stronge and Xianxuan Xu. Published by Soundview Executive Book Summaries® (ISSN 0747-2196), 225 Wilmington West Chester Pike, Suite 202, Chadds Ford, PA 19317 USA. • Copyright © 2022 by ASCD. All rights reserved. © 2022 by ASCD. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part is prohibited. • To subscribe, visit [www.ascd.org](http://www.ascd.org) or contact ASCD, 1703 N Beauregard Street, Alexandria, VA 22311.

### Introduction

Do principals factor into student success? In *Qualities of Effective Principals, 2nd Edition*, we answer this question with a resounding yes! In fact, among school factors, the effect of principals is considered second only to that of teachers in facilitating student learning. Consequently, principals are expected to promote and develop the school vision, empowering stakeholders to build and maintain the conditions necessary for the success of all students. High-quality schools are characterized by high-quality principals. Without question, an effective principal is the key to a successful school, and principals are responsible for the overall functioning of their school. In their managerial role, they oversee the daily operations of schools. As instructional leaders, they direct and supervise the development, execution, assessment, and improvement of educational programs and activities in their schools. Principals' practices influence school conditions, teacher quality, instructional quality, and student achievement.

Without world-class principals, there will be no world-class schools. The 21st century has seen an array of tasks—school safety, crisis management, understanding and accommodating for increasingly diverse student populations, marketing, public relations, grantsmanship, data management, and technology—added to the repertoire of the principalship.

So, what makes great principals great? The nature of the principal's role has changed significantly in the past three decades, from primarily managerial to that of leading through quality instructional guidance and managerial responsibilities. Despite the recent emphasis on instructional leadership, principals remain responsible for traditional duties such as facility management, budgeting, school safety, and student discipline—tasks that continue to absorb a considerable amount of their time. Indeed, contemporary principals fulfill a wide array of responsibilities. Principals apply combinations of value-informed organizational, personal, and task-centered strategies in response to careful diagnosis of the situations or people they are trying to influence. In other words, principal effectiveness is highly contextual.

Considering the increasing number of responsibilities required of principals, it is not surprising to find that long hours are spent on the job. School principals work an average of 59 hours per week. Although it is generally agreed that the principal's role has evolved in recent years, there is no clear definition of that role and no method to balance the respon-

sibility of instructional leadership with important managerial and myriad other demands on their time. Given the competing demands for precious time, it is imperative not only that principals do their work well, but also that they do the right work. And to this end, effective principals understand that the core business of school is teaching and learning.

One essential ingredient for success in education or any business, for that matter, is effective leadership. If we are to succeed as an educational enterprise in a highly competitive world, then we must embrace leadership development—not in a cursory fashion, but rather in an ongoing, comprehensive, sustained manner.

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### What It Means to Be an Effective Principal

Focusing on what we know about effective principals, we attempt to capture what the best and most recent research tells us about the profile of an effective principal. Thus, we've summarized, in language as practical as possible, the findings about what good principals should know and be able to do. These eight chapters address the major qualities of principal effectiveness. The following sections provide an extensive review of the key roles and responsibilities of building-level school administrators, with the final section serving as a culmination of the previous chapters by exploring the direct and indirect effects of effective principals on school improvement and student success.

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### Instructional Leadership: Supporting Best Practice

Instructional leadership matters not only in addressing the challenges associated with national and state expectations, but also, and even more important, in achieving long-term aims for student career and life outcomes. Principals play a leading role in creating engaging opportunities for students to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to thrive in an information economy and in diverse communities. Schools constitute an open system that is strongly influenced by their environment.

Essentially, schools are a microcosm of their communities. The global/local economy (a derivative of “think globally, act locally,” referring to the value of education on U.S. global competitiveness and the local impact of education) and society in the 21st century require younger generations

not just to succeed academically, establish paths toward their chosen careers, or be civically engaged, but rather build their capacity to achieve all of these goals.

Consequently, today's principals concentrate on building a vision for their schools; establishing learning communities; and ensuring the quality of curriculum, instruction, and assessment that are implemented in the school building with an eye on what is as well as what changes may come. Among other responsibilities, accomplishing these essential school improvement efforts requires gathering and analyzing data to determine needs and then monitoring instructional programs to determine if the identified needs are addressed. This chapter summarizes existing research related to instructional leadership and methods principals use to exhibit and harness that leadership to meet their school goals. In particular, we focus on the following key attributes:

- Building and sustaining a school vision.
- Monitoring and supporting instruction.
- Coordinating and supervising curriculum.
- Leading a learning community.
- Using data to make instructional decisions.

Nothing in the principal's role is more important for ensuring successful student learning than effective instructional leadership. Effective principals are not simply transformational leaders, developing vision and fostering goals, or good at day-to-day managerial tasks, such as budgeting, allocating materials, scheduling, and establishing procedures; rather, they are also solid and consistent instructional leaders. Effective principals demonstrate instructional leadership through supervising and supporting teachers, coordinating coherent instructional programs, and establishing a vibrant professional learning community. Combining these efforts with appropriate data use and regular monitoring of what takes place at the classroom level will increase the likelihood that schools will achieve their goals for student learning. Finally, the best principals know that effective leading, teaching, and learning are inseparable.

### School Climate: The Heart of the School

It has often been said that one can tell the climate of a school simply by entering the building. How does the school feel? Are the school's vision, mission, and priorities

demonstrated clearly? Do administrators and staff efficiently ensure that effective teaching and learning are taking place? Are members of the school community treated with respect?

Is there a sense of pride in the school? Do staff members and stakeholders work as a team? Is there a robust professional learning community? What level of community involvement is evident? When all is said and done, is there a sense that this school is a great place to learn and work? These and many other factors coexist to form the climate of a school. So how does the principal influence all of these factors?

Although the influence of principals' leadership may be primarily indirect in nature, a significant way that principals exert their influence and affect schools is through forming and shaping the school climate. Simply put, when the principal facilitates a positive school climate, there is a positive impact on teaching and learning.

The needs of schools may vary, creating a need for differing types of leadership in different contexts, but the importance of a safe and positive learning environment in all schools remains central to school success. The school leader sets the tone for, nurtures, and sustains such an environment. To do so, the effective school leader must consistently model honesty, credibility, and trustworthiness to inspire the commitment of others. This requires the leader to demonstrate moral purpose, understanding of the change process, strength in relationship building, knowledge sharing, and the ability to provide coherence.

In an era of rapid change, the effective principal recognizes the desirability of involving stakeholders in school decision-making. This represents a paradigm in which the principal is no longer a larger-than-life figure, tackling the challenges of school leadership alone. The prevailing leadership mythology that generally embraces the unitary 'heroic' leadership model is unsustainable, unsupportable, and dangerous to individual and organizational health. Instead, through shared decision making with those in the school community, a culture of mutual responsibility is established that enhances student success. To this end, the effective principal helps create a shared vision and mission, cultivates a culture of trust, focuses on the right work, and develops other leaders within the school to promote sustainability.

### Human Resource Administration: Recruiting, Selecting, Supporting, and Retaining High-Quality Teachers and Staff

A school's success is determined to a great extent by the effectiveness of its teachers: Great Teachers = Great Schools. One important lesson learned from the extant research is that recruitment and selection efforts have to work hand in hand with retention efforts. Schools that aim to make teaching a more attractive profession target recruitment and retention simultaneously, which helps build and sustain a stronger teacher workforce.

We learned that although competitive salaries and financial incentives help, teachers are drawn primarily to schools by other factors, such as by high-quality principals who are good instructional leaders, colleagues who are like minded and committed to the same goals, good teaching conditions, and opportunities to learn and grow as professionals. Schools that nurture core values and a culture aligned with these factors have a better chance of attracting high-quality and committed teachers. And of keeping them!

When done well, successful recruitment improves results in terms of providing a diverse and rich candidate pool. The next focal problem is how to maximize our ability to select the most effective candidates from the applicant pool. Challenges in identifying effective educators during the hiring process become more acute because, historically, we have tended to conduct hiring with instruments and processes that have low validity and reliability. In the absence of structure to ensure that administrators and teams involved in the hiring process and decision share a common vision for teachers they hire, a hiring process becomes a subjective and biased act, resulting in less optimal decisions.

Teacher effectiveness is a multifaceted concept, incorporating all aspects of the teacher, from personality to professional knowledge to technical skills. If we want success in hiring high-quality teacher applicants, it is of supreme importance to identify the qualities that really matter in an educator's effectiveness and purposefully look for those qualities during the hiring process. Schools can find the best employees by making hiring decisions through the lens of "effectiveness" in two areas of research—focusing on what makes an effective teacher (or other employee) and research-guided processes to make the selection process more effective. When the hiring processes delineated in this chapter are applied properly, administrators are in a better position to make

high-quality, evidence-based decisions in the screening and selection processes.

In the final analysis, here is a simple way to think about making the final decision of offering a job to a teacher: If given a choice, would I want my child in this classroom? We should be able to answer 'yes' to this question every time we make a hiring decision!

Retention is another key to maintaining the right mix of rich, diverse, novice, and experienced, effective teachers. Since retirement accounts for only a small proportion of all teacher attrition, stemming the attrition of early and mid-career teachers is essential to reduce turnover and address teacher shortages. Teachers, in general, cite social and economic reasons for leaving schools—for example, low salaries, inadequate housing, a lack of support in the school, a lack of resources, poor facilities, student discipline issues, poor school leadership, a lack of professional development opportunities, not being involved in decision-making, not being recognized and respected as professionals, large class sizes, a lack of parental involvement, and a lack of opportunities for advancement. Schools can turn some of these shortcomings into strengths and, by marketing the strengths well, the schools will be more attractive to applicants. Thus, the reasons why teachers leave can be leveraged to attract new hires.

We need a comprehensive and strategic approach to make teaching a rewarding profession. A holistic approach should include competitive pay and better principal leadership and administrative support, high-quality induction and mentoring programs, more parental involvement, increased teacher recognition and autonomy, more opportunities for leadership roles, better classroom resources, opportunities for collaboration, and stronger school cultures where teachers can grow and advance as professionals. If we insist on high-quality learning for our students, teachers' pay and working conditions would have to rise, and rise significantly, so that the smartest and brightest will select and stay in the teaching profession.

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### Teacher Evaluation: Assessing Instructional Quality

Program and personnel evaluations are some of the most powerful tools for school improvement and effectiveness that principals have at their fingertips. Strategic plans, mission statements, and school improvement plans are important

documents for defining current priorities and future goals, but they are not sufficient. High-quality people are needed to implement those plans and programs, make improvements, and work toward fulfilling the school's mission. No school or program is better than the people who deliver its services. Both programs and the people responsible for implementing them must be assessed on a regular basis to maintain and improve performance. Evaluation, therefore, is an essential activity for the principal of a successful school.

A high-quality teacher evaluation system improves the quality of instruction by, first and foremost, supporting teacher growth and success and, second, by ensuring accountability for classroom performance and teacher effectiveness. However, accountability is not enough. A meaningful evaluation empowers both teachers and leaders to recognize, appreciate, value, and develop excellent teaching and, ultimately, to optimize student learning and growth.

Too frequently, the key human resource functions are misaligned: One department is responsible for teacher recruitment, overseeing interviews and data review for recommending hiring decisions; another department directs the professional development program for teachers; and, finally, principals in the building are responsible for teacher evaluation.

To exacerbate the misalignment of the recruitment-selection-development connection, the teacher can be hired based on one set of criteria and evaluated later using a totally different set of performance standards than those used for the hiring decision. This human capital management process is disjointed, confusing, wasteful, and, ultimately, ineffective. However, if the standards we hire for are the same standards we develop for and evaluate for, then all human resource functions—recruitment, selection, induction, development, evaluation, and support—are properly aligned. It is important to understand that alignment increases the possibility of hiring, developing, evaluating, supporting, and keeping the best teachers possible.

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### Organizational Management: Building a Foundation for Teaching and Learning

Organizational management is a crucial role for principals. After all, schools must first and foremost be safe and positive places for students and staff. That is an important antecedent of academic achievement and the foundation of effective schools. Effective management is a necessary

component in high-quality schools, and principals with strong managerial skills are more likely to create a culture of continuous instructional improvement.

In the past quarter-century, the responsibilities of school administrators have changed dramatically, from building manager to instructional leader—and more. Although the expectations have shifted to encompass the leadership role, the managerial tasks required of school leaders have not diminished—and may also affect student learning. Today's principalship requires a dynamic combination of management, leadership, technical, and interpersonal skills. Effective principals foster high-quality teaching and learning through supporting, managing, and overseeing the school's organization, operation, and use of resources. Effective school leaders are master diagnosticians, facilitators, and collaborators who work with those in the school community to obtain resources, monitor progress, and continually improve teaching and learning.

The principal's role is evolving rapidly, requiring skills that may bear little resemblance to those learned in school leadership preparation programs. It is a job that is never finished, requiring lifelong learning, the ability to manage continual change, and tolerance of ambiguity. More than ever, it is evident that one person cannot do it all: Effective principals must share the many responsibilities of the role with those in the school community.

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### Communication and Community Relations: Working with Internal and External Constituencies

Schools are never an island unto themselves; rather, they exist within dynamic, changing social systems. Thus, it is essential that schools function internally and externally with an understanding that their functions and communication will interact with and affect the entire school community. Additionally, to adapt to constant and increasing global change, it is essential to involve stakeholders to make necessary improvements. Strong community relations involve purposeful, schoolwide efforts, but staff members' personal relationships with colleagues, students, parents, and the larger community are also a critical part of the principal's job.

Unfortunately, the importance of effective communication can be taken for granted or even neglected. When a breakdown in communication occurs with any constituency, it is always to the detriment of the school and its students. Thus, it

is critical for principals to communicate effectively with both internal and external constituents. The world outside schools is changing rapidly; consequently, it takes positive, effective, and ongoing communication to meet the challenges associated with preparing students to enter this changing world.

### Professionalism and the Principal: Making a Difference in the Educational Community

How should principals balance the competing demands for their time and attention? In brief, the answer is consistent with professional standards and ethical behavior. How principals do their work is vitally important; results count, but so does the manner in which principals carry out their duties in this complex, demanding, and even occasionally overwhelming job. To be successful, principals must understand that they are the public image of their schools and, as such, are role models to their students, staff, and community. Thus, professionalism is paramount in the principalship.

### The Ultimate Challenge: The Principal's Role in Student Achievement

So, why does the enterprise of schooling exist? And why do we have school principals, assistant principals, teachers, counselors, and other important staff members? The answer, most simply, is the students. Our mission—from

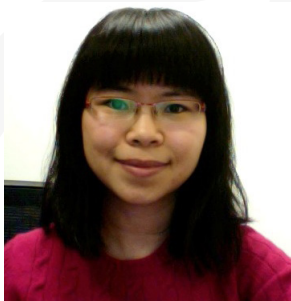
beginning to end—is about students. If this claim is true, then it is imperative that the principal makes a difference in the quality of teaching and learning in the school and, ultimately, in the quality of students' lives.

In the final analysis, does it matter whether effective principals influence student achievement directly or indirectly, as long as they have a positive effect on student learning? The important point, for both research and practice, is to understand the ways and means by which principals influence their schools and their educational programs. Without effective principals, we cannot possibly have effective schools. For effective principals, all the funds they receive and spend, all the resources they allocate, every employee they hire—indeed, everything they do—is about the students.

Examining school leadership can be a soul-searching process. Schools are about improving the lives of young people. Until students succeed, we don't succeed. If our students can't read; aren't adept with science, technology, engineering, and math; don't have an appreciation of the arts; and lack an appreciation of who they are, how can they continue to develop and participate in a democratic society? School reform, high-quality schools, and student success start with the principal. No effective principals, no effective schools. It's that simple.



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