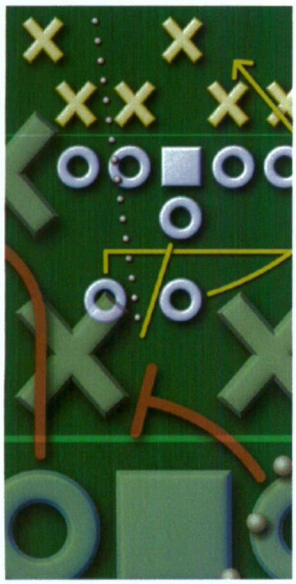


Thinkstock

New Thinking About Instructional Leadership

BY EILEEN HORNG AND SUSANNA LOEB

Schools that improve student achievement are more likely to have principals who are strong organizational managers than are schools with principals who spend more of their time observing classrooms or directly coaching teachers.

School leaders matter for school success. Numerous studies spanning the past three decades link high-quality leadership with positive school outcomes. Recognition of the importance of school leadership has led to increased attention to recruiting and preparing school leaders. Many new principal preparation and development programs emphasize the role of principals as "instructional leaders." This emphasis on instructional leadership was driven in large part by the effective schools movement of the 1970s and 1980s and has since been renewed because of increasing demands that school leaders be held accountable for student performance (Hallinger 2005). However, while broad agreement exists on the importance of instructional leadership, there is less consensus on what instructional leadership actually is. Some construe instructional leadership as synonymous with classroom observations and direct teaching of students and teachers. Informed by observations and interviews in hundreds of schools, we call for a different view of instructional leadership, one that includes broader personnel practices and resource allocation practices as central to instructional improvement.

Traditional Ideas

The traditional instructional leadership literature emphasizes teaching and learning aspects of school leadership. This research generally concludes that a strong, directive principal, focused on curriculum and instruction, is essential for effective schools. Writers in this tradition have characterized successful instructional leaders as "hands-on" leaders, engaged with curriculum and instruction issues, unafraid to work directly with teachers, and often present in classrooms.

Out of this literature has arisen a prototype of ideal instructional leaders — outstanding teachers, inspired to use their exceptional teaching skills to impact student learning. Leaders could mentor their teaching staff by observing practice, providing pointed feedback, and modeling instruction when necessary. Although this is an appealing portrait of the ideal, this model is actually poorly suited to the reality of many of today's schools. That reality includes large high schools serving some 3,000 students with courses ranging from Advanced Placement Calculus to service learning. No matter how extensive the teaching background of a school leader, could anyone have the content knowledge and relevant experience to coach one beginning teacher in how to engage students in British poetry of World War I and another on how to differentiate instruction in general chemistry? Even if school leaders have the requisite expertise, imagine them finding the time to regularly observe 250 teachers or provide extensive hands-on mentoring on curriculum and instruction.

Different Ideas

A different view of instructional leadership emphasizes organizational management for instructional improvement rather than day-to-day teaching and learning. On its face, this reconceptualization may appear to underestimate the importance of classroom instruction. After all, isn't day-to-day teaching and learning at the heart of good classroom instruction? Of course, it is. However, the quality of teaching in a school, in many cases, can be affected only marginally by a principal's involvement in the classroom. School leaders can have a tremendous effect on student learning through the teachers they hire, how they assign those

R&D appears in each issue of *Kappan* with the assistance of the **Deans' Alliance**, which is composed of the deans of the education schools/colleges at the following universities: Harvard University, Michigan State University, Northwestern University, Stanford University, Teachers College Columbia University, University of California Berkeley, University of California Los Angeles, University of Michigan, University of Pennsylvania, and University of Wisconsin.

EILEEN HORNG is associate director of the Institute for Research on Education Policy and Practice (IREPP) at Stanford University, Stanford, Calif. **SUSANNA LOEB** is a professor of education at Stanford University and director of IREPP.

teachers to classrooms, how they retain teachers, and how they create opportunities for teachers to improve. Organizational management for instructional improvement means staffing a school with high-quality teachers and providing them the appropriate supports and resources to be successful in the classroom.

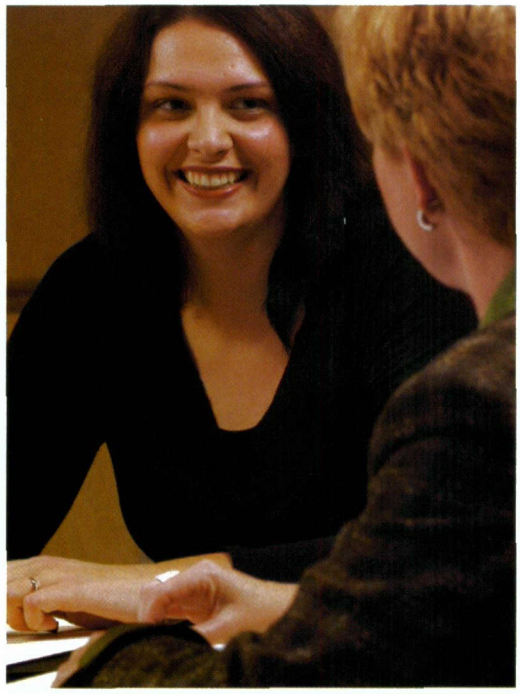
A recently released six-year study of school leadership commissioned by the Wallace Foundation concludes that school leaders primarily affect student learning by influencing teachers' motivations and working conditions. By comparison, a leader's influence on teachers' knowledge and skills has far less effect on student learning. Thus, the authors caution against conceptions of instructional leadership with a narrow focus on classroom instruction (Louis et al. 2010).

Our research at Stanford University has reached similar conclusions. We have examined school leadership in great depth in three large urban school districts: one on the East Coast, another on the West Coast, and a third in the Midwest. In these districts, we surveyed more than 800 principals, 1,100 assistant principals, and 32,000 teachers and did more than 250 full-day observations and comprehensive interviews of principals. Despite the differing contexts and district policies represented by these three districts, we consistently find that schools demonstrating growth in student achievement are more likely to have principals who are strong organizational managers. These principals do not fit the conventional definition of instructional leaders, but they do fit the new, expanded definition of instructional leadership that includes organizational management.

Organizational Management

What does it mean to be a strong organizational manager? Strong managers develop the organizational structures for improved instruction more than they spend time in classrooms or coach teachers. Strong organizational managers are effective in hiring and supporting staff, allocating budgets and resources, and maintaining positive working and learning environments. Schools that demonstrate academic improvement are more likely to have effective organizational managers. In one of our studies, we examine principals' self-reports of their efficacy on 42 separate school leadership tasks. The efficacy of a principal's organizational management skills consistently predict student achievement growth. Furthermore, evaluations of principals by their assistant principals confirm this finding (Grissom and Loeb 2009).

In another study, we use observations of how principals use time rather than reports of their efficacy. Our findings remain consistent. We shadowed principals for full school days, recording how they spent their time in five-minute intervals. We find that when principals spend more time on organizational management activities, school outcomes are better, including student test-score gains and positive teacher and parent assessments of the school's instructional climate. In contrast, time spent on day-to-day instructional activities — such as classroom observations — are marginally or not at all related to improvements in student performance. In fact, time spent on day-to-day instructional activities is often negatively related to teacher and parent assessments. Unfortunately, we also find that, on average, only one-fifth of the principals' time is dedicated to organizational management activities. In comparison, almost a third of their time is spent on administrative tasks — such as managing student discipline and fulfilling compliance pa-



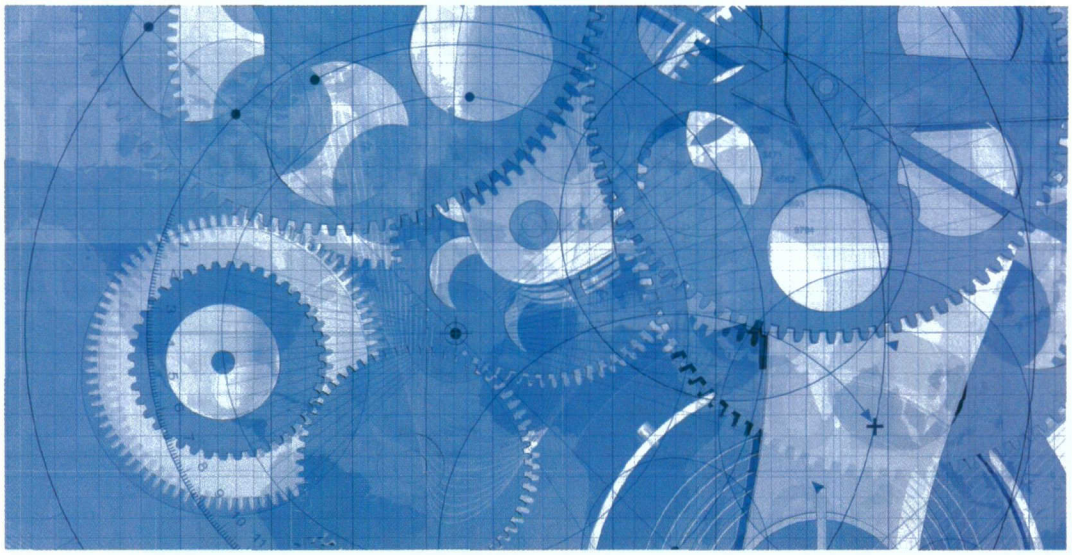
Effective organizational managers strategically hire, support, and retain good teachers while developing or removing less effective ones.

Strategic principals do not have a one-size-fits-all approach.

perwork — that do not appear to be related to improved school outcomes (Horng, Klasik, and Loeb 2010).

In two other studies, we find that managing personnel is one of the most important responsibilities of strong organizational managers. Effective organizational managers strategically hire, support, and retain good teachers while developing or removing less effective ones. In one study, we use value-added methods to examine the relationship between the effectiveness of a school and the recruitment, retention, and development of its teachers. We find that effective schools are able to retain higher-quality teachers and remove lower-quality ones. In addition, when teacher vacancies do arise, these effective schools are better able to attract and hire higher-quality teachers. We also find that teachers who work in more effective schools improve more rapidly than do those in less effective ones. School leaders' organizational management practices — particularly, in the area of personnel management — appear to play a critical role in improving schools (Beteille, Kalogrides, and Loeb 2009).

Schools demonstrating growth in student achievement are more likely to have principals who are strong organizational managers.



Thinkstock/Hemera

In another study, we find that these personnel management practices are particularly successful when applied strategically (Balu, Horng, and Loeb 2010). This happens when efforts to recruit, support, retain, develop, and remove teachers are clearly targeted. For example, a principal we interviewed explains how he targets retention efforts on exceptional teachers:

> There are some teachers that I have for leadership roles that don't exist in the regular [district] guidelines, like department chairs or other roles. And that's something that we've been able to use to keep teachers on staff who might be going somewhere else.

Other principals in our study described how effective organizational leaders strategically use professional development as a way to reward and retain effective teachers. For example, one principal reserves funding for her most effective teachers to take advantage of professional development opportunities that allow them to fulfill more ambitious teaching goals. Interestingly, many of these principals also illustrate how they strategically use professional development with poorly performing teachers. In some cases, they use professional development as coaching to help low-performing teachers improve, and in other cases, they use it as punishment to encourage low-performing teachers to transfer elsewhere. As an example of the former, one principal creates school-level professional development sessions focused on specific areas where some of his teachers need improvement. As an example of the latter, another principal describes how she encourages a poorly performing teacher to leave:

> I started documenting her from the first week of school, and I've had meeting upon meeting with her. I made her do a lesson — I don't make anybody [else] here do a daily lesson or a weekly lesson. I've been in her classroom. It's a one-year thing, and she's not coming back.

When strategic organizational managers have poorly performing teachers, they make an effort to understand why individual teachers

aren't performing satisfactorily and target teacher development (or removal) efforts accordingly. One principal whom we observed and interviewed describes two poorly performing teachers at her school: "One teacher puts in a lot of hours, but she's just not getting the results. The other person just doesn't work very hard." She later explains that she has referred the hardworking but ineffective teacher to the district's peer assistance and coaching program, whereas she directly monitors the other teacher to motivate him to work harder. Strategic principals do not have a one-size-fits-all approach to supporting teachers.

Two other studies contrast the traditional view of instructional leadership focused on curriculum and instruction with our broader view of instructional leadership focused on organizational management. In the first study, we compare principals who spend more time doing informal classroom observations with those who spend less time doing so. We find no evidence that the frequency or duration of principals' classroom walkthroughs relates to the instructional climate of the school or student achievement (Ing 2008). In the second study, we examine the role of principals in supporting teachers by creating collaborative work environments. Here we find that teachers led by effective organizational managers are more likely to turn to school leaders and other teachers for resources or advice on how to improve their teaching practice. This use of school resources for instructional improvement is particularly the case for novice teachers. Conversely, principals who are poor organizational managers are more likely to have teachers who look outside the school for support (Horng, Loeb, and Mindich 2010). Strong organizational managers consequently are able to support classroom instruction without providing that support directly to individual teachers. Instead, they develop a working environment in which teachers have access to the support they need.

Implications for Policy, Practice

Strong instructional leadership is essential for a school to be successful. However, defined narrowly only in terms of curriculum and classroom instruction, instructional leadership is unlikely to result in increased student learning or other desirable outcomes. Our studies have found that growth in valued school outcomes comes more from organizational management for instructional improvement than it does from principals' time observing classrooms or directly coaching teachers. School leaders influence classroom teaching, and consequently student learning, by staffing schools with highly effective teachers and supporting those teachers with effective teaching and learning environments, rather than by focusing too narrowly on their own contributions to classroom instruction.

Time spent on day-to-day instructional activities is often negatively related to teacher and parent assessments.

REFERENCES

Balu, Rekha, Eileen L. Horng, and Susanna Loeb. "Strategic Personnel Management: How School Principals Recruit, Retain, Develop and Remove Teachers." School Leadership Research, Working Paper 10-6. Stanford, Calif.: Institute for Research on Education Policy and Practice, 2010.

Béteille, Tara, Demetra Kalogrides, and Susanna Loeb. "Effective Schools: Managing the Recruitment, Development, and Retention of High-Quality Teachers." National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research (CALDER), Working Paper 37. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, 2009.

Grissom, Jason, and Susanna Loeb. "Triangulating Principal Effectiveness: How Perspectives of Parents, Teachers, and Assistant Principals Identify the Central Importance of Managerial Skills." National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research (CALDER), Working Paper 35. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, 2009.

Hallinger, Phillip. "Instructional Leadership and the School Principal: A Passing Fancy That Refuses to Fade Away." *Leadership and Policy in Schools* 4, no. 3 (2005): 1-20.

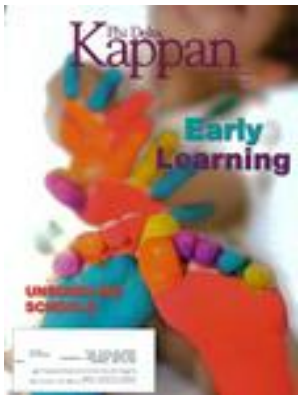
Horng, Eileen L., Daniel Klasik, and Susanna Loeb. "Principal Time-Use and School Effectiveness." *American Journal of Education* 116, no. 4 (2010): 492-523.

Horng, Eileen L., Susanna Loeb, and Dan Mindich. "Teachers' Support-Seeking Behaviors and How They Are Influenced by School Leadership." School Leadership Research, Working Paper 10-5. Stanford, Calif.: Institute for Research on Education Policy and Practice, 2010.

Ing, Marsha. "Using Informal Classroom Observations to Improve Instruction: Describing Variability Across Schools." School Leadership Research, Working Paper 08-1. Stanford, Calif.: Institute for Research on Education Policy and Practice, 2008.

Louis, Karen S., Kenneth Leithwood, Kyla L. Wahlstrom, and Stephen E. Anderson. "Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning." Final Report to the Wallace Foundation, Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, University of Minnesota and Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, 2010.

COPYRIGHT INFORMATION



Author: Horng, Eileen; Loeb, Susanna

Title: New Thinking About Instructional Leadership

Source: Phi Delta Kappan 92 no3 N 2010 p. 66-9
ISSN: 0031-7217

Publisher: Phi Delta Kappa, Inc.
Eighth & Union, Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402