

Foreword

Educational research in the early 1980s that looked into the issue of what factors contribute to effective schools discovered a fact that many educators had known for many years: Effective schools have effective leaders serving as their principals. A completely new movement was launched by those who suddenly rediscovered that the person “down the hall from the classrooms” was an important person, particularly if he or she devoted most or all of his or her time to supporting good practice by teachers. “Instructional leadership” became the key to all the good that was to happen in schools everywhere, and principals were rediscovered.

A few years after this rediscovery, however, another reality began to appear in schools across the United States. Principals—important ingredients of successful schools—were beginning to retire at an amazingly high rate. Individuals who joined the ranks of teachers in the 1950s and 1960s were leaving schools and leaving the duties of serving as effective leaders to a whole new generation of people who would now move into the offices “just down the hall.” The arrival of new and inexperienced principals became common in schools and districts across the nation.

But in addition to the need for new principals over the past two decades, new expectations for schools were becoming evident. The need to find schools that are more effective became the center of much of the daily dialogue of the political process across the country. Pressures to ensure that all schools would be successful and ensure that “no child” would be “left behind” have become realities to those who take on the challenges of leadership. Not only was there a great need for many new principals, but the new principals faced pressures and stress never experienced by their predecessors. Being a new principal is now more than simply learning how to do a managerial job: it is a daunting challenge to become a principal in a difficult environment.

Fortunately, the dilemma posed by needing new good principals who are able to perform effectively in a professional environment that is increasingly stressful has been recognized as an issue that needs attention. State departments of education, professional associations for school

administrators, and individual school systems have launched numerous efforts to provide support and guidance to novice principals, with the assumption that such formal activities will help beginning principals survive their newly selected career paths in education. However, many of these efforts have been short lived, often because they were designed primarily to simply *appear* supportive of new principals, or because they were very costly to implement, or perhaps most inappropriately, because they became programs with a focus on *evaluating* and not necessarily *helping* principals.

By contrast, one program designed to assist newly appointed principals not only survive their first years, but also to thrive as instructional leaders, has been operating without a great deal of visibility or fanfare for more than a decade. It began with a simple observation by a retired principal who devoted the majority of his career in education as a dedicated leader and who never lost his enthusiasm for and love of the principalship. Carl Weingartner, author of this book, frequently witnessed the difficulties of his colleagues as they first stepped in to the principal's office. He believed that having more experienced principals around to answer questions, to serve as cheerleaders, and to anticipate and interpret political potholes would be a way to make the principalship more doable, with leaders who could devote more of their time to increasing the learning opportunities for students in their schools.

That was the beginning of the Extra Support for Principals (ESP) mentoring program, a truly exemplary model of how a single urban school district—the Albuquerque Public Schools, in New Mexico—has been able to keep the focus on the importance of helping principals achieve success in performing what daily becomes a more complex and stressful job. The underlying assumption of this effort that has guided the ESP mentoring program for more than a dozen years has been the motto, “Keep it safe, simple, and supportive.” I believe the Albuquerque model has been able to survive because it has avoided the traps that other efforts have fallen into in creating programs to help new principals. It is not terribly costly, the operation of the program is not tied to pages filled with regulations and policies, and, above all, it holds true to one simple principle: experienced principals are the best source for providing true and meaningful support to new principals.

This book will provide you with detail about the design of a mentoring program that has served the needs of beginning principals in a large school system for several years. I believe that what Carl Weingartner describes can readily be adapted to support principals in very small districts, mid-size suburban districts, and even megadistricts. As a testimonial to that belief, I have been privileged to work with Carl and

serve as a member of a consulting team that has been engaged in trying to fine-tune a program of mentoring and coaching for new principals in the Chicago Public Schools, the third-largest school district in the United States, for the past three years.

Safety, simplicity, and security remain the key ingredients of any mentoring program. Above all, though, as you read this work you will also quickly understand what additional “magic” ingredients must be present. Respect for colleagues and love of the principalship gave rise to Carl’s work in developing the mentoring program; these same values will guide you in working through the suggestions offered to guide your efforts.

Principals are important people, and their job becomes more difficult each year. We are blessed to have resources such as this book and its author to make the job a more effective and satisfying place for great educators. I wish you success in your safe, simple, and secure efforts to create an environment that will help principals help children.

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