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Effective Schools

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July 2004

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Introduction

Why do some public schools that educate students from disadvantaged backgrounds make a difference while others fail? A group of school effectiveness researchers have demonstrated that public schools can make a difference—even if their student body is comprised of students whose families have disadvantaged backgrounds. They have discovered that the successful schools have unique characteristics and processes, which, help all children learn at high levels.

Correlates of Effective School

Seven Correlates:

- Clear School Mission
- High Expectations for Success
- Instructional Leadership
- Opportunity to Learn and Time on Task
- Safe and Orderly Environment
- Positive Home-School Relations
- Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress

Unique characteristics of the majority of effective schools are correlated with student success. Because of this, these characteristics are called *correlates* by researchers (Lezotte 1991).

The correlates are the means to achieving high and equitable levels of student learning. It is expected that all children (whether they be male or female, rich or poor, black or white) will learn at least the essential knowledge, concepts and skills needed so that they can be successful at the next level next year. Further, it has been found that when school improvement processes based upon the effective schools research are implemented, the proportions of students that achieve academic excellence either improves, or at the very least, remains the same. (Association of Effective Schools, 1996)

The seven common correlates include: Clear school mission, high expectations for success, instructional leadership, opportunity to learn and time on task, safe and orderly environment, positive home-school relations, and frequent monitoring of student progress.

A Clear School Mission

Lezotte (1991) proposed that in effective schools "there is a clearly articulated school mission through which the staff shares an understanding of and commitment to instructional goals, priorities, assessment procedures, and accountability" (p. 6). Early on, this characteristic translated into a focus on the teachers, and how they needed to be able to teach all children both lower-level academic skills and higher-level cognitive abilities.

Haberman (2003) puts the onus on the principal to create a clear school mission. The principal should be a leader. To be effective in this role a principal should: "create a common vision, build effective terms to implement that vision, and engender commitment to task—the persistent hard work needed to engender learning" (p. 2). However, for teachers to be an integral part of the change process, they need to do more than blindly accept a principal's vision. "Too often schools are organized as administrative hierarchies rather than as groups of professionals working toward shared goals" (Cibulka and Nakayama, 2000, p. 4). Teachers should be partners with the principal in creating that vision (Cibulka and Nakayama, 2000), or they may even be the sole creators of the vision (Goodman, 1997).

By including teachers in the change process, a school is more likely to keep good teachers despite the traditionally high turnover rate among teachers early in their careers (Darling, 1997; Dunne and Delisio, 2001). Creating an atmosphere in which teachers are considered professionals and have opportunities to continue their professional development, both within and without the school they teach in, leads teachers towards excellence. This atmosphere, in turn, will help them lead the children to excellence.

High Expectations for Success

> In the effective school, there is a climate of high expectations in which the staff believes and demonstrates that all students can obtain mastery of the school's essential curriculum. They also believe that they, the staff, have the capability to help all students obtain that mastery (Lezotte, 2001, p. 7).

The effective school movement emphasizes teacher excellence, collaboration, and mentoring so that schools become "places where every educator is recognized as a valuable contributor with unique strengths and impressive potential to learn, grow, and improve" (Johnson, 1997, p. 2). The same approach is true for students.

> In high performing schools, students are given challenging curricula and demanding tasks, and they are expected to succeed. High performing schools regard every child as an asset. Moreover, each child is considered to possess a unique gift to offer to society (Bauer, 1997, p. 2).

Instructional Leadership

Schools need effective leaders to communicate the school's mission and vision. By persistently reinforcing the school's mission, the principal creates a shared sense of purpose and establishes a set of common core values among the instructional staff. Having common core values and a shared sense of purpose helps guide all members of the instructional team and avoids individuals straying from the intended goals.

> In the effective school, the principal acts as an instructional leader and effectively and continually communicates the mission of the school to staff, parents, and students. In addition, the principal understands and applies the characteristics of instructional effectiveness in the management of the instructional program. Clearly, the role of the principal as the articulator of the mission of the school is crucial to the overall effectiveness of the school (Lezotte, 2001, p. 5).

The principal is not the sole leader; he or she is a "leader of leaders" (Lezotte, 1991, p. 3) empowering teachers and including them in decisions about the school's instructional goals. "In order to achieve significant changes in classroom practice, teachers must have an opportunity to participate in shaping a school's vision…" (Cibulka and Nakayama, 2000, pp. 5–6). Teachers work together with the principal to ensure that expectations for student achievement are understood across classrooms and across grade levels (School Redesign Network).

Critical Elements:

- **Effective administrative leadership**
- **Positive expectations**
- **Strong, integrated curriculum**
- **Shared decision making**
- **Campus wide responsibility for teaching and success**

Johnson (1997) suggests certain "critical elements" need to be in place for a school's leadership to be effective—to create an environment where "properly supported, students can learn and teachers can teach" (p. 3). He lists these elements as: *effective administrative leadership; positive expectations; strong, integrated curriculum; shared decision making*; and *campus wide responsibility for teaching and success* (pp. 3–4). These elements include the ideas that principals need to create a professional environment in which teachers can thrive in and contribute to the overall school goals and environment. The school's curriculum should not be ever changing but rather a steady element in a long-term goal of helping students gain the knowledge they will need to succeed in school and life.

Opportunity to Learn and Student Time on Task

Knowing what to teach and providing adequate time to teach are essential for effective instruction. Teachers and administrators must balance issues of increasing curricular demands with limited instructional time.

> In the effective school, teachers allocate a significant amount of classroom time to instruction in the essential curricular areas. For a high percentage of this time, students are actively engaged in whole-class or large group, teacher-directed, planned learning activity (Lezotte, 2001, p. 9).

Lezotte (1991) suggests creating an "interdisciplinary curriculum" to teach the necessary skills in the least amount of time, making decisions about what is most important and letting go of the rest—what he calls "organized abandonment" (p. 4).

A Safe and Orderly Environment

In effective schools, "there is an orderly, purposeful, business-like atmosphere, which is free from the threat of physical harm. The school climate is not oppressive and is conducive to teaching and learning" (Lezotte, 2001, p. 6). Lezotte (1991) also spoke of schools not only needing to eliminate "undesirable behavior" but of teaching students the necessary behaviors to make the school "safe and orderly" (p. 1). Desirable behaviors would include "cooperative team learning," "respect [for] human diversity," and an appreciation of "democratic values" (pp. 1–2). Teachers must also model these desirable behaviors.

Positive Home-School Relations

In effective schools, "parents understand and support the basic mission of the school and are given opportunities to play important roles in helping the school to achieve its mission" (Lezotte, 2001, p. 8). However, because so many ineffective schools are located in low socioeconomic areas, many of the parents of the children attending these schools may not be able to support their children fully in their academic activities (Goodman, 1997; Johnson, 1997).

A good deal of the effective schools literature has focused on the need for schools to serve and educate not only the child but the entire family (Goodman, 1997; Johnson, 1997) and to include parents as a valued member of the school family (Revilla and Sweeney, 1997). Schools develop programs for parents in the evenings and on the weekends, the idea being that if the children see their parents valuing education, they will also value it. When this happens, "the kids settle down and get serious about learning, and then they achieve positive results" (Goodman, 1997, p. 6). The attitude is for schools to do whatever they have to in order to get the parents involved and strengthen the parent-child-school relationship. Parents "should be treated as respected partners who bring important perspectives and often the untapped potential to grow in their capacity to support their children's education" (Johnson, 1997, p. 2).

Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress

"In the effective school, pupil progress over the essential objectives are measured frequently, monitored frequently, and the results of those assessments are used to improve the individual student behaviors and performances, as well as to improve the curriculum as a whole" (Lezotte, 2001, p. 8).

In his paper, *Correlates of Effective Schools: The First and Second Generation*, Lezotte (1991) cites that after what he terms the "first generation" of frequent monitoring of student progress is accomplished, schools will need to advance into a "second generation" of frequent monitoring of student progress. During the second generation, "the use of technology will permit teachers to do a better job of monitoring their students' progress. …[T]his same technology will allow students to monitor their own learning and, where necessary, adjust their own behavior. The use of computerized practice tests, the ability to get immediate results on homework, and the ability to see correct solutions developed on the screen are a few of the available tools for assuring student learning" (Lezotte, 1991, p. 5).

Lezotte (1991) goes on to say that "in the area of assessment the emphasis will continue to shift away from standardized norm-referenced paper-pencil tests and toward curricular-based, criterion-referenced measures of student mastery. In the second generation [of frequent monitoring of student progress], the monitoring of student learning will emphasize 'more authentic assessments' of curriculum mastery" (p. 5). Lezotte explains that "this generally means that there will be less emphasis on the paper-pencil, multiple-choice tests, and more emphasis on assessments of products of student work, including performances and portfolios" (p. 5).

"Two new questions are being stimulated by the reform movement and will dominate much of the professional educators' discourse in the second generation: 'What's worth knowing?' and 'How will we know when they [the students] know it?'" (Lezotte, 1991, p. 5).

How Will We Know When They Know It?

"How will we know when they know it?" Pearson Inc. (Pearson) is answering that question with the development of Stanford Learning First™. Stanford Learning First™ will address the use of technology presented in Lezotte's second generation of frequent monitoring by the creation of web-based computer assessment. Stanford Learning First™ will offer the opportunity for students to engage in interim and benchmark assessment in a computer-based environment.

The interim assessments will provide a periodic tool to highlight learning opportunities and suggested corrective actions. The feedback from interim assessments will not only tell the student and the teacher which responses were correct and which were incorrect, but will also provide specific indicators of categorical misconceptions and strategy errors. These indicators are based on incorrect responses that can guide the selection and implementation of appropriate and effective intervention strategies. Through the use of innovative item design, students and teachers will be able to know more about the root causes of students' misunderstanding of a learning objective. With this information the teacher will be able to adjust instruction to meet the students' learning needs more effectively.

The benchmark assessments will serve as an indicator of the students' overall performance and knowledge base for the entire school year as well as likely performance on accountability assessments. With the benchmark assessments, teachers and administrators will be able to identify those students in need of additional instruction or instructional intervention.

Setting a common measurement of expectations ensures that all children are learning what's worth knowing and will not miss an opportunity to learn. By using criterion-referenced measures of student mastery, Stanford Learning First™ will clearly measure learning goals defined by states and school districts.

Conclusion

During a time of increasing accountability, budget shortfalls, low and unfunded mandates, and high expectations, effective schools are becoming an important part of the educational landscape. The implementation of effective schools correlates will have great impact on the human capital of schools and society. Education centers will be able to teach students, regardless of their backgrounds; connect with the families of all students; and improve the working environment and professional status of kindergarten through grade 12 teachers and administrators. In the era of reform, effective schools are a viable path to recognizing, reaching, teaching, and assessing each child. Effective schools will create a generation that not only has proven their ability to attend class, but has also proven their proficiency of knowledge and skills essential for success. Pearson's Learning First™ can support the transformation to an effective school by providing the assessment needed to guide students' learning and the assurance that students are performing to the highest level of expectation.

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