

researchsnapshot

The Impact of Leadership on Student Outcomes: An Analysis of the Differential Effects of Leadership Types



Source of Research: Robinson, V., Lloyd, C., & Rowe, K. (2008). *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 44(5), 635-674.

What is this research about?

The researchers examined the impact of different types of leadership practices on students' academic and non-academic outcomes based on the premise that leaders' impact on student outcomes will depend on the particular leadership practices in which they engage.

What did the researchers do?

The researchers conducted a meta-analysis from studies that examined the relationship between leadership and student outcomes, comparing the effects of five leadership practices on student outcomes. These practices included: establishing goals and expectations; resourcing strategically; planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum; promoting and participating in teacher learning and development; and ensuring an orderly and supportive environment. The studies examined were peer-reviewed and conducted between 1978 and 2006 in elementary and secondary schools, mostly in the United States and Canada.

What did the researchers find?

This meta-analysis showed that there were “substantial differences between the leadership of otherwise similar high- and low-performing schools, and that those differences matter for student academic outcomes” (p. 657). In the high performing schools, teachers reported that leaders were a) more focused on teaching and learning, b) stronger instructional resources for teachers, and c) more active participants in and leaders of teacher learning and development. When leaders promoted and participated in teacher learning it involved more than just supporting or sponsoring other staff in their learning. The leader was a participant in the learning as leader, learner, or both. Contexts for such learning were both formal (staff meetings and professional development) and informal (discussions about specific teaching problems).

As far as the other four dimensions were concerned, researchers found:

- ⇒ Establishing goals and expectations had indirect effects on students by focusing and coordinating the work of teachers and, in some cases, parents. In addition, evidence suggested that the degree of staff consensus about school goals was a significant discriminator between otherwise similar high- and low-performing schools.
- ⇒ There was evidence to support that principals influenced student achievement through their decisions about staffing and teaching resources.
- ⇒ Leaders in higher performing schools were distinguished from their counterparts in otherwise similar lower performing schools by their personal involvement in planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and teachers.
- ⇒ Findings also suggested that the leadership of effective schools was distinguished by the principals' emphasis on and success in establishing a safe and supportive environment through clear and consistently enforced social expectations and discipline codes.

What you need to know...

The leadership dimension that was most strongly associated with positive student outcomes was that of **promoting and participating in teacher learning and development**. The leaders' involvement in teacher learning provided them with a “deep understanding of the conditions required to enable staff to make and sustain the changes required for improved outcomes” (p.667). The authors cautioned, however, that this type of leadership support could be counterproductive if done without reference to evidence about particular qualities and processes of professional learning that are more likely to produce effects on the students of participating teachers.

In what ways do you create the conditions to enable staff to make and sustain the changes required for improved outcomes?