



From Teacher to Administrator: What Does It Take?

Becoming an educator is one of the most rewarding and challenging experiences for those called to the profession. Teachers and administrators may serve for up to 30 years, and during that time elementary school teachers may instruct 600 or more students. There is no other profession that has this kind of an impact on the lives of children and their families.

As a coordinator of a teacher preparation program, students often stop by my office to inquire about our program. Some of them are interested in becoming elementary school principals. However, they have not yet realized the importance of “earning your stripes” before moving into a leadership position. Many of them assume that it is possible to begin preparation for an administrative position upon completion of a bachelor’s degree or a teaching credential, and think nothing of omitting teaching experience. What they do not realize is that principals have complex and challenging jobs, and they must be skilled and experienced in numerous areas not covered by their training.

Good Teaching: The Key to Success

I invite these students into my office

“Only after successful experience in classroom instruction should teachers consider becoming principals.”

to share with them my teaching and administrative experiences, and explain how they led to my success as an educational leader. I tell them that good teaching is at the center of successful schools, and that the practices and beliefs of principals related to instruction determine their success as instructional leaders. How principals acquire

the skills they need to become accomplished leaders is dependent on their experiences as teachers.

For example, one of the most important tasks of an elementary school principal is to assure that all students are provided a quality instructional program. A critical component of that task is developing knowledge about instruction and gaining expertise as a classroom teacher. Only after successful experience in classroom instruction should teachers consider becoming principals.

Literacy is at the heart of all instruction, and the types of materials used in the classroom are not as significant as the teacher’s instructional skills. Schools with successful literacy programs have strong involvement by principals whose knowledge about literacy instruction enables them to promote best practices and effective teaching. Good teachers believe they can teach any child. Poor teachers do not have the skills or the belief that all children can learn. That is why it is essential that principals recognize effective and ineffective reading and writing instruction, and are able to communicate this knowledge to teachers. Principals also must have the ability to support, mentor, coach, and instruct teachers to improve their competencies. Excelling as a classroom teacher is the essential first step in acquiring this ability.

Understanding Teaching

Principals also play a crucial role in school improvement, and it is difficult

HERE’S YOUR CHANCE TO SPEAK OUT

The author believes that aspiring principals should “earn their stripes” as successful teachers before becoming school administrators, and that extensive teaching experience is a requisite for effective instructional leadership. Do you agree? How many years of teaching do you feel are appropriate?

Let your colleagues know what you think by going to the Principals’ Office blog at <http://naesp.typepad.com> and clicking on “Speaking Out.”

When your textbook isn't enough...



CUSTOMIZED MATH AND SCIENCE WORKSHOPS

Effective hands-on teaching can help your teachers dramatically improve student understanding and retention.



"I send my staff to **AIMS workshops** whenever possible. They use the activities in their classroom."

- Don Bidwell
Superintendent
Broadview, MT

Teachers learn strategies and techniques firsthand.

**IN OVER 600 WORKSHOPS EACH YEAR,
AIMS CONSISTENTLY RECEIVES EXCELLENT RATINGS FOR**

- ✓ **Classroom Application**
- ✓ **Alignment to Standards**
- ✓ **Reinforcement of Content Knowledge**


Make hands-on teaching work for you—CALL TODAY!

1.888.733.2467
www.aimsedu.org

to develop exemplary academic programs if one has had little experience as a teacher. It is even more challenging to have credibility with teachers if one has not been a successful teacher. Meaningful teacher evaluations are not possible when principals have little knowledge about the instructional process and best practices.

According to Darling-Hammond (1997), developing teaching expertise is essential to improving instruction. If teachers are critical to the school improvement process, principals must be prepared to provide assistance in refining their teaching skills. This assistance may even require principals to go into classrooms to give demonstration lessons. Fullan (2000) believes that extended knowledge about instruction is vital for instructional leadership. Strong instructional leaders notice differences in teacher expertise and how they impact learning.

The work of an elementary school leader requires multiple skills, and knowledge about teaching, instructional leadership, organizational management, and the change process is central to a successful principalship. When my university students ask me about the quickest path to becoming a school principal, I tell them to focus on the teacher preparation program and to do an outstanding job as student teachers. Once they are credentialed, they need to continue to grow and develop expertise about teaching and learning.

Only then should they consider school administration. 

Mary F. Borba, a former principal, is an assistant professor in the Department of Teacher Education at California State University, Stanislaus. Her e-mail address is mborba@csustan.edu.

References

- Darling-Hammond, L. (1997). *The right to learn*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Fullan, M. (2000). Leadership for the twenty-first century: Breaking the bonds of dependency. In *The Jossey-Bass Reader on Educational Leadership* (pp.156-163). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.



Let's fight flu together!

Influenza is a serious and potentially deadly disease

Of 63 children who died of influenza-related causes (for whom vaccination status was known)* during the 2007-2008 season, 58 had not been vaccinated against influenza according to CDC recommendations.¹

* Cases aged >6 months with vaccination status known

The single best way to help prevent influenza is to receive a vaccination²

That is why NAESP is partnering with Flu Busters, a leading provider of on-site vaccinations, and Novartis Vaccines to provide convenient access to influenza vaccinations for students, parents and teachers, and other members of our community.

Introducing the 2009

School-based Influenza Immunization Initiative

The single best way to help prevent influenza is annual vaccination.²

SIGN UP your school to host an
Influenza Immunization Clinic

www.flubusters.net/naesp

References:

1. Influenza Activity—United States and Worldwide, 2007–08 Season. Available at: www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5725a5.htm?cid=mm5725a5_e. Accessed July 2008.

2. Key Facts About Seasonal Influenza. Available at: www.cdc.gov/flu/keyfacts.htm. Accessed July 2008.

