RESEARCH REPORT

Achieving More, Together

Distributed leadership is more complicated than just assigning responsibilities. To be successful, distributed leadership should take “flexible approaches to school organization, management, and operations,” according to a toolkit from New Leaders, “Achieving More, Together: Improving School and Student Outcomes via Distributed Leadership.”

New Leaders identified several benefits of distributed leadership, rating the evidence behind them from “strong” to “promising.”

- **Promotes collaboration (strong).** In schools where leadership is distributed effectively, there is greater collaboration among staff members and more collaborative team problem-solving and decision-making.

- **Fosters teacher leadership (strong).** Distributed leadership increases teachers’ voice in shaping school practices and provides exceptional teachers with opportunities to expand their reach, positively influence instruction, and advance in their careers.

- **Supports instructional improvement (moderate).** In schools where leadership is widely distributed, teachers follow practices that support instructional improvement, such as engaging in candid conversations about change and seeking feedback from instructional leaders.

- **Increases teacher job satisfaction and fosters stronger organizational commitment (promising).** Teachers express greater job satisfaction when they work in schools where leadership is distributed, and they are more willing to make altruistic contributions to the school.

- **Contributes to increased student achievement (promising).** Two studies show that distributing leadership across multiple stakeholders correlates to greater student achievement.

6 Key Elements

The toolkit identifies six common characteristics of effective distributed leadership models:

1. **An effective principal.** This is an individual with positional and relational authority who is committed to fostering leadership across the school and has the necessary mindset, knowledge, skills, and supports to do so.

2. **Collaborative learning, problem-solving, and decision-making.** School personnel who don’t hold leadership positions help establish a shared understanding of the school’s needs, deliberating on solutions and establishing shared goals.

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MY TWO CENTS

How can assistant principals spend less time on discipline and school management and more time on instructional leadership?

**JOE CLARK (@DROECLARK):** View discipline as a noun, not a verb. It’s not something we do to kids; it’s something we want kids to have. It should be modeled and taught, like any other skill.

**JEROD PHILLIPS (@JAPHILLIPS0722):** If there are discipline issues, spend max time in the rooms where they exist. [Teachers] love [when] you offer this type of support.
3. **Strategic opportunities for engagement.** Creating and supporting leadership teams, PLCs, councils, and other structures for teachers, students, parents, and other community members promotes collaborative learning, problem-solving, decision-making, and capacity-building.

4. **Empowerment.** Staff and community members feel empowered to exercise leadership. Principals encourage and support individuals—especially teacher leaders—to take on new responsibilities and roles.

5. **A culture of trust.** Individuals outside traditional leadership have opportunities to contribute and trust that their input and contributions will be respected and valued.

6. **Capacity-building.** Members of the school community grow their practice and strengthen the school’s capacity for improvement. In successful distributed leadership approaches, principals focus on capacity-building and sustainability.

There’s no one-size-fits-all approach to instructional leadership, but these findings can offer principals a place to start when tailoring an instructional leadership model to their school’s unique needs.

To download the full toolkit and read success vignettes, visit newleaders.org/research-policy/distributed-leadership-toolkit.

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### 5 Steps Toward a Trauma-Skilled School

Every school in the U.S. has students who are trauma-impacted, and every school must be equipped to support them. But it’s not as important for educators to understand the exact trauma as it is for them to understand its influence on behavior and learning.

Schools should focus on being trauma-skilled versus trauma-informed, National Dropout Prevention Center’s report says, listing five things schools need to become more deliberate and proactive when working with trauma-impacted students:

1. **Knowledge:** Establish a foundational body of shared knowledge and develop a vocabulary among staff regarding adverse childhood experiences and their effect on behavior and learning.

2. **Resiliency:** Trauma-impacted youths are likely to be deficient in at least one of five essential resiliency factors—connection, security, achievement, autonomy, and fulfillment. Structure experiences and instruction to help cultivate and reinforce these critical resiliency factors.

3. **Skills:** All personnel must be skilled in four educator strategies—prevention, intervention, recovery, and referral—for success with trauma-impacted students. The goal is to prevent trauma from having a negative impact on learning and behavior, intervene when students fail to learn or behave appropriately, facilitate quick recovery when incidents occur, and refer students to treatment.

4. **Model:** Focus on policies, practices, and people to find out whether your school has had an unintended negative effect on trauma-impacted students or undermined their resilience. Analyze the school’s culture, climate, and procedures to identify and eliminate practices that might be interpreted as threatening by trauma-impacted students.

5. **Plan:** The long-term effectiveness of a trauma-skilled model requires a plan, implementation and maintenance of that plan, an outside review of policies and procedures to ensure that the faculty and staff remain knowledgeable and continue to make progress.

Read the full study at dropoutprevention.org.

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**LAURYN KELLER (@KELLERLAURYN):** Building the capacity of teachers to handle things is the first step in reducing time spent on discipline. The second is committing time to be in classrooms every day.

**MATTHEW MAYER (@MEMAYER21):** I had the least amount of discipline [issues] when I was out of my office. Leaders need to be in classrooms, in the cafeteria, and at recess, building relationships and capacity.