

### Excerpt

*The School Principal as Leader: Guiding Schools to Better Teaching and Learning* (The Wallace Foundation, 2013), 9–10.



A broad and longstanding consensus in leadership theory holds that leaders in all walks of life and all kinds of organizations, public and private, need to depend on others to accomplish the group's purpose and need to encourage the development of leadership across the organization.<sup>1</sup> Schools are no different. Principals who get high marks from teachers for creating a strong climate for instruction in their schools also receive higher marks than other principals for spurring leadership in the faculty, according to the research from the University of Minnesota and University of Toronto.<sup>2</sup>

In fact if test scores are any indication, the more willing principals are to spread leadership around, the better for the students. One of the most striking findings of the universities of Minnesota and Toronto report is that effective leadership from all sources — principals, influential teachers, staff teams and others — is associated with better student performance on math and reading tests.

The relationship is strong albeit indirect: Good leadership, the study suggests, improves both teacher motivation and work settings. This, in turn, can fortify classroom instruction. “Compared with lower-achieving schools, higher-achieving schools provided all stakeholders with greater influence on decisions,” the researchers write.<sup>3</sup> Why the better result? Perhaps this is a case of two heads — or more — being better than one: “The higher performance of these schools might be explained as a consequence of the greater access they have to collective knowledge and wisdom embedded within their communities,” the study concludes.<sup>4</sup>

Principals may be relieved to find out, moreover, that their authority does not wane as others' waxes. Clearly, school leadership is not a zero-sum game. “Principals and district leaders have the most influence on decisions in all schools; however, they do not lose influence as others gain influence,” the authors write.<sup>5</sup> Indeed,

1. See for example, J.W. Gardner, *On Leadership*, The Free Press, 1993; J. Kouzes, J. and B. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge: How to Keep Getting Extraordinary Things Done in Organizations*, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2008; and G. Yukl, *Leadership in Organizations*, Prentice-Hall, 2009.
2. Karen Seashore Louis, Kenneth Leithwood, Kyla L. Wahlstrom and Stephen E. Anderson, *Learning From Leadership: Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning: Final Report of Research Findings*, University of Minnesota and University of Toronto, 2010, 81-82.
3. Seashore Louis, Leithwood, 35.
4. Seashore Louis, Leithwood, 35.
5. Seashore Louis, Leithwood, 19.

although “higher-performing schools awarded greater influence to most stakeholders... little changed in these schools’ overall hierarchical structure.”<sup>6</sup>

University of Washington research on leadership in urban school systems emphasizes the need for a leadership team (led by the principal and including assistant principals and teacher leaders) and shared responsibility for student progress, a responsibility “reflected in a set of agreements as well as unspoken norms among school staff.”<sup>7</sup>

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6. Seashore Louis, Leithwood, 35.

7. Michael S. Knapp, Michael A. Copland, Meredith I. Honig, Margaret L. Plecki, and Bradley S. Portin, *Learning-focused Leadership and Leadership Support: Meaning and Practice in Urban Systems*, University of Washington, 2010, 3.