



The Laboratory for Student Success

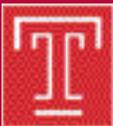
***Educational Leadership***

prepared for  
The Laboratory for Student Success

by

Kenneth Leithwood

*A Review of the Research*



The Mid-Atlantic Regional Educational Laboratory at  
Temple University Center for Research in Human Development and Education

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# **Educational Leadership**

**by**  
**Kenneth Leithwood**  
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**The Laboratory for Student Success**  
**at**  
**Temple University Center for Research in Human**  
**Development and Education**

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# *A Review of the Research*

## **Educational Leadership**

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What is educational leadership? Why should we care about it? How does it work? What forms might it take? Which leadership practices are useful in almost all contexts? Which are context-specific? What are the sources of successful leadership? These questions—addressed in this *Review of the Research*—are questions presently of concern to a growing number of people who are convinced that one of the central keys to the success of our present efforts to improve student learning is leadership. Leadership, for this purpose, may come from many sources—school and district administrators, teachers, parents, school-board members, and state officials, for example. Although leadership from these sources has a bearing on the improvement of student learning, the leadership of school and district administrators, along with teachers, has demonstrably more influence than leadership from other sources; it is the leadership of such people with which this review is most concerned.

### **What Is Leadership?**

At the core of most definitions of leadership are two functions generally considered indispensable to its meaning: setting directions and exercising influence. Each of these functions can be carried out in different ways, with such differences distinguishing the many models of leadership from one another. As Yukl (1994) notes, leadership influences “the interpretation of events for followers, the choice of objectives for the group or organization, the organization of work activities to accomplish objectives, the motivation of followers to achieve the objectives, the maintenance of cooperative relationships and teamwork, and the enlistment of support and cooperation from people outside the group or organization” (p. 3).

Some readers will argue that such a definition seems overly bureaucratic or hierarchical, but it need not be interpreted as such. Some may also point out it is not a very precise definition of leadership. Such imprecision, they may further charge, severely hampers efforts to understand better the nature and effects of leadership.

But leadership is a highly complex concept. Like health, law, beauty, excellence, and countless other equally complex concepts, efforts to define leadership too narrowly are more likely to trivialize than help bring greater clarity to its meaning.

How, you might ask, does leadership defined this way differ from management? I view the popular distinction between “doing things right” (management) and “doing right things” (leadership) as largely meaningless: Achieving success as a leader, by virtually any definition, requires “doing right things right.”

### **Evidence for the Value of School Leadership**

Why should we care about leadership? Although the answer to this question will seem self-evident to many readers (who may respond, “Schools become more effective and students will learn more,” or assert some similar response), there are those who will argue that our confidence in leadership as a pillar of organizational effectiveness is misplaced (Evers & Lakomski, 2000; Meindl, 1995). So it is important to ask whether the value typically attributed to educational leadership is actually warranted by the evidence? Twenty years ago, this question would have been especially complicated to answer because of the multiple criteria considered to be reasonable bases on which to judge a leader’s impact (e.g., organizational efficiency, teachers’ job satisfaction, increasing organizational resources, greater community involvement). However, in the current context of performance-based accountability, such criteria are only considered relevant if they can be shown to improve student learning.

Most empirical evidence about leaders’ effects on student learning has come from research on school-level leaders, especially principals. District leadership effects on students have, until recently, been considered too indirect and complex to sort out, and research on teacher leadership has rarely inquired about student effects.

The claims about the important effects of school leadership on student learning are justified by three different types of research evidence. One type is primarily qualitative case-study evidence. Studies providing this type of evidence are typically conducted in exceptional school settings (e.g., Gezi, 1990; Reitzug & Patterson, 1998). These are settings believed to be contributing to student learning

significantly above or below normal expectations as, for example, effective schools research based on “outlier” designs (comparisons between exceptionally high- and exceptionally low-performing schools). Studies of this type usually report very large leadership effects not only on student learning but on an array of school conditions, as well (e.g., Mortimore, 1993; Scheurich, 1998). What is lacking from this evidence, however, is external validity or generalizability. We do not know whether the apparently successful leadership practices found in one setting will be equally successful in other settings.

The second type of research evidence about leadership effects is that drawn from large-scale quantitative studies of overall leader effects. Evidence of this type reported between 1980 and 1998 (approximately four dozen studies across all types of schools) has been reviewed in several different papers by Hallinger and Heck (1996a, 1996b, 1998). These reviews conclude that the combined direct and indirect effects of school leadership on pupil outcomes are small but educationally significant. While leadership explains only 3% to 5% of the variation in student learning across schools (not to be confused with the very large within-school effects that are likely), this range of variation represents about one quarter of the total across-school variation (10% to 20%) explained by all school-level variables, after controlling for student intake or background factors (Creemers & Reezigt, 1996; Townsend, 1994).

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A third type of research evidence about leadership effects, like the second type, is also derived from large-scale and quantitative studies. But instead of examining overall leadership effects, this research inquires about the effects of specific leadership practices. Evidence of the value of such practices can be found sporadically in the research alluded to above, but a recent meta-analysis by Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) has significantly extended this type of research. This review of evidence identifies 21 leadership “responsibilities” and calculates an average correlation between each and whatever measures of student achievement were used in the original studies. From these data, estimates of the effects on student test scores are calculated (e.g., a 10 percentile point increase in student test scores

resulting from the work of an average principal who improved her “demonstrated abilities in all 21 responsibilities by one standard deviation” (p. 3)).

While such quantitative syntheses of research produce interesting data, applying estimates from such data to principal effects on student learning in real-world conditions must be treated with considerable caution for several reasons. First, the data are correlational in nature, but cause and effect assumptions are required for the extrapolated effects of leadership improvement on student learning. Second, the illustrative effects on student achievement described in the study depend on leaders improving their capacities across all 21 responsibility practices at the same time, an extremely unlikely occurrence. Some of these responsibilities are dispositional in nature (e.g., flexibility) or rooted in deeply held beliefs (e.g., ideals) and unlikely to change much, if at all, within adult populations. And just one of the 21 responsibilities, increasing “the extent to which the principal is knowledgeable about current curriculum, instruction and assessment practices” (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003), would be a major professional-development challenge by itself. Nonetheless, this line of research is a useful addition to other lines of evidence which justify a strong belief in the contributions of successful leadership to student learning.

### **How Does Leadership Work?**

Most sources of educational leadership have indirect effects on student learning. This is most obviously the case for those exercising leadership outside the classroom, for example, principals, superintendents, and school-board members. These sources of leadership exercise direct effects on the district, school, and classroom practices, which, in turn, have direct effects on student learning. So the challenge for leaders aiming to improve student learning is to identify in their organization those features with the greatest likelihood of contributing to student success and also which leaders are in a position to influence directly. Principals, for example, are in a position to foster greater collaboration among teachers. Such collaboration often leads to improvements in teachers’ instructional practices; these improvements, in turn, enhance student learning. Similarly, superintendents are in a position to ensure that their district achievement tests are aligned with the goals or standards of district curricula. Such alignment supports teachers’ efforts

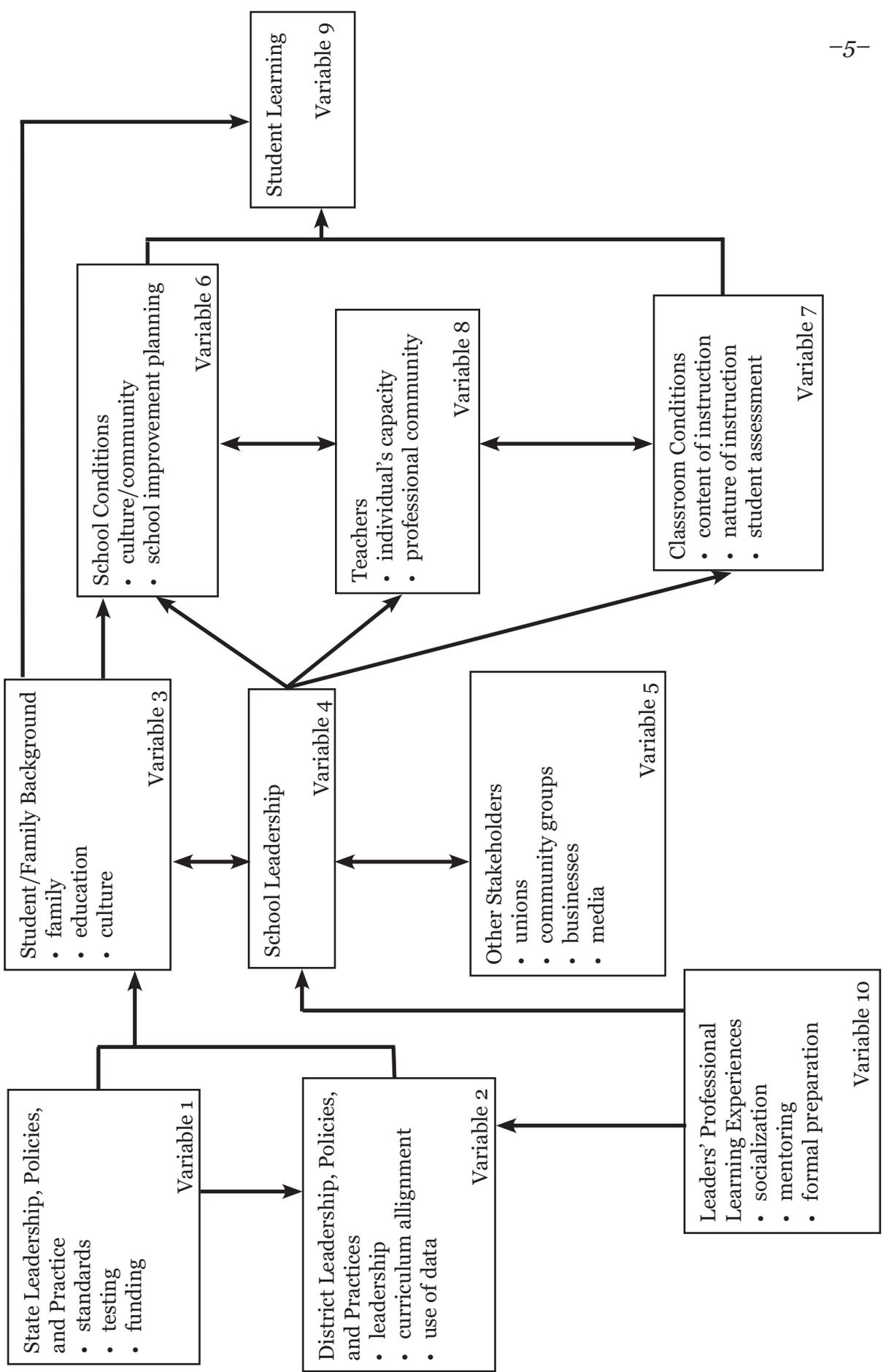


Figure 1. Framework guiding the Wallace Foundation study of linkages between leader learning experiences, their practices, and their effect on student learning.

to focus on the most important curricular outcomes for students; this alignment, in turn, fosters student success by increasing the amount of instructional time devoted to those outcomes.

Figure 1, from a review of research (Leithwood, Riedlinger, Bauer, & Jantzi, 2003) written for a Wallace Foundation research project on leadership, illustrates

*At least a half dozen such leadership models appear repeatedly in educational leadership literature.... Nevertheless, two models currently vie for most of the attention among practicing educators—instructional and transformational models.*

one evidence-based chain of variables or organizational components linking leadership to student learning. According to Figure 1, features of both state and district leadership (which may be distributed among others in formal, as well as informal, leadership roles) policies, practices, and other characteristics interact with one another; and both exert a direct influence on what school leaders do. Leaders influence school and classroom conditions, as well as teachers as individuals and as members of professional communities). Organizations with an interest in schools, such as media, unions, and community and business groups, also have an influence on school leadership practices, as do leaders' professional learning experiences and student and family background factors.

School leadership, from both formal and informal sources, helps to shape the nature of such school conditions as goals, culture, structures, and classroom conditions (e.g., the content of instruction, the size of classrooms, the forms of instruction used by teachers). A wide array of factors help shape teachers' sense of professional community. School and classroom conditions, teachers' roles as individuals and as part of a professional community, along with students' family background conditions, are directly responsible for the learning of students.

One of the most striking implications of Figure 1, and other such frameworks aimed at describing how educational leadership influences student learning, is the breadth and depth of knowledge needed if leaders are to make significant contributions to student learning through their organizations. Leaders never have enough time to meet all of the expectations others have for them (and expectations they have for themselves). If they are to be successful in improving learning for

their students, they need to know where their efforts will have the biggest payoff. But even this knowledge is not enough. Successful leaders also need a substantial repertoire of practices (or skills) to draw on in order to exercise such influence. Subsequent sections of this review describe many of these practices

## **What Forms Does Successful Leadership Take?**

While direction and influence capture the core functions of leadership, those functions can be exercised in distinctly different ways in schools—more or less successfully. Such differences depend on many factors, including personal preferences or style, demands of the organizational setting, leaders' internal processes (cognitive processes, attitudes, values, and beliefs), cultural norms, and the expectations of leaders' colleagues. For the most part, different leadership models attempt to capture—in a succinct, memorable, and inevitably simplified manner—aspects of successful or effective leadership in relation to these and other areas. So, for example, arguing that values are a central part of leadership, moral leadership models (e.g., Sergiovanni, 1992) attempt to specify how leaders' values should figure into their work and which values ought to dominate leaders' decision making (Begley, 1996; Hodgkinson, 1991). Constructivist models (Lambert, 2003, Lambert et al., 1995) draw attention to what leaders might do within their communities of practice to assist their colleagues both to make sense of their work and to determine how that work might be advanced. Participative models (Johnston & Pickersgill, 1992) emphasize the nature and importance of engaging organizational members in decisions about the purposes and nature of their work.

At least a half dozen such leadership models appear repeatedly in educational leadership literature (Leithwood & Duke, 1999), and many more models can be found in literature about leadership in non-education organizations, as Yukl's (1994) comprehensive overview indicates. Nevertheless, two models currently vie for most of the attention among practicing educators—instructional and transformational models. Each model has both an extensive history and a reasonably well-developed body of evidence about its nature and effects.

The modern roots of instructional leadership can be found in the effective

schools movement of the late 1970s and early 1980s (Brookover & Lezotte, 1977). In the United States, these roots were largely nourished in inner-city elementary schools typically serving children faced with a variety of economic and social challenges to their educational success. From this effective schools context emerged an image of strong, hands-on leadership by a heroic individual, unambiguously committed to the welfare of students. Since those early beginnings, however, the term “instructional leadership” has gradually become less the designation of a sharply defined set of leadership practices and more a slogan chiding administrators to focus their efforts on the “core technology” of their schools and districts—teaching and learning. Leaders should not be unduly preoccupied with the routine maintenance of their organizations, which many believed was the primary focus of principals (and those who trained them). Simply chiding educational administrators to be instructional leaders, of course, is no different—and no more helpful—than simply advocating that leaders of any type of organization focus on the goals of their organization and the effectiveness of the processes used to accomplish those goals.

Although the term “instructional leadership” has been mostly used as a slogan to focus administrators on their students’ progress, there have been a small number of efforts to give the term a more precise and useful meaning. Book-length descriptions of instructional leadership by Andrews and Soder (1987) and Duke (1987) are among such efforts, for example. However, Hallinger (2000), Hallinger and Murphy (1985), and Heck, Larson, and Marcoulides (1990) have provided us with the most fully specified model and by far the most empirical evidence concerning the nature and effects of that model in practice. By one estimate, this evidence now runs to 125 studies reported between 1980 and 2000 (Hallinger, 2003). Three categories of practices are included in the model, each of which encompasses a number of more specific practices (10 in total):

- *defining the school’s mission* includes framing and then communicating the school’s goals;
- *managing the instructional program* includes supervising and evaluating instruction, coordinating the curriculum, and monitoring student progress; and
- *promoting a positive school learning climate* encompasses protecting instructional time, promoting professional development, maintaining high visibility, providing

incentives for teachers, and providing incentives for learning.

Hallinger's recent (2003) review of evidence concerning instructional leadership found that mission-building activities on the part of principals are the most influential set of leadership practices. In addition, and especially interesting in light of the sloganistic uses of the term "instructional leadership," this review concluded:

Relatively few studies find a relationship between the principal's hands-on supervision of classroom instruction, teacher effectiveness, and student achievement. Where effects have been identified, it has generally been at the elementary school level and could possibly be explained by school size. (Hallinger, 2003, pp. 333-334)

Hallinger's summary of the evidence for the effects of instructional leadership serves as an appropriate introduction to transformational models of leadership, which are currently the main contenders to instructional leadership for the attention of educators. As with instructional leadership, many uses of the term "transformational leadership" are essentially sloganistic. Whereas instructional leadership aims to narrow the focus of leaders to the core technology of their organizations, transformational leadership asks them to adopt a much broader, more systemic, view of their work. Paradoxically, most large-scale educational reform efforts argue for systemic approaches to change (Elmore, 2003) while at the same time advocating instructional forms of leadership.

Transformational models of leadership, initially captured in the classic writings of Burns (1978) and Bass (1985), have their roots in the challenges faced by leaders of organizations struggling to survive the wrenching dislocations of radical downsizing and globalization during the 1980s and early 1990s. While there is now much discussion in educational literature about transformational orientations to leadership, empirical evidence about its effects in school contexts is relatively thin. Virtually all of this evidence, however, attests to the suitability of transformational leadership practices in schools faced with significant challenges for change (e.g., Day, Harris, Hatfield, Tolley, & Beresford, 2000; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999) and to the contribution of this form of leadership, when exercised by principals, to a wide array of organizational and student outcomes (e.g., Leithwood, Tomlinson, & Genge, 1996). Comparable claims are made for this approach to leadership in non-school contexts, as well (Yukl, 1999).

All transformational approaches to leadership emphasize emotions and values and share in common the fundamental aim of fostering capacity development and higher levels of personal commitment to organizational goals on the part of leaders' colleagues. Increased capacities and commitments are assumed to result in extra effort and greater productivity. Authority and influence associated with this form of leadership are not necessarily allocated to those occupying formal administrative positions, although much of the literature adopts their perspectives. Rather, power is attributed by organizational members to whomever is able to inspire their commitments to collective aspirations and their desire for personal and collective mastery over the capacities needed to accomplish such aspirations. Recent evidence suggests that practices associated with transformational leadership may be widely distributed throughout an organization (Leithwood, Jantzi, Earl, Watson, & Fullan, 2004). So there is no need to view the transformational approach as an “heroic” or “great man” orientation to leadership.

To date, Leithwood and his colleagues have provided the most fully specified model of transformational school leadership, one that has been the object of several dozen empirical studies (e.g., Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990, 1999, 2000, in press). Three broad categories of practices, including nine more specific sets of practice, or dimensions, are encompassed in this model. Included in the “Setting Directions” category are the dimensions building school vision, developing specific goals and priorities, and holding high performance expectations. The “Developing People” category encompasses the dimensions providing intellectual stimulation, offering individualized support, and modeling desirable professional practices and values. The “Redesigning the Organization” category includes the dimensions developing a collaborative school culture, creating structures to foster participation in school decisions, and creating productive community relationships. Each dimension is made up of multiple, more specific, practices which encourage contingent responses on the part of leaders depending on the contexts of their work.

### **Which Leadership Practices Are Useful in Almost All Contexts?**

Evidence suggests that whether exercised by superintendents, principals, teachers, or others, a set of common practices is used by successful leaders in most

contexts. These practices are not constantly required, and some will be much more important than others at particular points in time. But there is enough evidence about their value across enough different settings and circumstances to consider them basic to successful leadership. These basics also should be considered necessary but not sufficient because successful leadership is very sensitive to the unique demands of specific schools and districts. So, more than the basics are necessary for success. But not less.

Evidence—from districts and schools and also non-education organizations—points to three broad categories of basic leadership practices. Hallinger and Heck (1999) label these categories of leader practices as “purposes,” “people,” and “structures and social systems.” Conger and Kanungo (1998) write about “visioning strategies,” “efficacy-building strategies,” and “context-changing strategies.” Leithwood’s (1996) categories, described above, are “setting directions,” “developing people,” and “redesigning the organization.” Within each of these similar categories of practice are numerous, more specific competencies, orientations, and considerations. Most of Water, Marzano, and McNulty’s (2003) 21 specific leadership “responsibilities” contributing to student learning fit within these categories.

*Whereas instructional leadership aims to narrow the focus of leaders to the core technology of their organizations, transformational leadership asks them to adopt a much broader, more systemic view of their work.*

These categories of leadership practices closely reflect a transformational approach to leadership, which, as Bass (1997) claims, has proven to be useful in many different cultural and organizational contexts. This claim is demonstrably the case for educational organizations, generally (e.g., Geijsel, Slegers, Leithwood, & Jantzi, 2003; Southworth, 1998; Yu, Leithwood, & Jantzi, 2002), and specifically, for the success of some large-scale reform efforts in schools (e.g., Day et al., 2000).

### ***Setting Directions***

A critical aspect of leadership is helping a group to develop shared understandings about the organization and its activities and goals that can undergird a sense of purpose or vision (e.g., Hallinger & Heck, 2002). The best explanation for the importance of direction-setting practices on the part of leaders

is to be found in goal-based theories of human motivation (e.g., Bandura, 1986; Ford, 1992; Locke, Latham, & Erez, 1988). According to such theory, people are motivated by goals which they find personally compelling, as well as challenging, but achievable. Having such goals helps people find meaning in their work (e.g., Thayer, 1988; Weick, 1995) and enables them to find a sense of identity for themselves within their work context (Pittman, 1998).

Often cited as helping set directions are such specific practices as identifying and articulating a vision, fostering the acceptance of group goals, and creating high performance expectations. Visioning and establishing purpose also are enhanced by monitoring organizational performance and promoting effective communication (Bennis & Nanus, 1985).

### ***Developing People***

Although clear and compelling organizational directions contribute significantly to members' work-related motivations, they are not the only conditions to do so. Nor do such directions contribute to the capacities members often need in order to productively move in those directions. Such capacities and motivations are influenced by the direct experiences organizational members have with those in leadership roles (Lord & Maher, 1993), as well as the organizational context within which people work (Rowan, 1996).

The ability to engage in such practices depends, in part, on leaders' knowledge of the "technical core" of schooling—what is required to improve the quality of teaching and learning—often invoked by the term "instructional leadership" (Hallinger, 2003; Sheppard, 1996). But this ability also is part of what is now being referred to as leaders' emotional intelligence (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). Recent evidence suggests that such intelligence—displayed, for example, through the personal attention devoted by a leader to an employee and through the use of the employee's capacities—increases levels of enthusiasm and optimism, reduces frustration, transmits a sense of mission, and indirectly increases performance (McCull-Kennedy & Anderson, 2002).

More specific sets of leadership practices significantly and positively influencing these direct experiences include, for example, offering intellectual stimulation, providing individualized support (e.g., Louis, Toole, & Hargreaves,

1999), and providing an appropriate model (e.g., Ross, 1995; Ross, Cousins, & Gadalla, 1996).

### ***Redesigning the Organization***

Successful educational leaders develop their districts and schools as effective organizations that support and sustain the performance of administrators, teachers, and students. This category of leadership practices has emerged from recent evidence about the nature of organizational learning in schools (Leithwood & Louis, 1998), professional learning communities (e.g., Louis & Kruse, 1995; Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996), and their contribution to teacher work and student learning (Marks, Louis, & Printy, 2000; Silins, Mulford, Zarins, & Bishop, 2000). Such practices assume that the purpose behind organizational cultures and structures is to facilitate the work of organizational members and that the malleability of structures should match the changing nature of the school's improvement agenda.

Specific practices typically associated with this category include strengthening district and school cultures (e.g., Anderson, 1998; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990), modifying organizational structures to foster culture building and creating collaborative processes to ensure broad participation in decision making (Louis & Kruse, 1995; Roberts, 1985),

This category of practices also includes the ongoing refinement of both routine and non-routine administrative processes. Among the former are, for example, district and school improvement planning processes (including the monitoring of student progress), administrator and teacher recruitment and selection, performance appraisal, and budget allocation. Examples of non-routine administrative processes include buffering administrators and teachers from excessive and distracting demands on their attention, and celebrating successes and accomplishments. Successful leaders aim to align school and district administrative processes with their improvement goals. Administrative processes should reinforce and institutionalize rather than hinder such improvement by, for example, ensuring that budgets reflect improvement priorities, hiring teachers and principals committed to moving the improvement agenda forward, and rewarding administrators and teachers in performance appraisal practices for their contributions to the improvement efforts.

## **Which Practices Are Demanded by Unique Features of the Context in Which School Leaders Work?**

Successful leaders do much more than just deliver the basics. They are extremely responsive to the unique contexts in which they work, “context” here including, for example, their roles, the policies framing their work, and the characteristics of their students.

### ***Role-Related Leadership Practices***

The leadership practices that superintendents and their staffs, principals, and teachers are uniquely situated to provide, are quite different. To illustrate, a small number of studies describe how superintendents and their staffs work with state policies and regulations to ensure authentic reflection of such reform efforts while, at the same time, doing justice to local district and school priorities. For example, based on evidence from a successful Illinois district, Leithwood and Prestine (2002) identify the following three sets of leadership practices which seem to be successful responses to this challenge and unique to those in district roles.

***Capturing people’s attention.*** Students and teachers are often slow to attend to new initiatives from the state and, usually, become aware only gradually of what the changes imply for their own practices. So, district leaders need to capture the attention of teachers and students in a variety of ways. When the changes are driven, as is often the case at this time, by new standards, one of the most successful initiatives that district leaders can undertake is to use formative and summative student assessments aligned to the new standards. This strategy typically engages the attention of parents and principals.

***Capacity building.*** Although assessments capture people’s attention, productive change requires a powerful response to the dilemmas and conflicts they create. For district leaders, an effective response is to develop a strong, in-house, systematically aligned, professional-development program—something that could be considered part of the basic “Developing People” set of practices engaged in by most successful leaders (Leithwood, 1996).

***Pushing the implications of state policies into schools and classrooms.*** Depending on the specific nature of the state policy, this may entail, for example, fostering widespread participation of school and district staffs in

efforts to implement the changes.

The five superintendents in Togneri and Anderson's (2003) study were both "data savvy" and "data users." They understood performance data on students and schools and could address the shortcomings of state data, for example, by collecting data of a longitudinal nature when the state only provided snapshots of student performance. These superintendents both supported and insisted on school leaders using student performance and stakeholder satisfaction data for identifying needs, setting goals, and planning and tracking improvements. These district leaders also worked with their school boards to increase their comfort and effectiveness in using such data for policy development and governance.

### ***Policy-Related Leadership Practices***

Unique features of national and state policies require leadership practices beyond the basics if leaders are to be successful in their efforts to improve student learning. There are many such policies, potentially calling for a wide array of unique leadership practices, only a few of which can be illustrated here. The extensive set of state policies designed to hold schools more accountable (e.g., Ladd, 1996), along with the recent federal No Child Left Behind Act (e.g., Fusarelli, 2004), serves this purpose well because these policies have a bearing on the work of leaders in almost all U.S. districts and schools.

*Unique features of national and state policies require leadership practices beyond the basics if leaders are to be successful in their efforts to improve student learning.*

Available evidence suggests that to be successful in such highly accountable policy contexts, school and district leaders need to draw on practices that contribute to several key goals of school leadership.

***Creating and sustaining a competitive school.*** This set of practices is important for district and school leaders when they find themselves in competition for students, as in education "markets" that provide alternatives to existing public schools—such as charter, magnet, and private schools—and that are sometimes supported through tuition tax credits (e.g., Apple, 2004).

***Empowering others to make significant decisions.*** This is a key set of leadership practices when accountability mechanisms include giving a greater

voice to community stakeholders, as in the case of parent-controlled school councils (Murphy & Beck, 1995).

***Providing instructional guidance.*** This is an important set of leadership practices in almost all districts and schools aiming to improve student learning. But it is particularly important in the context of more explicit grounds for assessing the work of educators, as, for example, in the setting of professional standards and their use for purposes of ongoing professional development and personnel evaluation (Burkhardt & Schoenfeld, 2003; Ogawa, Haymore Sandholtz, Martinez-Flores, & Paredes Scribner, 2003).

***Developing and implementing strategic and school improvement plans.*** When schools are required to have school-improvement plans, as in most school districts now, school leaders need to master skills associated with productive planning and the implementation of such plans (Louis, Toole, & Hargreaves, 1999). Virtually all district leaders need to be proficient in large-scale strategic planning processes (Baker, 2002).

### ***Student-Related Leadership Practices***

Increasingly diverse student populations served by districts and schools exemplify a third type of context demanding a unique response by leaders. Evidence suggests that successful leadership in such contexts calls for the integrated use of two distinct approaches to leadership (Leithwood & Riehl, in press; Riehl, 2000). The first approach includes practices aimed at implementing policies and other sorts of initiatives, which, according to the best available evidence, serve well diverse student populations, initiatives such as providing parent education programs, reducing class sizes, and building rich curricula delivered through sustained discourse structured around powerful ideas.

The second approach to successful leadership aims to ensure, at minimum, that such policies and practices are implemented equitably. This usually means building on the forms of social capital that students do possess rather than being restricted by the social capital they do not possess—an approach to leadership referred to variously as “emancipatory” (Corson, 1996), “leadership for social justice” (Larson & Murtadha, 2002), or “critical leadership” (Foster, 1989). Examples of specific practices associated with this approach include heightening the awareness

of school community members to unjust situations which they may encounter and how such situations effect their lives, providing members of the school community with the capacities needed to resist situations that generate inequities, and offering opportunities to become involved in political actions aimed at reducing inequities (Ryan, 1998).

### **What Are the Sources of Successful Leadership?**

Neither superintendents nor principals can tackle the leadership task by themselves. Highly successful leaders develop and count on leadership contributions from many others in their organizations. Principals typically count on key teachers for such leadership, along with their local administrative colleagues. In site-based management contexts, parent leaders are often crucial to the school's success (Murphy & Beck, 1995). Superintendents rely on many central office and school-based people, along with elected board members, for leadership. The nature and impact of such distributed leadership has become the object of recent research, although often with no recognition that inquiry about the concept dates back almost 70 years (Gronn, 2002).

At its root, the concept of distributed leadership is quite simple: Initiatives or practices used to influence members of the organization are exercised by more than a single person. Other "non-person" sources of influence also may be included in this concept—as suggested in Jermier and Kerr's (1997) "substitutes for leadership"—leading to a view of leadership as an organizationwide phenomenon (Pounder, Ogawa, & Adams, 1995). Leadership influence is exercised through actions that seek to accomplish functions for the organization (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2000). The concept of distributed leadership overlaps substantially with shared (Pearce & Conger, 2003), collaborative (Wallace, 1988), democratic (Gastil, 1997), and participative (Vroom & Jago, 1998) leadership concepts. Distributed leadership assumes a set of practices that "are enacted by people at all levels rather than a set of personal characteristics and attributes located in people at the top" (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003, p. 22).

Gronn (2002) distinguishes two basic forms of distributed leadership: additive and holistic. Additive forms entail the dispersal of leadership tasks among

members across an organization without explicitly considering their interactions; this is the most common meaning of “distributed leadership” and is the sense that “everyone is a leader” advocates have in mind (e.g., Manz & Sims, 1980). These holistic forms of distributed leadership assume that the sum of leaders’ work adds up to more than the parts and that there are high levels of interdependence among those providing leadership. The extent and nature of coordination in the

exercise of influence across members of the organization is a critical challenge from a holistic perspective. Interdependence between two or more organizational members may be based on role overlap or complementary skills and knowledge (Gronn, 2002).

*Distributed leadership more accurately reflects the division of labor experienced daily in organizations and reduces the chances of error arising from decisions based on the limited information available to a single leader.*

A number of individual and organizational benefits have been associated with distributed leadership (e.g., Burke, Fiore, & Salas, 2003; Cox, Pearce, & Perry, 2003; Gronn, 2002; Manz & Sims, 1993). As compared with exclusively hierarchical forms of leadership, distributed leadership more accurately reflects the division of labor experienced daily in organizations and reduces the chances of error arising from decisions based on the limited information available to a single leader. Distributed leadership also enhances opportunities for

the organization to benefit from the capacities of more of its members, permits members to capitalize on the range of their individual strengths, and develops among organizational members a fuller appreciation of interdependence and how one’s behavior effects the organization as a whole.

Especially in the context of team work, distributed leadership may provide greater opportunities for members to learn from one another. Through increased participation in decision making, greater commitment to organizational goals and strategies may develop. Distributed leadership has the potential to increase on-the-job leadership development experiences, and the increased self-determination arising from distributed leadership may improve members’ work experiences. Such leadership allows members to better anticipate and respond to the demands of the organization’s environment. With holistic forms of distributed leadership (Gronn, 2002), solutions are possible which would be unlikely to emerge from individual

sources. Finally, overlapping actions that occur in some distributed leadership contexts provide further reinforcement of leadership influence.

## **Conclusion**

This *Review of the Research* has provided a brief overview of important concepts central to the meaning of educational leadership, as well as a synopsis of evidence about the nature and effects of leadership practices that are successful in improving student learning. Two issues central to the evidence which has been summarized in this review are taken up in this concluding section: the nature and quality of the evidence presented in this report and the complex problem of making use of leadership research to inform practice.

The evidence on which this review is based varies considerably in quantity. Much more empirical evidence is available about the leadership of principals than about either the leadership of district staff or teachers. But even the relatively large amount of evidence about principal leadership can be criticized as not being conducted in a programmatic fashion. Only a handful of efforts (all reflected in this review) have mounted long-term, sustained, coherent programs of educational leadership research (Willower & Forsyth, 1999), making it difficult to accumulate substantial amounts of evidence about the same approaches to leadership.

The evidence reviewed in this report has also been subject to some of the same methodological criticisms now being leveled at all educational research (Burkhardt & Shoenfeld, 2003). Approaches to educational leadership research are roughly divided between the use of small-scale, qualitative, case-study techniques and large-scale, quantitative, survey techniques. But as Burkhardt and Shoenfeld argue (see also National Research Council, 2002), in all fields of research “There is a wide range of ways of conducting high-quality research” and “Triangulation using multiple methods is one fundamental way to establish robust finding” (2003, p. 11). Methodological triangulation is a technique associated with some current educational leadership research.

The positing of this range of available methodologies that may lead to high-quality research entails a fundamental caveat: The appropriateness of research methods must be judged by the goals of research. For example, when the goal is to

discover promising leadership practices or create models and theories of successful leadership, qualitative case-study methods will be the techniques of choice. How else can one acquire rich descriptive accounts of what leaders actually do? Indeed, leadership researchers outside of education are now being admonished to make much greater use of these methods as a way of breaking out of long-standing, increasingly sterile, narrowly defined conceptions of leadership. When the aim is to develop and test interventions effective in building leadership capacities, design experiments (Kelly, 2003) offer promising possibilities.

When the effects of leadership practices and theories are being tested, large-scale quantitative techniques are more likely to provide robust results with high levels of external validity. Within this category of techniques, there are several different but defensible sets of alternatives. One set includes experimental or quasi-experimental research designs. Such designs are almost totally absent from the corpus of research reviewed in this report. But this is not the Achilles' heel some current policymakers would have us believe. In real-life contexts, such designs are usually unable to control for many variables relevant to an understanding of the results. And the results of leadership research using experimental designs in laboratory settings can rarely be generalized to real-life contexts with much confidence. These design limitations begin to explain why most large-scale quantitative studies of educational leadership employ such multivariate analytic techniques as causal modeling. Such methods aim to test explanatory models of the sort illustrated by Figure 1 in all their real-life messiness.

A second important issue in understanding the nature of the evidence examined in this report is this: While there is variation in the quality and quantity of research on educational leadership, making productive use of the best research in practice is a non-trivial problem for many familiar reasons. I want to mention just one of these reasons: what passes for evidence-based claims about successful leadership practice. The main corpus of educational leadership literature is of two sorts and serves two quite distinct purposes. Evidence reviewed in this report consists mainly of empirical studies describing what actual leaders do, inquiring about their effects on organizations and students, and sorting out which practices make the most difference. Such evidence provides justification for its claims more or less consistent with the canons of normal science. The second type of literature

is exemplified in some of the work of such authors as Sergiovanni (2000), Deal and Peterson (1994), and Fullan (2003). This literature typically begins with attractive visions of schooling, school conditions, or approaches to the improvement of schools and then infers what leaders would need to do (or be) to help realize such visions. This literature actually attracts a considerable following from educators because of its accessible, non-technical writing styles and the novelty and attraction of its ideas. It inspires, motivates, and jars leaders out of old ways of thinking—all quite worthwhile purposes. But this literature should not be viewed as a source of evidence-based leadership practices, even though its creators may also publish evidence-based claims about leadership.

Research-based evidence about educational leadership is vastly larger in quantity and more sophisticated in quality than it was even a scant 20 years ago. As is the case in all social-science domains, this improved sophistication and substance does not mean that the evidence is irrefutable, nor will it ever be. But it has now reached the critical mass necessary for it to be an important guide for policy and practice.

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## **About the Laboratory for Student Success**

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The LSS mission is to significantly improve the capacity of the mid-Atlantic region—including Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Washington, DC—to enact and sustain lasting, systemic educational reform by building on the resources and expertise of schools, families, and communities in the region to improve student learning. Through its broad-based programs of research and development and services to the field, LSS provides ongoing professional development and technical assistance to support efforts of local schools and state education agencies to achieve student success.

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