

## **HOW LEADERSHIP INFLUENCES STUDENT LEARNING**

**K. Leithwood, K.S. Louis, S. Anderson, & K. Wahlstrom, 2004**

### **Overview**

Recent research suggests that successful leadership can play a highly significant – and frequently underestimated – role in improving student learning. Specifically, the available evidence about the size and nature of the effects of successful leadership on student learning justifies two important claims; that leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school and secondly that leadership effects are usually largest where and when they are needed the most. These results, therefore, point to the value of changing, or adding to, the leadership capacities of underperforming schools as part of their improvement efforts or as part of school reconstitution.

### **Basics of Successful Leadership**

Three sets of practices comprise a common core of basic leadership practices:

1. Setting directions (accounts for the greatest proportion of a leader's impact)
  - a. Developing a shared vision that serves as the framework for vision and goals
  - b. Using goals to motivate people and helping them make sense of their work
  - c. Monitoring organizational performance
  - d. Promoting effective communication
2. Developing people
  - a. Providing intellectual stimulation
  - b. Providing support for individual needs
  - c. Providing examples of best practices crucial to a well-performing organization
3. Redesigning the organization to develop one that supports the performance of administrators, teachers, and students
  - a. Strengthen district and school cultures
  - b. Modify organizational structures
  - c. Build collaborative processes

### **Leadership effects on student learning:**

- a. Leadership accounts for about ¼ of total direct and indirect effects on student learning, second only to classroom instruction.
- b. Leaders have greater impact on the neediest underperforming schools; therefore, building leadership capacity in these schools should be part of any school improvement efforts.
  - Strengthen district and school cultures
  - Modify organizational structures
  - Build collaborative processes

### **Conclusion**

There seems little doubt that both district and school leadership provides a critical bridge between most educational reform initiatives and their consequences for students. Of all the factors that contribute to what students learn at school, present evidence leads to the conclusion that leadership is second in strength only to classroom instruction. Furthermore, effective leadership has the greatest impact in those circumstances (e.g., schools “in trouble”) in which it is most needed. This evidence supports the present widespread interest in improving leadership as a key to the successful implementation of large-scale reforms.

**Leithwood, K., Louis, K.S., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How leadership influences student learning*. New York: The Wallace Foundation.**