

Elementary School Principals and Leadership Development¹

JOANNE S. BURGESS² AND R. ALLAN DERMOTT³

This study investigated the value of selected leadership competencies of elementary principals as perceived by superintendents, supervising principals, teaching principals, teachers under supervising principals, and teachers under teaching principals. A questionnaire of 54 items covered three areas of administrative skill: technical, conceptual, and human. Differences were found between groups on 29 of the 54 items, with the major differences appearing in the human skill area. The findings include: (1) teaching principals are in closer agreement with their teachers than are supervising principals; (2) the values of educators change as individuals move from active classroom work to active involvement with administrative tasks.

Often institutions of higher education prepare individuals to become school principals without evaluating how well these people have been prepared for their positions. As theories and concepts change with growth, so too sometimes instructional programs should plan for change where the need is indicated. As educators, we hope that the education of our children will improve with improved training of our educational leaders.

This study was undertaken as a concerted effort to secure from elementary principals and other professional educators field-based information to assist in planning and providing the kind of preparation program in institutions of higher education that will best meet the needs of the elementary principal. Input from teachers and superintendents who ideally work closely with elementary principals and whose own effectiveness is likely to be to some degree dependent upon elementary principals' competency in leadership can bring subordinate and superordinate perspectives into the determination of desirable and productive leadership practices.

It was the purpose of this investigation to assess the value of selected leadership competencies to the practicing elementary principal, as perceived by elementary principals, superintendents, and teachers in Maine public schools.

The list of competencies used in this study was compiled from a variety of sources [1; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 9; 10; 11; 12; 13]. For our analysis skills are divided into three categories: conceptual, human, and technical.

Of the three types of skills, the conceptual skills are most directly related to knowledge. According to Abbott [3], however, conceptual skills require more than an acquisition of knowledge about concepts. He stated that

conceptualization involves the ability to apply information and concepts to practice. For one to be able to do this, it is necessary to view organization as a whole and to understand how various segments of the organization relate to and affect each other.

In reference to the human skills, Lipham [8] noted that the effective principal may be expected to be energetic, be concerned with achieving and improving his performance, be successful in his relationships with other people, and be able to adjust well to frustrations, irritations, confusions, and criticisms in pressure situations.

Technical skills are related to methods or techniques of getting a job done. There are three general categories of technical skills: planning skills, group process and communication skills, and management skills.

Procedures

The subjects for this study included all Maine school superintendents ($n=133$) and a random selection of elementary supervising principals ($n=76$), elementary teaching principals ($n=117$), and elementary teachers ($n=580$) on a proportionate basis. Those who did not return the questionnaire from the first mailing were contacted a second time. Responses were obtained from 89 (67%) of the superintendents, 55 (72%) of the supervising principals, 77 (66%) of the teaching principals, and 257 (44%) of the surveyed teachers.

Chi-square was used to assess differences between the personnel groups on specific questions or groups of questions. The level of significance was set at the .05 level of confidence. The statements were also rank ordered by mean for each group of educational professionals.

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²Dr. Burgess is an associate professor of education and director of elementary, secondary, and early childhood education at the Department of Education, Franklin Hall, University of Maine at Farmington, Farmington, Maine 04938. Her major interest is in elementary supervision and language arts.

³Dr. Dermott is an assistant professor of English and reading at the English Department, 125 Dunkle Hall, Frostburg State College, Frostburg, Maryland 21532. Having been a headmaster of an elementary school, he is interested in curriculum development and in the psychological development involved in learning to read.

Instrumentation

The questionnaire, *Survey of Principal Competencies*, sampled three areas of administrative skills: technical, conceptual, and human. It was drafted initially by graduate students at the University of Maine at Orono who were elementary principals or potential principals and who had done a thorough review of the literature before wording the statements. It was then refined by a team of professors. Copies of the complete questionnaire may be obtained by contacting the first author.

Results

There were twenty-nine items on which there were significant differences in the distribution of ratings by the groups.

Technical Skills

One item in the technical skills group pertains to the ability "to make an assessment of needs of learners as well as those that are unique to the school and community." A chi-square of 40.14 was significant at the .05 level. Eighty-five percent of the teaching principals listed this as being an extremely or very important need as compared with 76 percent of the superintendents, 71 percent of the supervising principals, 70 percent of the teachers under teaching principals, and 66 percent of the teachers under supervising principals.

A second item in this group of skills has to do with "competency in business administration." A chi-square of 42.45 was significant at the .01 level. Forty percent of the teachers under supervising principals reported this as being extremely or very important in comparison with 30 percent of their principals and 30 percent of the teachers under teaching principals in comparison with 23 percent of their principals and 19 percent of the superintendents. Fourteen percent of the superintendents saw this as having little or nothing to do with a principal's job. Nine percent of the teachers under teaching principals and eight percent of their principals concurred.

A third item deals with the ability "to make staff assignments that are compatible with skills and abilities." A chi-square of 48.75 was significant at the .01 level. The range for the five groups marking this as being extremely or very important was 81 percent to 91 percent. However, for those marking it as being extremely important, 76 percent of the teachers under supervising principals checked this as compared to 71 percent of their supervising principals, 68 percent of the teaching principals, 57 percent of the superintendents, and 54 percent of the teachers under the teaching principals.

One item on the questionnaire has to do with the ability "to prepare a school budget and operate within that budget." A chi-square of 36.99 was significant at the .05 level. Seventy-five percent of the supervising principals and 71 percent of the teaching principals thought this to be extremely or very important as compared to 61 percent of the teachers under supervising principals, 58 per-

cent of the teachers under teaching principals, and 50 percent of the superintendents.

Having "expertise in administering effective guidance programs" is the focus of another question. A chi-square of 37.73 was significant at the .05 level. Forty-eight percent of the teachers under the supervising principals reported this as being extremely or very important as compared to 40 percent of the teachers under teaching principals, 36 percent of the principals, and 33 percent of the superintendents. However, for those marking it as being extremely important, 26 percent of the teachers under teaching principals checked this as compared to 18 percent of the teachers under supervising principals, 16 percent of teaching principals, eight percent of superintendents, and six percent of supervising principals. Nine percent of the superintendents saw this as having little to do with a principal's job. Nine percent of the teachers under teaching principals concurred.

The item dealing with the principal's ability "to direct the development of in-service training programs to improve instruction," was also discriminating. A chi-square of 57.86 was significant at the .001 level. Sixty-four percent of the supervising principals checked this as being extremely or very important as compared to 62 percent of the superintendents, 59 percent of the teaching principals, 57 percent of the teachers under supervising principals, and 49 percent of the teachers under teaching principals. The supervising principals and their teachers split their responses about evenly between extremely and very important. Superintendents and teaching principals put more emphasis on the "extremely" (38 percent and 35 percent, respectively), while the teachers under the teaching principals reversed their choices with only 14 percent indicating this item as being extremely important and another 14 percent perceiving this as being of little importance.

One question has to do with responsibility "for maintaining, analyzing, and interpreting student records information." A chi-square of 41.02 was significant at the .05 level. Seventy percent of the teaching principals perceived this as being extremely or very important as compared to 56 percent of the supervising principals, 54 percent of the superintendents, 54 percent of the teachers under supervising principals, and 51 percent of the teachers under teaching principals. Eight percent of the teachers saw this as having little or nothing to do with a principal's job.

Another point posed states that "the competent elementary principal shall assist in the recruitment and selection of personnel for instructional responsibilities." A chi-square of 37.83 was significant at the .05 level. Eighty-four percent of the principals and 81 percent of the superintendents reported this as being extremely or very important as compared to 77 percent of the teachers.

Taking "responsibility for dissemination of information about the school's programs and events to the community" also showed a difference among the responders. A chi-square analysis of 38.22 was significant at the .05 level. Seventy-eight percent of the teaching principals, 71 percent of the supervising principals, and 69 percent of

the superintendents stated that they thought this was extremely or very important as compared to 56 percent of both groups of teachers considered separately.

A tenth significant item in the technical skills group pertains to the ability to "formally and informally evaluate teaching performance." A chi-square of 41.43 was significant at the .01 level. Ninety-three percent of the superintendents saw this as being extremely or very important as compared to 91 percent of supervising principals, 90 percent of the teachers under supervising principals, 88 percent of teaching principals, and 86 percent of teachers under teaching principals. However, for those marking it as being extremely important, 86 percent of the supervising principals checked this as compared to 76 percent of the superintendents, 70 percent of the teachers under supervising principals, 69 percent of teaching principals, and 55 percent of teachers under teaching principals.

Conceptual Skills

For the conceptual skills group, one item deals with principal's planning and evaluating "instructional programs based on evaluation and assessment of student needs." A chi-square of 40.57 was significant at the .05 level. Eighty-two percent of the principals and superintendents thought that this was an extremely or very important need as compared to 79 percent of the teachers under teaching principals and 64 percent of the teachers under supervising principals.

A second item in this group of skills has to do with encouraging and initiating "studies that discover causes for student failure." A chi-square of 38.46 was significant at the .05 level. Seventy-seven percent of the teaching principals reported this as being extremely or very important as compared to 65 percent of the teachers under teaching principals, 64 percent of the superintendents, 60 percent of the teachers under supervising principals and 56 percent of the supervising principals. Nine percent of the supervising principals saw this as having little or nothing to do with a principal's job.

Another point presented deals with analyzing "strengths and weaknesses of various instructional programs." A chi-square of 52.55 was significant at the .001 level. Eighty-one percent of the teaching principals, 79 percent of the superintendents, and 71 percent of the supervising principals considered this as being extremely or very important as compared to 64 percent of the teachers under supervising principals and 63 percent of the teachers under teaching principals.

The principal's "knowledge of conflict management techniques sufficient to work through conflict situations with students, parents, and teachers" showed differences among the five groups. A chi-square of 40.49 was significant at the .05 level. Eighty-eight percent of the teaching principals, 85 percent of the teachers under supervising principals, 81 percent of the teachers under teaching principals, and 78 percent of the supervising principals listed this as an extremely or very important need in comparison with 66 percent of the superintendents.

One question posed deals with approaching "discipline in terms of self-control, self-motivation and personal involvement of the students in their own education." A chi-square of 44.59 was significant at the .01 level. Eighty-eight percent of the teachers under teaching principals and 83 percent of their principals felt this was extremely or very important as compared to 75 percent of the teachers under supervising principals and their principals considered as separate groups, and 64 percent of the superintendents. Whereas 77 percent of the teachers under teaching principals considered this extremely important, only 32 percent of the superintendents listed it as such.

Guiding "individual teachers toward selective participation in appropriate in-service training programs" is not to be overlooked. A chi-square of 38.27 was significant at the .05 level. Fifty-one percent of the supervising principals and 50 percent of the superintendents thought this extremely or very important as compared with 40 percent of the teachers under teaching principals and their principals considered as separate groups, and 33 percent of the teachers under supervising principals. Twelve percent of the teachers under teaching principals and eight percent of the teachers under supervising principals saw this as having little or nothing to do with a principal's job.

Another item offered in the survey deals with the assessment of "the morale and climate of the school unit." A chi-square of 38.62 was significant at the .05 level. Eighty-one percent of the teaching principals and 80 percent of the supervising principals listed this as extremely or very important as compared with 78 percent of the teachers under supervising principals, 74 percent of the teachers under teaching principals, and 72 percent of the superintendents. Whereas the percentages for the extremely important category generally were in the high 50's and low 60's, only 36 percent of the superintendents listed it as such.

An eighth significant item in the conceptual skills group provides "for optimum participation of school personnel, students, and community in the school program." A chi-square of 36.07 was significant at the .05 level. Eighty-one percent of the teaching principals thought this extremely or very important as compared to 74 percent of their teachers, 73 percent of the supervising principals, 76 percent of the superintendents, and 64 percent of the teachers under supervising principals. Whereas the percentages for the extremely important choice generally were in the 30's, 51 percent of the teaching principals listed it as such.

Human Skills

For the human skills group, one item has to do with clearly defining and interpreting "expectations to staff members." A chi-square of 36.51 was significant at the .05 level. Ninety-three percent of the teachers under teaching principals, 92 percent of the teachers under supervising principals, and 91 percent of the teaching principals listed this as being extremely or very important as compared to 85 percent of the supervising principals and 83 percent of the superintendents. Whereas the

percentages for the extremely important category were generally in the 70's, only 53 percent of the superintendents listed it as such.

A second item in this group of skills pertains to demonstrating "flexibility in adjusting to changes in plans and procedures." A chi-square of 38.97 was significant at the .05 level. Eighty-seven percent of the teaching principals, 86 percent of the teachers under teaching principals, and 84 percent of the teachers under supervising principals checked this as being extremely or very important as compared with 79 percent of the superintendents and 75 percent of the supervising principals.

A third item relates to the principal's displaying "openness by giving consideration to divergent views." A chi-square of 38.58 was significant at the .05 level. Eighty-eight percent of the teachers and 86 percent of the teaching principals felt this extremely or very important as compared to 74 percent of the superintendents and 73 percent of the supervising principals.

That "the competent elementary principal shall realize the importance of delegating responsibility to staff members" is variously important to many educators. A chi-square of 45.29 was significant at the .01 level. Ninety-one percent of the teaching principals considered this as extremely or very important as compared to 80 percent of the superintendents, 82 percent of the supervising principals, 79 percent of the teachers under teaching principals, and 71 percent of the teachers under supervising principals.

A principal's treating "staff members in an unbiased and impartial manner" is also considered variously important to educators. A chi-square of 44.37 was significant at the .01 level. Ninety-five percent of the teaching principals felt this extremely or very important as compared to 88 percent of the teachers under supervising principals, 85 percent of the superintendents, and 84 percent of the teachers under teaching principals and of the supervising principals. Nine percent of the supervising principals saw this as having little or nothing to do with a principal's job.

Another item has to do with displaying a "sense of humor." A chi-square of 40.29 was significant at the .05 level. Seventy-nine percent of the teaching principals, 76 percent of the supervising principals, and 74 percent of the superintendents checked this as being either extremely or very important as compared to 86 percent of the teachers under teaching principals and 69 percent under supervising principals.

The item that showed the most significant difference on the survey deals with a principal's providing "adequate support to staff in relationships with parents and students." A chi-square of 81.52 was significant at the .001 level. Ninety-eight percent of the teachers under teaching principals, 96 percent of the teaching principals, and 94 percent of the teachers under supervising principals saw this as extremely or very important in comparison with 87 percent of the supervising principals and 82 percent of the superintendents.

Another item presented to Maine's educators deals with demonstrating "a genuine personal interest in children."

A chi-square of 41.95 was significant at the .01 level. Ninety-nine percent of the teaching principals and 98 percent of their teachers thought this extremely or very important as compared to 95 percent of the superintendents, 91 percent of the supervising principals, and 90 percent of their teachers.

That "the competent elementary principal shall perceive, understand, and accept personality differences in staff and student body" cannot be overlooked. A chi-square of 41.46 was significant at the .01 level. Ninety-one percent of the teaching principals thought this extremely or very important as compared to 88 percent of the teachers under teaching principals, 86 percent of the teachers under supervising principals, 84 percent of the supervising principals, and 82 percent of the superintendents. The percentage checking extremely important in each group was 77 percent for the teachers under teaching principals, 76 percent for their principals, 63 percent for the teachers under supervising principals, 49 for their principals, and 44 for the superintendents.

Another item has to do with being "available to listen and able to empathize with staff members, students and parents." A chi-square of 38.76 was significant at the .05 level. Ninety-four percent of the teaching principals perceived this as being extremely or very important as compared to 89 percent of the teachers under supervising principals, 86 percent of the teachers under teaching principals, 84 percent of the supervising principals and 78 percent of the superintendents.

A seventh significant item in the human skills group pertains to "attention to building and maintaining positive relationships among members of the educational community." A chi-square of 50.49 was significant at the .001 level. Eighty-three percent of the teaching principals checked this as extremely or very important as compared to 79 percent of the teachers under these teaching principals, 73 percent of the supervising principals, 72 percent of the superintendents, and 65 percent of the teachers under supervising principals.

For the human skill group, a chi-square of 39.98 was significant at the .05 level. Ninety-nine percent of the teaching principals perceived this as being either extremely or very important as compared with 97 percent of the teachers under supervising principals, 93 percent of the teachers under teaching principals, 93 percent of the supervising principals, and 92 percent of the superintendents.

Summary

When all groups are combined, the ten items that have the highest rank order based upon the sample's perception of critical need are as follows:

RANK	ITEM
1	demonstrate a genuine personal interest in children
2	provide adequate support to staff in relationships with parents and students

- 3 display consideration of others
- 4 be able to formally and informally evaluate teaching performance
- 5 clearly define and interpret expectations to staff members
- 6 realize the importance of developing a feeling of unity and enthusiasm among the staff members
- 7 treat staff members in an unbiased and impartial manner
- 8 be able to make staff assignments that are compatible with skills and abilities
- 9 remain calm and poised in difficult situations
- 10 be available to listen and able to empathize with staff members, students and parents

The chi-square analysis for each item in the survey and for each of the three skill groups and rankings of the ten top questions for each of the five groups of educators are available from the first author.

An examination of the data contributing to the significant differences in the manner in which the various groups responded to the 29 items reported above led to the following summary observations relative to the five groups.

Teaching Principals

Teaching principals tend to place greater emphasis on some facets of their jobs which would normally be assumed by auxiliary personnel (e.g., guidance counselor, department heads, etc.) in schools which have more fully developed staffs. They tend to view education as an individual, personal experience to be carried out in a cooperative and community atmosphere. They also tend to rely more upon interpersonal skills and cooperative action than upon administrative edicts in dealing with school functions involving human relationships.

Teachers Under Teaching Principals

Teachers under teaching principals tend less to see their principals as being responsible for the development and direction of in-service training programs. They also tend more to value a sense of humor in their principals.

Supervising Principals

Supervising principals are less likely than teaching principals to see a need for their being able to analyze and initiate studies that discover causes for student failure. They also see less of a need than all other administrators for their being able to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of various instructional programs.

Teachers Under Supervising Principals

Teachers under supervising principals are more likely to expect their principals to be competent in business ad-

ministration and to have expertise in administering effective guidance programs. They tend to place less importance on the principal's role as designer and evaluator of instructional programs for students as well as to coordinate the various facets of the educational community. In the human skills area, these teachers are less likely to see the importance of the principal's role in delegating responsibility to the staff members. They also tend to place less emphasis on the need for their principal to have a sense of humor.

Superintendents

Superintendents tend to place less emphasis on the principal's need for competency in business administration and conflict management techniques and skills.

Other

When teachers are contrasted with principals, principals tend to place greater importance on being able to prepare and manage a school budget. When teachers are contrasted with administrators as a whole, teachers place less emphasis on the principal's role in recruiting and selecting personnel, disseminating information about school programs to community, and analyzing strengths and weaknesses of instructional programs.

When educators who are teaching are contrasted with the non-teaching educators in this study, teachers tend to place less emphasis on the principal's role as guide to in-service training programs. In the human skills group, these teaching educators place greater importance on the principal's role in defining expectations to staff members, demonstrating flexibility, considering divergent views, and providing support to staff.

Teaching principals and their teachers, when contrasted with supervising principals and their teachers, are more likely to see the principal as approaching students in a positive, child-centered manner.

Some items showing significant differences appeared to reflect only a statistical difference and not a practical difference. These differences indicate variations in rating items as "extremely important" as opposed to "very important."

Conclusions and Discussion

A review of the data collected suggests that teaching principals are in closer agreement with their teachers than are supervising principals. Teaching principals identify more with the needs of students and teachers in their approach to education and the management of schools. They tend to rely more on human interpersonal skills in dealing with both teachers and students and less upon business-like administrative skills. These findings coincide with many studies which show that individuals undergo a change in values as they move from active classroom participation to active involvement in administrative tasks [9].

This study raises many questions concerning the pre-

and in-service training of elementary school principals. Generally, the teaching principals included in the study had less training and experience than the supervising principals. Yet it was the teaching principals who displayed more of the practices and concept understanding that are commonly accepted by professional educators as being most useful in establishing a proper climate for the education of elementary children [7].

Perhaps the training, both pre- and in-service, for elementary principals needs to emphasize more of the human skills that are necessary in dealing with elementary teachers and students. Too often the training of elementary school administrators has emphasized technical and managerial skills while giving only lip-service to the wide range of human skills needed in dealing with superiors, peers, and subordinates.

This study seems to imply that the teaching principals surveyed relied a great deal on their human skills in setting the climate for their schools. It may have been a lack of sophistication in the use of technical, business-like skills that caused them to rely so heavily upon these human skills. The implication here seems to be that perhaps those who seek to become elementary principals should first become skilled in the human relations area. Further, perhaps this skill can best be acquired in practical situations that involve dealing with superiors, peers, and subordinates on a day-to-day basis.

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