
Introduction

The role of the assistant principal is one of the *least researched* and *least discussed* topics in professional journals and books focusing on educational leadership. No universal definition of the role or clearly defined job description of the position of assistant principal exists. The role thus is open to interpretation by principals and central office personnel alike, and it often becomes one that fulfills the common contractual phrase of “performing any and all duties assigned by a superior.”

The ambiguity in the role of assistant principal allows for the ineffective use of this position, which should be a vital link between the principal and teachers, parents and students, and an extension of the principalship in promoting effective, quality-oriented outcomes. In no other position does one walk such a fine line between the maintenance and survival needs of the school and the needs and demands of the students, teachers, and principal. In addition, the position of assistant principal is between that of teachers and principal, and this “between” position makes the leadership role of the assistant principal a difficult one. The effectiveness of those in this position depends on their ability to master and apply salient leadership knowledge and skills.

This book’s contents and format are unique, representing several firsts in a publication and addressing the multiple needs of students, instructors, and practitioners alike. The need for the text originated with the concerns and frustrations of our students and colleagues who, as assistant principals, lacked a clear role

definition and purpose for the position of assistant principal. These assistant principals also wanted guidance on developing the skills they needed to move up the leadership ladder to the principalship or other leadership positions. These concerns led us to an extensive review of the literature and, in conjunction with interviews with practicing assistant principals, formed the basis for the questionnaire we devised. This questionnaire was administered to 100 assistant principals to assess the knowledge and skills they needed for effective leadership, their actual roles and responsibilities, and their ideas about the essential components of a text that would help them perform their duties more effectively and gain the skills they need for advancement. This book thus represents the first book on assistant principals based on field-based research findings. As such, the book focuses on the actual needs of practitioners rather than the perceived needs of theorists.

This book is also a first in that it can be used as a self-contained staff development program for those preparing teachers for the role of assistant principal and for assistant principals preparing for the principalship or other leadership positions. Theory, experimental research, and field-based research are combined in one volume, complete with case studies, exercises, and examples based on real-life situations and the actual requirements of those in the assistant principalship. This unique blend makes the work practitioner-friendly and allows for the immediate application and reinforcement of newly learned content.

This text can also be used as a reference guide for practicing assistant principals. It contains the most current information on “best” leadership practices; practical examples that work, provided by practitioners in the field; and examples of surveys, evaluation instruments, and so on, designed for immediate application and easy use.

Each chapter of this book contains survey results from 100 practicing assistant principals and addresses the specific needs, concerns, and issues confronting practicing professionals. Chapter 1 focuses on the knowledge and skills essential to effective leadership, and discusses the nature of leadership, formal and informal power, the manager-versus-leader debate, and the practice of leadership through influence and persuasion. Effective leadership characteristics are presented along with the findings of effective schools research; this information provides the reader with the current research on student learning and leadership-effectiveness indicators.

The transition from manager to leader is the focus of Chapter 2. Research on the roles played by both managers and leaders is presented and related to the responsibilities of the assistant principal. Moving from manager to leader requires commitment, time, and a “personal plan” that includes core leadership competencies and self-made opportunities to practice effective leadership. The chapter also discusses the importance of conducting action research, ways to increase teachers’

job satisfaction, and a model for developing the teacher-as-leader concept in the classroom and school.

Chapter 3 examines informal groups and their leaders as sources of power that compete with the formal leadership for control and resources within an organization. Tactics of informal leaders for achieving power are discussed through the topics of “power games,” communication networks existing in informal groups, and the use of grapevine and rumor. Practical, proven methods are presented for dealing effectively with both the overt and covert political activities of informal groups that can undermine the achievement of the school’s goals and the authority of school administrators.

Public relations and community power agents are the focus of Chapter 4. The chapter explores the nature of power, the school as a political organization within the overall political structure of the community, and the importance of having comprehensive public relations programs to foster community confidence and support for education. Central to this chapter are three research methods that can be easily applied to identify community power structures and their power agents. Models are presented to deal effectively with special interest groups that seek to impose their goals or use their power to influence decision makers to advance their own objectives or favor their own cause. This chapter concludes with practical examples on how to build community confidence in the school, techniques for handling criticism, and instruments for measuring public opinion.

Chapter 5 addresses the topic of effective communication and listening. Research on effective oral and written communication is presented in the context of building positive working relationships and developing effective leadership characteristics. Barriers to effective communication and listening are presented as well as methods to improve listening and communication skills. The chapter presents examples on how to conduct effective meetings, prepare meeting agendas, and maximize human potential in group situations.

Leadership for instructional improvement is the focus of Chapter 6. The chapter presents the characteristics of effective instructional leaders and the essential variables associated with leadership for instructional effectiveness. The significance of leadership in curriculum development is presented along with curriculum development models found in effective schools. Models are also presented for building an instructional climate, coordinating action research projects, preparing teacher-made tests with built-in validity and reliability, assessing teacher performance, supervising instruction, and remediating teacher weaknesses.

The final chapter focuses on leadership for staff development. Emphasis is placed on models that provide both a continuous and a personalized approach to staff development. Techniques are presented to identify and meet the individual and professional growth needs of teachers and to develop holistic staff development

programs. Also provided are examples of assessment instruments that assistant principals can use to determine the effectiveness of staff development programs and to develop specific strategies to help teachers master newly acquired knowledge and skills.

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