

PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP AWARDS ROUNDTABLE SUMMARY 2024





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Piyush Patel
Chairman of the Board of Trustees

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DEAR FELLOW TAXPAYER,

Research has consistently shown that, after teachers, principals have the most significant impact on student achievement among school-related factors. Quality education is important to the development of productive, self-sufficient, well-informed Floridians and a required component to satisfying future critical workforce needs. As Florida competes within the global economy and seeks the highest quality of life for its residents, placing the right leadership in schools is crucial.

In 2013, Florida TaxWatch established the Principal Leadership Awards program. This unique initiative recognizes and rewards principals who have the greatest impact on student learning gains amid the greatest obstacles. This year, we proudly expanded the program, honoring 15 winning principals from across the state.

As a nonpartisan, independent public policy research institution, we pride ourselves on uncovering innovative ideas and policies that can make Florida a national example of excellence. Each year, we convene a roundtable discussion with our Principal Leadership Awards winners to capture best practices that can be replicated at other schools. On April 11, 2024, Florida TaxWatch convened a roundtable of the 2023-24 Principal Leadership Award winners.

Florida TaxWatch is pleased to present this summary report, and we look forward to discussing its conclusions and recommendations with policymakers in advance of the 2025 legislative session.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dominic M. Calabro".

Dominic M. Calabro
President & Chief Executive Officer

LETTER FROM HELIOS EDUCATION FOUNDATION

GREETINGS COLLEAGUES,

On behalf of Helios Education Foundation, I am pleased to welcome you to the release of the **Florida TaxWatch 2024 Principal Roundtable Report**. As enthusiastic supporters of initiatives that honor educational leadership and the role principals play in advancing student outcomes, Helios Education Foundation deeply appreciates the work of Florida TaxWatch in this important report.

This year's report offers insights into the evolving challenges within our education system, notably in hiring and retaining the very best educators. Fewer young professionals have been pursuing teaching careers in recent years, leading to a constrained talent pool. Moreover, the enduring impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have only compounded these hardships, with many educators facing record chronic absenteeism and students continuing to struggle with learning loss. Amid these conditions, the importance of robust and adaptive leadership in our schools has never been more evident.

This report celebrates the remarkable achievements of 94 principals who have demonstrated exceptional leadership since the inception of the **Principal Leadership Award** program in 2013. These trailblazers have made profound differences in their schools, from the small towns of Franklin County to the bustling district of Miami-Dade, significantly enhancing student learning outcomes.

The strategies and insights shared by these visionary leaders are invaluable. They are not merely highlights but the foundation for fostering a successful educational environment where every student can excel. These dynamic principals have shown how all students can achieve remarkable success with visionary guidance and commitment.

As you read through this report, I invite you to reflect on the opportunities ahead.

Thank you for your continued commitment to elevating student achievement in Florida. Together, we continue to shape an education landscape where every student, educator, and community can succeed.

Sincerely,



Stacy Baier, Ph.D.

Senior Vice President, Florida Community Engagement, Operations, and Strategic Partnership

Helios[®]
Education Foundation

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INTRODUCTION

Among all school-related factors that contribute to student learning gains, leadership is perhaps second only to classroom instruction. Furthermore, the impact of leadership tends to be the greatest in schools where the learning needs of students are most acute.¹ The greater the challenge, the greater the impact an effective principal can have on student learning. There are virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around without intervention by an impactful leader. Many other factors contribute to such turnarounds, but leadership is the catalyst.²

In 2013, Florida TaxWatch established its prestigious Principal Leadership Awards (PLA) Program to recognize and reward Florida’s highest-performing principals whose schools draw from predominantly at-risk populations, yet whose students consistently outperform those in schools with comparable populations. In 2023, Florida TaxWatch expanded from nine winners to 15 winners across the state, recognizing the top five elementary, top five middle, and top five high school principals, determined by a unique, data-driven methodology.

The PLA Program, the first of its kind in the U.S., uses the Florida Department of Education’s Florida Value-Added Model (FL-VAM) common school component estimates, which describe the amount of learning that is typical for students in each school that differs from the statewide conditional expectation and indicates the total contribution of the school to greater than or less than predicted student achievement. Florida TaxWatch calculates

student learning gains for math and reading by grade and by school year.

In April 2024, Florida TaxWatch hosted a roundtable with the latest PLA winners to discuss the philosophies, strategies, challenges, and best practices of effective principals. The PLA-winning principals are identified in the appendix. The participants discussed the following topics:

- Attracting, developing, and retaining high-quality teachers;
- Building a productive school culture;
- Building relationships with stakeholders beyond the campus; and
- Managing time and personnel.

The strategies discussed by the roundtable participants for effectively leading their schools have been summarized herein, paired with educational research that supports these strategies. This report compares the strategies employed by this year’s roundtable participants to those employed by preceding participants to identify best practices and “key takeaways” for consideration by policy makers and education professionals. A draft copy of this report was provided to the roundtable participants for feedback to ensure Florida TaxWatch accurately captured the discussion.

Please note that this report is intended to be a starting point for further discussion, rather than provide a comprehensive review of, or a “deep dive” into, the above topics. Florida TaxWatch is pleased to present a summary of this discussion, takeaways for consideration by Florida’s education policymakers and professionals, and a summary of available research in support of those takeaways.

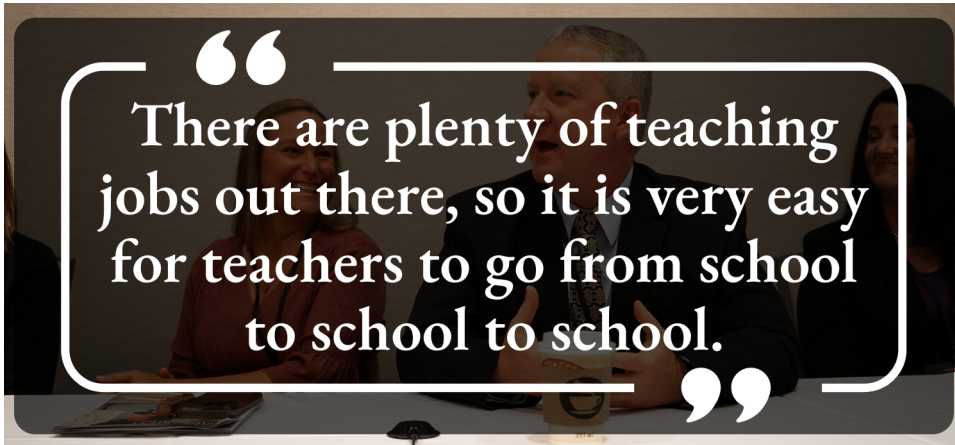
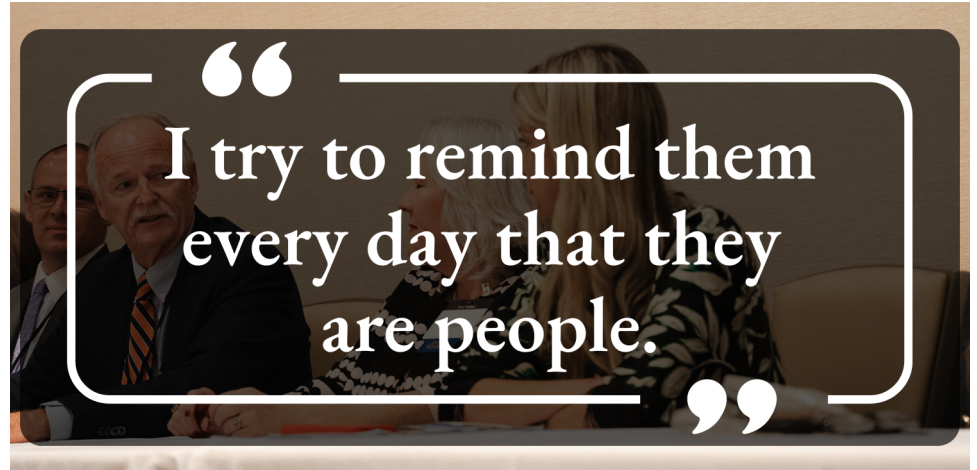
¹ Jason A. Grissom, Anna J. Egalite, & Constance A. Lindsay, “How Principals Affect Students and Schools,” The Wallace Foundation, February 2021.
² *Ibid.*



ATTRACTING, DEVELOPING, AND RETAINING HIGH-QUALITY TEACHERS

ROUNDTABLE SUMMARY

The process of hiring and retaining teachers looks different compared to five years ago. Fewer young professionals are choosing to pursue teaching degrees, restricting the talent pool. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers continue to struggle with financial stress and mental distress, and, amid statewide vacancies, they are more likely to switch schools in hopes of finding a better fit.



The winning principals have not experienced heavy turnover, which they attribute to the relationships they build with their teachers. They create a supportive environment for teachers by facilitating collaboration, performing walk throughs, and running mentorship programs. One school reduced the workload of an effective veteran teacher so they could serve as the designated “mentor teacher,” whose main responsibility is to guide faculty through their first year at the school. The winning principals emphasized instilling trust and confidence in their teachers, in part by encouraging a sense of autonomy. To help teachers balance their mental health, the principals allow space for vulnerability and help teachers make time for counseling.

Key Takeaways:

Effective principals build bonds of trust and create a positive school culture and climate that ensure a reduction of teacher attrition in hard-to-staff schools.

Effective principals address teachers’ classroom needs to help prevent burnout.

Effective principals work to develop connections between teachers by encouraging open communication and guiding teachers to reflect critically on their own learning and teaching practices.

Partnerships with colleges and universities introduce the principals to new teachers. The principals conduct mock interviews and provide positions at their schools to the teachers-in-training. These partnerships create an opportunity for principals to develop relationships with prospective hires while providing future teachers with valuable onsite experience. One principal shared that in her small community, former students attend local colleges and stay in town; therefore, the relationships with her own students can result in a foundational relationship with a prospective hire.

The principals noted that, in recent years, prospective hires primarily come from nontraditional teaching pathways, such as temporary certificates and Troops to Teachers. Within this hiring pool, the principals focus on finding candidates who have a “love for kids” and strong interpersonal skills. The first few years for a nontraditional teacher can be especially challenging, as the teacher learns about the routines and expectations of their school, develops the skills needed to deliver curriculum, and works toward satisfying difficult state requirements, such as passing certification tests. The principals acknowledged that a nontraditional teacher may have different mentorship needs than a traditional teacher and extra strains on their time.

SUPPORTING RESEARCH

Nationwide, states are struggling with teacher shortages. In August 2022, Florida TaxWatch released, “Are Floridians Ready to Go Back to School? Not Without More Teachers,” which illustrated a decline in newly certified teachers from 2011 to 2020. At the beginning of the 2023-24 school year, Florida school districts reported 4,776 teacher vacancies. To mitigate the effect of the teacher shortage, about 11 percent of courses statewide are taught by an out-of-field teacher who lacks appropriate certification for the subject matter. Exceptional Student Education (ESE) has the highest percentage of courses taught by out-of-field teachers relative to its prevalence.³

Salary and compensation are often cited as a primary influence driving teachers’ choice of workplace but tend to be beyond the control of the principal. In 2020, Florida increased the base salary to \$47,500, with additional increases included in the state budget. During the 2020-21 school year, Florida was ranked 48th in average teacher salary nationwide.⁴

³ Florida Department of Education, Identification of High Demand Teacher Needs for 2024-25.

⁴ World Population Review, Teacher Pay by State 2024, retrieved from <https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/teacher-pay-by-state>, accessed on April 19, 2024.

⁵ Anne Podolsky, Tara Kini, Joseph Bishop, and Linda Darling-Hammond, “Solving the Teacher Shortage How to Attract and Retain Excellent Educators,” Learning Policy Institute, September 2016.

⁶ Amy L. Hughes, John J. Matt, and Frances L. O’Reilly, “Principal Support is Imperative to the Retention of Teachers in Hard-to-Staff Schools,” Journal of Education and Training Studies Vol. 3, No. 1; January 2015, retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1054905.pdf>, July 11, 2021.

⁷ Anne Podolsky, Tara Kini, Joseph Bishop, and Linda Darling-Hammond, “Solving the Teacher Shortage How to Attract and Retain Excellent Educators,” Learning Policy Institute, September 2016.

⁸ Marks, H. M. & Printy, S. M., “Principal Leadership and School Performance: An Integration of Transformational and Instructional Leadership,” Educational Administration Quarterly, 39(3), 2003, retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/44832147_Principal_Leadership_and_School_Performance_An_Integration_of_Transformational_and_Instructional_Leadership, June 5, 2018.

⁹ Wallace Foundation, “How Principals Affect Students and Schools,” February 2021.



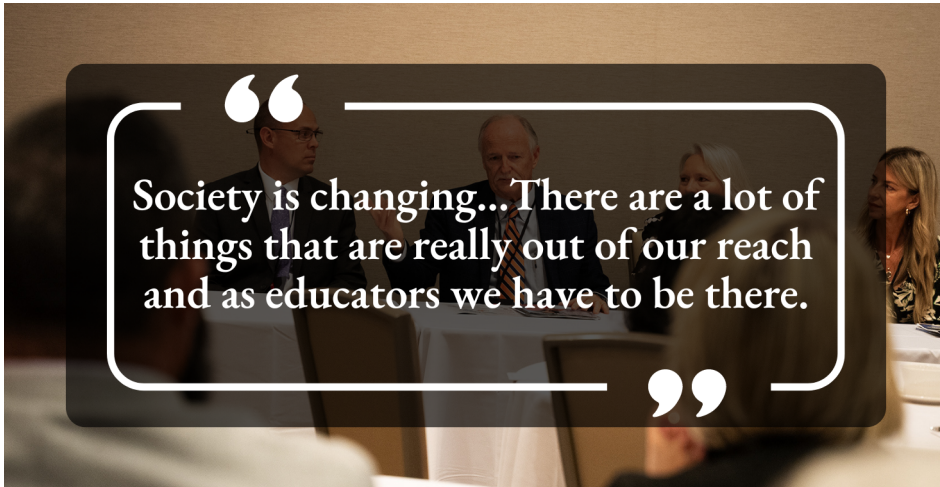
Beyond compensation, factors such as the administration’s leadership and the amount of support the administration provides are often the top reason teachers identify for leaving or staying in the profession, outweighing even salary considerations for some teachers.⁵ Teachers who left hard-to-staff schools claimed limited opportunities for personal growth and limited supports to improve emotional, environmental, and instructional wellbeing affected their choice.⁶ The Learning Policy Institute has identified five major factors that influence teachers’ decisions to enter, stay in, or leave the teaching profession;⁷ three of the five—improving teachers’ working conditions, providing support to new teachers, and ensuring a pathway to employment—were strategies identified during this PLA Roundtable.

Research on principal leadership indicates that principals are most effective at developing teachers when they facilitate shared decision-making with teachers, prioritize instructional improvement, and encourage teachers to work collaboratively toward instructional improvement.⁸ The resulting relationship between principals and teachers has shown to improve teacher efficacy, attitudes about teaching, understanding of students, and levels of trust. Focus upon high-leverage skills—the foundational skills teachers can yield on a daily basis—most greatly supports teachers and improves classroom instruction. As principals guide the development of new skills, they should protect teachers’ sense of autonomy.⁹

BUILDING A PRODUCTIVE SCHOOL CULTURE

ROUNDTABLE SUMMARY

The principals acknowledged that the tactics used to keep students focused on academics ten or twenty years ago may not work today. As society changes—whether it be the ramifications of a pandemic or the rise of social media—the needs of students also change. Principals vigilantly monitor such changes and guide the school community to adapt.



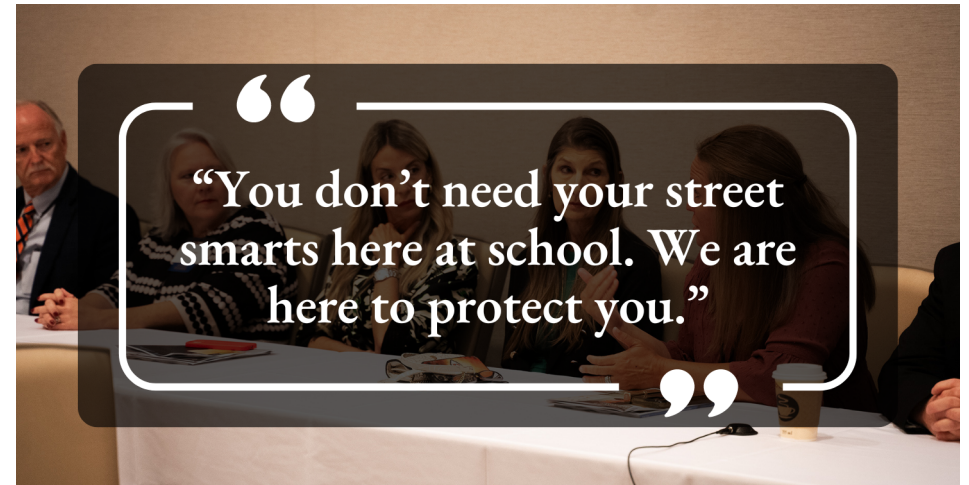
The foundation of a productive school culture is student trust. The winning principals discussed building rapport with their students and encouraging their teachers to do the same, no matter how difficult a student may be. In an at-risk school, the faculty and staff should be sensitive to students’ out-of-school stresses and attempt to alleviate their effects during the school day, such as making sure students are well fed and feel safe.

Key Takeaways:

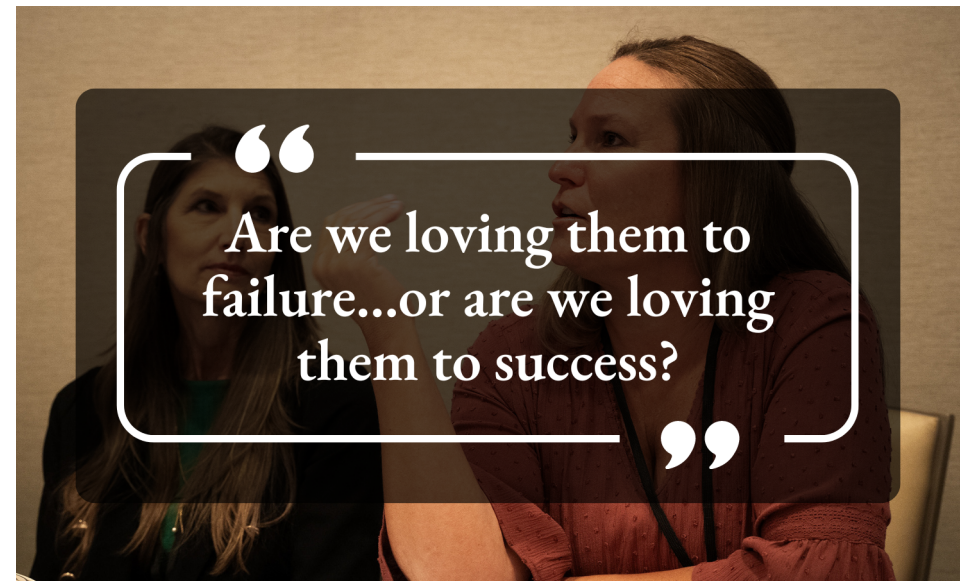
Effective principals do not expect students to drop their personal lives when entering the classroom. They seek ways of alleviating the out-of-school stresses of students.

Effective principals set high expectations for the schools and garner commitment from students, parents, and teachers.

Effective principals make data-informed decisions and provide their teachers with the training to do the same.



Data chats are frequent in productive school cultures. A “data chat,” conducted by a principal or teacher, is a one-on-one conversation with a student to map previous test scores and set goals for future assessments. Data chats bring a sense of partnership to the learning process and help students develop a growth-oriented mindset. One principal shared that she has a data chat with every single eighth grader, not only to build rapport with her students but also to model to her teachers the importance of the practice. Another principal discussed setting incentives, such as dress code passes, to reward students for prioritizing their data chat goals.



High expectations are also prevalent in productive school cultures. When students are faced with obstacles beyond their control, such as a learning disability, the school community may be tempted to lower expectations. Although they are lowering expectations out of “love” for the student—hoping to prevent the student from experiencing a sense of struggle or failure—it ultimately hurts the student if they are not academically prepared for new challenges.

At a high school level, students are beginning to think of their life beyond school. The students are more likely to stay engaged if their work directly contributes to career development. Principals try to offer electives that are relevant to their students’ interests, ranging from criminal justice to computer programming. Electives that certify students to fulfill local job demands are especially effective at instilling a sense of purpose.

SUPPORTING RESEARCH

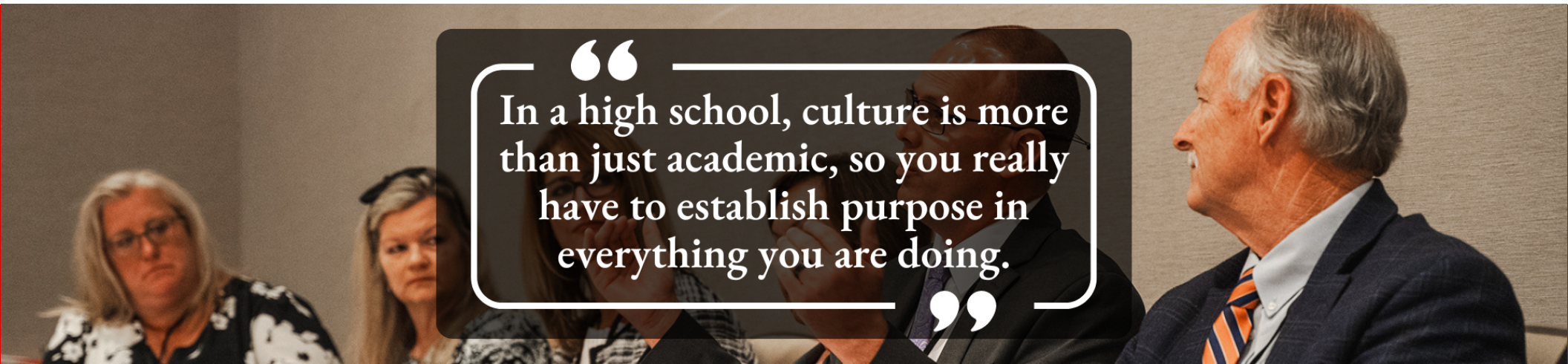
Research suggests that the best administrators spend an immense amount of time developing, improving, and investing in relationships with faculty, staff, and students, and that these positive relationships are the heart of what makes a school extraordinary. To build relationships with people and positively shape school culture, it is necessary for the school leader to be visible in the school and community.¹⁰

¹⁰ Sue A. Rieg and Joseph F. Marcoline, “Relationship Building: The First “R” for Principals,” Eastern Education Research Association Conference Paper, February 2008. See also, Wallace Foundation, “How Principals Affect Students and Schools,” February 2021.
¹¹ Learning Policy Institute, “Community Schools as an Effective School Improvement Strategy: A Review of the Evidence,” December 2017.
¹² Hanover Research, “High Expectations and Student Success,” November 2012.
¹³ Hanover Research, “High Expectations and Student Success,” November 2012. See also, David S. Yeager, Paul Hanselman, Gregory M. Walton, et al. “A national experiment reveals where a growth mindset improves achievement,” August 2019.
¹⁴ Pathways to College Network, “Using Data to Improve Educational Outcomes,” Nature, 2007.

Effective principals do not expect their students to drop their personal life as they walk through the door. Sometimes, principals are even able to secure funding or resources that help satisfy student needs. Access to integrated student supports, such as counseling or medical care, has been linked to improved “attendance, behavior, social functioning, and academic achievement” in under-resourced, underserved areas.¹¹

Creating an environment that encourages student achievement is crucial. Research shows that students tend to increase or decrease their academic efforts based upon the expectations they perceive.¹² To help students meet high expectations, schools should foster a “growth mindset,” building the understanding that students can work hard to improve their academic skills rather than be stuck with their initial test scores.¹³ As the instructional leader, principals are responsible for setting this vision for the whole school.

Data is the crux for monitoring and understanding student needs, measuring the effectiveness of teaching practices, and informing the training of teachers. It also enables a measurable, goal setting culture throughout the school. Principals should provide teachers with the professional development needed to wield data in their classrooms. Data beyond test scores, such as attendance records and extracurriculars, can also be utilized, helping to identify problems and opportunities outside of traditional instruction.¹⁴



“
In a high school, culture is more than just academic, so you really have to establish purpose in everything you are doing.
”

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH STAKEHOLDERS BEYOND THE CAMPUS

ROUNDTABLE SUMMARY



Parents, at least with us, want to be involved, but they do not always know how to be involved.

The principals work with their faculty and staff to find ways to involve students' families. Some principals host yearly events and fundraisers, such as a 5K or parental involvement day, to encourage parents to support their schools. One principal polled her parents at the start of the school year and uses the collected information to invite the parents to speak about their experiences in her classrooms, which not only facilitates parental involvement but also enhances the delivery of curriculum. Another principal provides "remote" opportunities to make involvement more feasible for families whose work hours or health conditions restrict their ability to enter the school building.

Community partnerships can be made with nonprofits or local businesses to promote the wellbeing of faculty and staff or encourage student achievement. The opportunities available are only limited to the imagination of the principal. Examples shared by the winning principals include:

- Inviting businesses to host learning opportunities for students, such as career fairs or budgeting seminars;
- Working with local businesses to connect every faculty and staff member with a "sponsor" business who will celebrate them on holidays, birthdays, and teacher appreciation day;

- Rewarding students who completed their reading goal with a field trip to a Sonic, assisted by police officers who were willing to help students walk across the street; and
- Collaborating with an economic development council to align community workforce needs with the course offerings at the local high school, influencing the development of 17 career and technical education courses.



The community is willing to do whatever you ask for, in our experience...you really just have to be willing to call and ask and they will shower us."

Some of the principals discussed the importance of an active social media account. When community members see the good work occurring within the building—whether it be kindergarteners learning to read or eighth graders working diligently at their desks—they become more willing to support the school. One principal shared that a social media post about a student sports team led to an unprompted donation of new uniforms.

SUPPORTING RESEARCH

Family involvement and community partnerships hold the potential to improve students' attendance, academic achievement, and behavior. Research suggests the most crucial form of involvement is academic socialization, which is when families hold conversations with their students regarding academic expectations, educational values, and future aspirations.¹⁵ To realize the positive outcomes produced by family involvement, effective principals actively work to welcome participation and remove barriers to access.¹⁶

¹⁵ Miranda Avnet, David Makara, Karen H. Larwin, and Matthew Erickson, "The impact of parental involvement and education on academic achievement in elementary school," *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education*, September 2019.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Families with greater involvement describe their schools as “empowering and welcoming.” Studies suggest the following characteristics are found at schools that successfully facilitate family involvement:

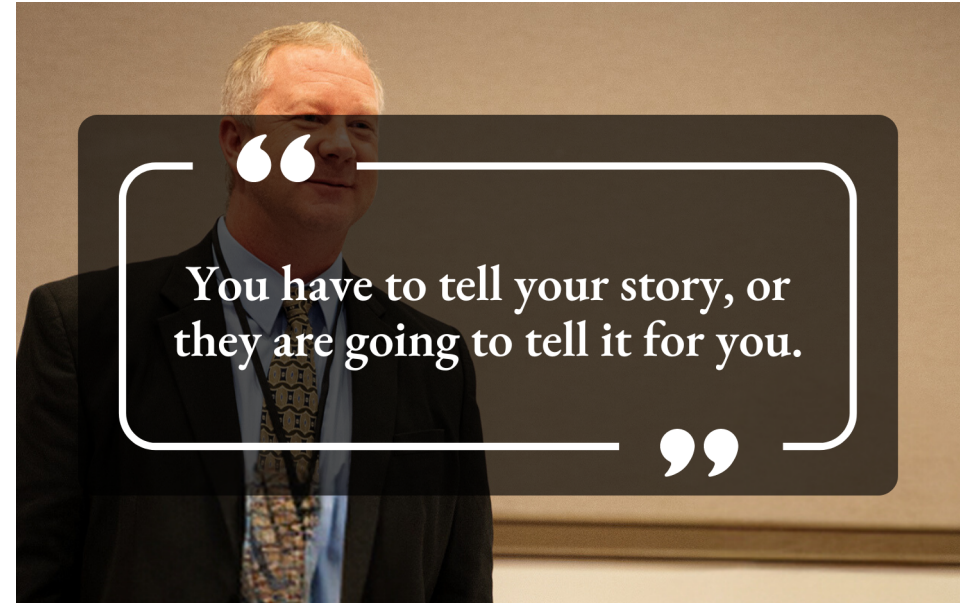
- Positive and helpful office staff, especially during school registration and orientations;
- Teachers who put in extra effort, respond quickly, and develop positive rapport;
- Principals who display accessibility, visibility, and personal investment;
- Ongoing events and activities that engage students and families with the school community; and
- Supports designed for students’ specific circumstances (special needs, gifted, transient, bullied, English language learners, etc.) and are communicated to families.¹⁷

Advancing technologies creates new ways for schools to involve students’ families. In the late 2000s, the widespread production of smartphones increased the popularity of social media (i.e., Instagram and Facebook) and digital education platforms (i.e., ClassDojo and Edmodo), giving schools a new space to maintain steady communication with students’ families. Early studies suggest social media can promote positive teacher-student relations and increase family participation. Social media posts that share school events help student families to learn about, and show appreciation for, the school community. Posts that establish connections between learning at school to

¹⁷ Alana Siegel, Monica Christina Esqueda, Ruth Berkowitz, and Kathrine Sullivan, “Welcoming Parents to Their Child’s School: Practices Supporting Students With Diverse Needs and Backgrounds,” *Education and Urban Society*, January 2018.
¹⁸ School Community Network, “Handbook on Family and Community Engagement,” 2011.

activities at home or the community better facilitate academic discussions between students and their families, which helps reinforce student learning.¹⁸

Schools also benefit from activating community members beyond students’ families. Community members, from political leaders to local businessmen, help principals better understand the populations they serve. Such partnerships can unlock new resources—such as advice, financial assistance, after-school programs, and internships—that can further advance student achievement.



Key Takeaways:

Effective principals prioritize connections with students’ families by removing obstacles to contact and maintaining easy pathways for families to see what is happening within the school.

Effective principals consider their school’s relationship with the local community, focusing upon how they are perceived by the families they serve, the families they will serve, and potential partners, such as political or business leaders.

MANAGING TIME AND PERSONNEL

ROUNDTABLE SUMMARY

Many of the principals acknowledged that they are the first one to enter the school building and the last one to leave. There are not enough hours in a day to do everything that a principal needs to do. One principal shared that her weekly debrief with her assistant principal occurred after school hours to help maintain her availability during the school day. Another principal takes advantage of after-school events to talk with parents or host data chats with students.

The assistant principal is often treated as a partner. Principals work closely with their assistant principal, ensuring their visions align and that the assistant principal is ready to step up whenever the principal is unavailable. This partnership allows principals the flexibility to react to emerging issues, whether it be a teacher in need of help or a student in need of discipline, and further develops an assistant principal's skillset as an administrator, contributing to their career growth. One principal discussed helping their assistant principal balance time management by reminding them to take time off during "less busy" times in preparation for very busy times, such as testing weeks.

Principals also delegate tasks to faculty and staff. Intentional routines and systems that leverage the strengths of personnel help schools run more smoothly and allow principals greater flexibility to address pressing issues, but effective delegation requires mutual trust between the principal and personnel. To build trust with her personnel, one principal shared that she purposefully saves the worst tasks for herself, such as



taking on after school volunteer shifts or cleaning the cafeteria. She has found that choosing difficult duties not only helps her relationship with faculty and staff but also models servant leadership to students.

While the principals may try to guard the personal time of their faculty and staff, they are the only ones who can guard their own personal time. In a job that never feels complete, many principals struggle to find a balance. They learn to accept that there will always be tasks in need of attention and try to manage the expectations of their faculty and staff as they try to do it all. The principals may set tight boundaries, such as leaving all their "work talk" within the school building, to help preserve their personal time.

Key Takeaways:

Principals remain visible throughout the day, modeling their expectations and building trust with staff and students.

The most important work performed by a principal cannot be done from their desk.

Much of principals' work is done during non-working hours (nights and weekends).

Effective principals identify the strengths of their staff in order to place employees in the positions where they are most needed.

SUPPORTING RESEARCH

The nature of a principal's duties requires them to spend a considerable amount of time on their non-instructional responsibilities. As a result, it is easy for principals to become office bound. Effective principals do not let this happen. Studies show that teachers perceive infrequent visits by a principal as a demonstration that other priorities outweigh the value of maintaining a classroom presence.¹⁹ Regardless of why principals lacked presence in classrooms, teachers consistently shared their belief that administrators' absences limited their credibility among the faculty.²⁰

To be successful, a principal should be where the action is, which is where the students are—in the classrooms, on the playground, in the cafeteria, and around the campus. Only by observing teachers and students in their element can one truly understand their experiences, feel their existence, and know the goings-on of the entire school. There is no substitute for that knowledge.²¹

Principals carry many duties, so to ensure better productivity and efficiency, many schools are leveraging additional staff members to reinforce the roles of principals. Assistant principals often collaborate with principals to complete administrative tasks, uphold leadership responsibilities, maintain a positive culture, and foster favorable working conditions for teachers. Many schools have begun instituting structures that diffuse leadership, such as hiring multiple assistant principals, establishing department chairs, and placing teachers into leadership

¹⁹ Olaf Jorgenson and Christopher Peal, "When Principals Lose Touch with the Classroom," *Principal*, March/April 2008.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Peter A. Hall, "Voices from the Field: The Principal's Presence and Supervision to Improve Teaching," retrieved from <http://www.sedl.org/pubs/sedl-letter/v17n02/principal.html>, July 11, 2021.

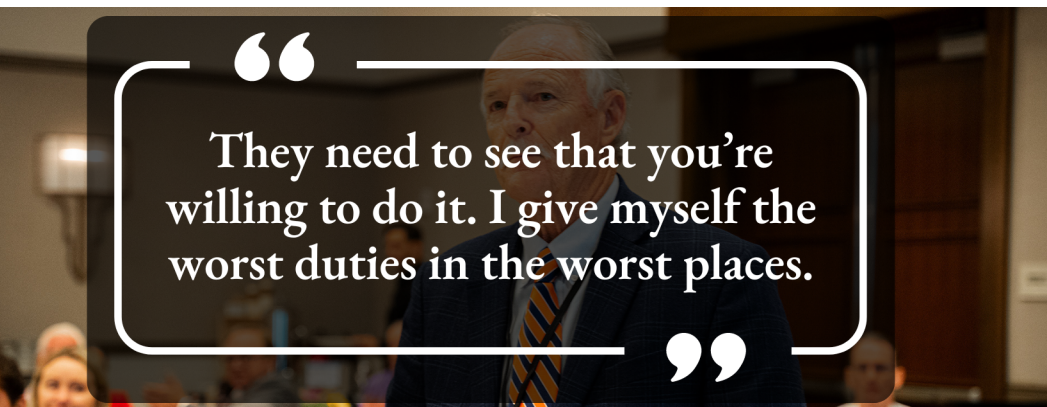
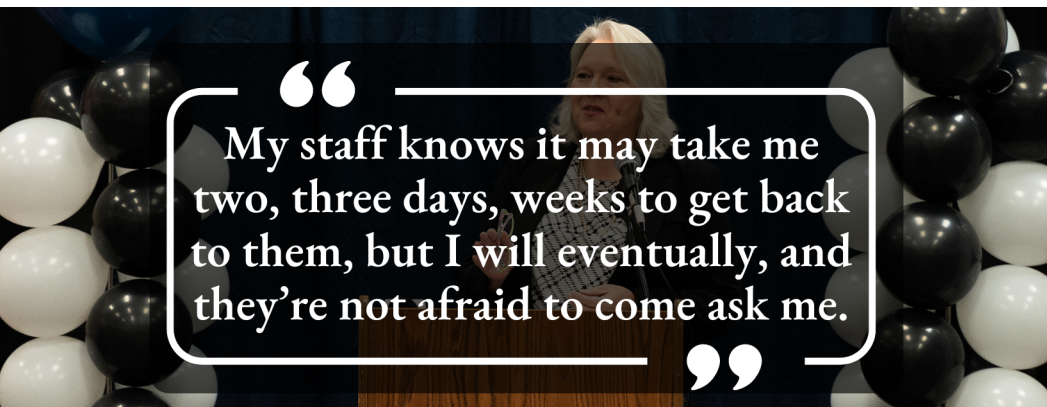
²² Ellen Goldring, Mollie Rubin, and Mariesa Herrmann, "The Role of Assistant Principals: Evidence and Insights for Advancing School Leadership," Wallace Foundation, April 2021.

²³ Jason A. Grissom, Anna J. Egalite, Constance A. Lindsay, "How Principals Affect Students and Schools: A Systematic Synthesis of Two Decades of Research," Wallace Foundation, February 2021.



positions. While diffusing leadership can help make responsibilities more manageable, principals must ensure each member of their team has the necessary training and skills to best serve their school.²²

Principals also need their teachers in the right places to maximize the growth of students. In high-growth schools, principals place their highest performing teachers with their lowest-achieving students. The pressures of standardized tests can negatively influence the placement of teachers. In an attempt to better test scores, some principals concentrate high-performing teachers in tested grade levels and low-performing teachers in the untested classes of K-2; however, congregating low-performing teachers into lower grade levels not only results in lower performance on classroom assessments but also impacts future high-stakes assessments, given that students are starting their new grade levels with insufficient foundational skills.²³



GROWING INSIGHTS OF PLA

The 94 principals who have been selected by Florida TaxWatch as Principal Leadership Award winners since the program’s inception in 2013 come from all parts of Florida, from a small charter elementary school in coastal Franklin County to large urban high schools in Miami-Dade County. As a result of visits with winning principals and roundtable discussions, Florida TaxWatch has identified several “best practices” that are common among the winning principals. Among these are:

- Effective principals are the first staff member students see each morning when they arrive at school;
- Effective principals stress parental involvement, and have an open-door policy;
- Effective principals care about each student, to the point where many students could easily recall one or more personal interactions with the principal that one would typically expect of a favorite teacher;
- Effective principals are involved and engaged in the classroom, often helping to teach classes;
- Effective principals use data prominently in developing learning curriculum;
- Effective principals have created a collaborative culture where teachers feel their voices are heard and respected; and
- Effective principals prioritize becoming a hub for the community and finding ways to engage students’ families, whether it be providing babysitters during parent conferences or maintaining active social media accounts.

These principals have transformed schools with large populations of at-risk students into schools with student learning gains that far exceed those predicted by the state’s value-added model. The observations and experiences shared by the winning principals represent more than just “takeaways” in a report—they represent the foundation for a successful school and for creating a culture in which all students can be successful.

CONTINUING THE DISCUSSION

SUPERINTENDENTS

As the leaders of school districts, we encourage you to share this summary with your principals. By sharing these Florida-based success stories, we hope this report can help inspire and validate the ambitions of school leaders and encourage productive conversation and collaboration.

GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND POLICYMAKERS

K-12 education is the foundation of workforce development. When residents have an education, they are more likely to maintain self-sufficiency, attract high-wage jobs, and contribute higher earnings to the state's economy and tax revenue. Therefore, K-12 education is essential to the growth of Florida and the wellbeing of its taxpayers. Based upon our roundtable discussion, we encourage government officials and policymakers to consider the following observations as they seek the best educational outcomes for Floridians:

- An administrative team with effective training and sufficient funding helps principals manage their various roles;
- Guidance, mental health services, de-escalation training, and relationship training can help at-risk students maintain their focus upon their studies;
- Developing teachers is a process, so retaining teachers—whether through salary, professional development opportunities, or an enticing school culture—saves a principal's time and maximizes the impact of their work;
- Students and teachers benefit from a collaborative environment and shared decision making;
- The flexibility to work with businesses can help schools connect students with careers and help satisfy local workforce demands; and
- Community grants that transform schools into resource hubs can help schools build relationships with families and reduce extraneous stress factors that distract students from studies.

BUSINESS LEADERS

K-12 students are the future workforce. Encouraging the success of schools encourages the development of talent. Businesses can support schools by providing advice, financial assistance, donations, after-school programs, internships, and career pipeline programs.

NON-PROFITS AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

When students and their families face challenges beyond the school day, such as illness, homelessness, or poverty, the personal stresses can negatively impact student performance. To support student achievement throughout the education system, non-profits and community organizations can provide expertise and resources such as clothes, food, medical care, and referrals. When dispersed at the school, these resources may enable guardians to visit the school, opening the doors to greater influence upon their student's achievement.

APPENDIX

Moderator

- Meg Cannan, Senior Research Analyst, Florida TaxWatch

Participants

- Linda Bartberger, Principal, Round Lake Charter School
- James Bray, Principal, Steinhatchee Elementary School
- Saili Hernandez, Principal, Somerset Academy Bay Middle School
- Nancy Holley, Principal, Roulhac Middle School
- Terry Huddleston, Principal, Branford High School
- Rosemarie Maiorini, Principal, Challenger K-8 School of Science and Mathematics
- Lauren Myers, Principal, Okeechobee High School
- Mary Myers, Principal, Riviera Elementary School
- Annessia Powell, Principal, GRASP Academy
- Diane Showalter, Principal, Franklin Academy Pembroke Pines High School
- Eric Willis, Principal, Liberty County High School
- Angela Whiddon, Principal, W.E. Cherry Elementary School

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ABOUT FLORIDA TAXWATCH

As an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit taxpayer research institute and government watchdog, it is the mission of Florida TaxWatch to provide the taxpayers of Florida and public officials with high quality, independent research and analysis of issues related to state and local government taxation, expenditures, policies, and programs. Florida TaxWatch works to improve the productivity and accountability of Florida government. Its research recommends productivity enhancements and explains the statewide impact of fiscal and economic policies and practices on citizens and businesses.

Florida TaxWatch is supported by voluntary, tax-deductible donations and private grants. Donations provide a solid, lasting foundation that has enabled Florida TaxWatch to bring about a more effective, responsive government that is accountable to the citizens it serves since 1979.

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All Florida TaxWatch research is done under the direction of Dominic M. Calabro, President, CEO, Publisher & Editor.

The findings in this Report are based on the data and sources referenced. Florida TaxWatch research is conducted with every reasonable attempt to verify the accuracy and reliability of the data, and the calculations and assumptions made herein. Please feel free to contact us if you feel that this paper is factually inaccurate.

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