

Building a Culture of Success: What Effective Principals Do

The 2022 Florida TaxWatch Principal Leadership Awards Roundtable Discussion Summary and Findings

Florida
TaxWatch



August 2022

this page left blank for formatting purposes



106 North Bronough Street, Tallahassee, FL 32301 floridatxwatch.org o: 850.222.5052 f: 850.222.7476

Senator George S. LeMieux
Chairman of the Board of Trustees

Dominic M. Calabro
President & Chief Executive Officer

Dear fellow taxpayer,

Research has consistently shown that after teachers, principals have the most significant impact on student achievement when it comes to in-school factors. Having an effective principal holds the same impact as an additional three months of learning. The principal's role as a school's instructional leader and the individual most responsible for fostering a positive climate is getting more attention from lawmakers and policymakers.

On May 11, 2022, Florida TaxWatch convened a roundtable of past and present winners of Florida TaxWatch's prestigious Principal Leadership Award, educators, and education stakeholders to discuss the philosophies, strategies, and leadership required to bolster the achievement of at-risk students. Quality education is important to the development of productive, self-sufficient, well-informed citizens as well as a powerful tool for dismantling poverty. As Florida competes within the global economy and seeks the highest quality of life for its residents, placing the right leadership in schools is important for continued progress.

Moderated by Charles Hokanson, Senior Vice President, Community Engagement and Strategic Partnerships at Helios Education Foundation, the roundtable discussion touched upon attracting and retaining high-quality teachers; developing teachers; building a productive school culture; inviting stakeholders from beyond the building into schools; and managing time and personnel.

Florida TaxWatch is pleased to present this summary report and its recommendations, and we look forward to a continued discussion with Florida lawmakers and policymakers during the 2023 legislative session and beyond.

Sincerely,

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

Dominic M. Calabro
President & CEO

Contents

Introduction	1
Attracting and Retaining High-Quality Teachers	2
<i>Roundtable Summary</i>	2
<i>Supporting Research</i>	2
<i>Key Takeaways</i>	3
Developing Teachers	4
<i>Roundtable Summary</i>	4
<i>Supporting Research</i>	4
<i>Key Takeaways</i>	5
Building a Productive School Culture	6
<i>Roundtable Summary</i>	6
<i>Supporting Research</i>	7
<i>Key Takeaways</i>	7
Inviting Stakeholders into the Building	8
<i>Roundtable Summary</i>	8
<i>Supporting Research</i>	8
<i>Key Takeaways</i>	9
Managing Time and Personnel	10
<i>Roundtable Summary</i>	10
<i>Supporting Research</i>	10
<i>Key Takeaways</i>	11
Growing Insights of PLA	12
Continuing the Discussion	13
<i>Superintendents</i>	13
<i>Government Officials and Policymakers</i>	13
<i>Business Leaders</i>	13
<i>Non-Profits and Community Organizations</i>	13
Appendix	14
<i>Moderator</i>	14
<i>Participants</i>	14
<i>Florida TaxWatch Staff</i>	14

Introduction

Among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school, 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. Each year, Florida TaxWatch recognizes the top three elementary, top three middle, and top three high school principals, determined by a unique, data-driven methodology.

This 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 May 2022, Florida TaxWatch hosted a two-hour roundtable with the latest PLA winners to discuss the philosophies, strategies, and challenges of effective principal leadership that should be known if the state is to advance these leadership qualities within our public schools. The winning principals, along with visiting principals from Duval County and a former principal (and PLA winner) from Mater Academy, Inc. are identified in the appendix. Moderated by Florida TaxWatch board member Charles Hokanson, Senior Vice President, Community Engagement and Strategic Partnerships at Helios Education Foundation, the participants discussed the following topics:

- Attracting and retaining high-quality teachers;
- Developing teachers;
- Building a productive school culture;
- Inviting stakeholders from beyond the building into schools; 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 and examination of what these principals are doing to make their schools so successful, and what policymakers can do to begin to institutionalize these effective leadership practices, rather than represent 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 for 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 and Retaining High-Quality Teachers

Roundtable Summary

Attracting high-quality teachers is more important than ever, as schools face unprecedented vacancy rates and threats of isolation imposed by rising costs of living. One principal discussed a Florida county with more than 1,000 vacancies and teachers taking second jobs to make ends meet. Meanwhile, principals cannot afford mistakes when building their staff; each addition will influence the carefully crafted culture and hold real consequences for the students placed before them.

To recruit teachers, the principals lean upon their positive cultures. The candidates speak alone with staff members and explore classrooms, learning about the relationships, expectations, and routines of the school before even accepting an offer. At hiring fairs, one principal sends teachers to share their stories, ensuring potential candidates know the gratification of working for an at-risk school. These efforts help secure a mutual fit.

“I look for someone who’s really passionate about wanting to be in these positions.”

The principals are transparent about the challenges of their communities but transform the challenges into passion. Passion reigns as a prized quality of candidates. Principals want to invest in teachers who have the skillset to enhance the school but also a reason to stay; therefore, schools are often willing to guide professional development to make the relationship work, even if candidates do not have a traditional teaching background or need help honing their craft.

“We can’t afford to lose teachers anymore. I was letting go teachers that now I’d have to grab because there is nobody out there to replace them. We need to train them. Even if they are not up to par, we need to figure out how to do the professional development.”

To ensure hired teachers want to stay, the principals focus upon building intentional, positive relationships. The effective principals treat each teacher as an individual; listen to personal stories; host open-door policies; acknowledge teachers’ needs; and celebrate wins (even small ones). They find ways to express appreciation of teachers, whether through praise, gifts, personal exchanges, or adherence to preferences. The frequency of such interactions must strike a balance; it must be often enough that a teacher feels validated but not so often that the interactions feel meaningless.

“Find a way to make that teacher feel wanted—feel an integral part of the school—and retain them in that aspect. Make them an integral part of the solution.”

Supporting Research

Teacher effectiveness is the most important driver of success, but retention is not guaranteed. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated an already stressful profession. Both before and after the onset of the pandemic, most who left teaching claimed the pay did not merit the disappointments and stress of the job. In October 2020, about a quarter of sampled public-school teachers planned to leave the profession before the end of the year.³ Principals must make teaching at their schools worthwhile in order to attract and retain high-quality teachers.

³ RAND Corporation, “Stress Topped the Reasons Why Public School Teachers Quit, Even Before COVID-19,” 2021.

Based upon an extensive body of research on teacher recruitment and retention, the Learning Policy Institute has identified five major factors, and related policies, that influence teachers' decisions to enter, stay in, or leave the teaching profession.⁴ Two of the five—improving teachers' working conditions, and providing support to develop them professionally—were strategies identified during the PLA Roundtable.

The Harvard Graduate School of Education (2013) reviewed evidence from six recent studies of what fuels high rates of teacher turnover in schools that serve large numbers of low-income students of color. These studies collectively suggest that teachers who leave high-poverty schools are not fleeing their students, but rather the poor working conditions that make it difficult for them to teach and their students to learn. Together, these studies find that the working conditions teachers prize most—and those that best predict their satisfaction and retention—are social in nature and include school leadership, collegial relationships, and elements of school culture.⁵

The perception of a school's administration, based upon factors such as leadership and provided support, is often the top reason teachers identify for leaving or staying in the profession, or in a given school, outweighing even salary considerations for some teachers.⁶ Research shows that personal growth and the ability to receive support from administrators regarding emotional, environmental, and instructional wellbeing impacted a teacher's decision to stay or leave in hard-to-staff schools.⁷

Salary and compensation are also often cited as a primary influence driving teachers' choice of workplace but tend to be beyond the control of the principal. Recent Florida legislation helped boost the state's average starting salary to \$44,040, ranking 16th in the nation; however, experienced teachers are not receiving raises comparable to the rest of the nation, with Florida ranking 48th in the nation for average teacher salary.⁸

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 tell their new teachers up front before being hired what to expect and what they will encounter.
- Effective principals leverage a teacher's skillset and passion, then support their progress through professional development.

4 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.

5 Nicole S. Simon and Susan Moore Johnson, "Teacher Turnover in High-Poverty Schools: What We Know and Can Do," Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, Harvard Graduate School of Education, August 2013. See also, Tray Geiger and Margarita Pivovarova, "The Effects of Working Conditions on Teacher Retention," April 2018.

6 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.

7 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.

8 National Education Association, "NEA Unveils New Nationwide Data on Educator Pay and School Funding," April 2022.

Developing Teachers

Roundtable Summary

“The only constant is change.”

Whether it is advanced technology, new strategies, or changing standards, schools should expect continual changes to their teaching practices. The success of students depends upon dedication to progress. Effective principals lead this progress, setting expectations early and steering teacher development through the use of evaluations and collaborative opportunities. This leadership also helps teachers feel supported, reinforcing retention.

Evaluations provide teachers with ongoing, timely feedback. Effective principals visit their teachers often in order to monitor progress, offer help, and interact with students. If other administrators conduct evaluations, they should align with the practices of the principal to ensure a united front and clear expectations.

Evaluations are only effective if they act as a learning moment. Principals help teachers learn through modeling, actionable plans, and follow-up visits. It is especially useful when principals focus upon developing skills with high leverage. Not only does it impact more teaching moments but it also eases the stress of teachers; if principals witness a “bad day,” they can come back tomorrow to see better use of the developing skill.

“I’m not there for the ‘gotcha game’ or trying to get you in trouble. It’s trying to get you better every day.”

Effective principals make clear that evaluations are not tests or punitive but rather a pillar of support. To express the right sentiment, many principals attempt to empower teachers throughout the process. One principal recommended a pre-meeting, offering teachers an opportunity to share which skills they want the evaluation to address. Another school is removing tension from evaluations by eliminating formal ratings and only providing comments as feedback.

Effective principals establish routine collaboration, so teachers also learn from each other. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) connect teachers of related grade level or subject matter for plannings and trainings. PLCs provide a time where best practices can be celebrated and taught across the school. Principals may also implement vertical teaming, which facilitates conversations among teachers of different grade levels. Vertical teaming guides productive instruction by identifying the foundational skills expected for the following grade level as well as current gaps that need remediation.

To get the most from routine collaboration, principals must find a way to secure commitment rather than compliance. If collaborative sessions are designed to the current needs of teachers, allows time for questions, enables the sharing of practices, and result in observable, positive outcomes for students, teachers are more likely to feel committed. This commitment opens teachers to growth and inspiring them to support the growth of their fellow teachers.

Supporting Research

A principal’s time in the classroom should be focused on enhancing the ability of the teachers to serve their students. Research on principal leadership indicates that principals are most effective when they focus on instructional improvement, share decision-making with teachers, and encourage teachers to work together actively toward instructional improvement.⁹ This collaboration has shown to improve teacher efficacy, attitudes about teaching, understanding of students, and levels of trust.

⁹ 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.

Teacher evaluations are unproductive without broader coaching and feedback. As principals conduct evaluations, the interactions must be deliberate. Focus upon high-leverage skills, the foundational skills teachers can yield on a daily basis, most greatly supports teachers and improves classroom instruction. Development of new skills requires monitored progress—measured by observations and valid metrics, such as formative assessments—and a commitment from the teacher, which may be influenced by their relationship with the principal. As principals guide the development of new skills, they should protect teachers’ sense of autonomy.¹⁰

Effective principals not only support teachers directly but also facilitate the teachers’ abilities to support each other. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) can be effective tools for collaboration and have bettered student learning outcomes in many schools. Effective PLCs tend to share five features that often operate simultaneously:

- Shared values and vision that emphasizes a focus on student learning;
- Collective responsibility for student learning that helps to sustain commitment and put collegial pressure on colleagues to engage, learn, and improve;
- Reflective professional inquiry that manifests through conversations about important issues, the application of new knowledge, and the identification of solutions to support students and their needs;
- Collaboration that moves beyond superficial interactions of help, support, or assistance; and
- An emphasis on group and individual learning where teachers develop as colleagues and professionals, but also maintain an orientation toward inquiry and its benefits for improving their own practice and the practices in their school.¹¹

Principals facilitate the core elements needed to sustain PLCs by sharing leadership and by building leadership capacity on a school-wide level. Effective principals set the vision and activate the leadership of teachers, which helps the teachers to feel a sense of ownership in and loyalty to the school’s direction.¹²

Key Takeaways

- The importance of investing in teachers and developing them professionally cannot be overstated.
- Effective principals recognize the importance of a collaborative principal-teacher relationship and a shared vision, and they understand the impact their support has on their teachers.
- Effective principals build a positive school culture through participatory decision-making, collaboration, and shared instructional leadership that puts the students’ learning first and turn a teacher’s best practice into a schoolwide best practice.
- 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.

¹⁰ Wallace Foundation, “How Principals Affect Students and Schools,” February 2021.

¹¹ Stoll, L., Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Wallace, M., & Thomas, S., “Professional Learning Communities: A Review of the Literature,” *Journal of Educational Change*, 7(4), 2006, retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ111683.pdf>, July 11, 2021.

¹² Wallace Foundation, “The School Principal as Leader: Guiding Schools to Better Teaching and Learning 2013, retrieved from <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/overview-the-school-principal-as-leader.aspx>, July 11, 2021.

Building a Productive School Culture

Roundtable Summary

The winning principals are ever present for their students and are always willing to listen. They recommend seeking feedback from teachers, students, and parents. When the community sees feedback transformed into change, it benefits from both the improvement and a sense of ownership.

“They buy into it if they see we are giving them the opportunity to say... ‘this is what we need at our school’... that’s how you get the culture to change.”

To ready at-risk students for learning, the principals suggest instituting systems that alleviate stress. Educators can be trained to monitor students’ emotions and practice de-escalation. Schools can offer access to resources—such as clothes or food—either directly or through partnerships with local organizations. Principals can establish health-focused routines; for example, one school teaches taekwondo as a physical outlet and tool for self-control.

“Our kids come in already up here—this is the breaking point; our kids are so close to it...A lot of times, it’s simple. Hey, man, I’m here to help you.”

For students to have the trust and motivation to learn, they need to like their teachers. One principal recommends a training for teachers called “Capturing Kids’ Hearts.” The training teaches teachers how to build relationships with students and how to encourage students to build relationships with each other. Implementing the training’s strategies, schools are able to function like a family, with members ready to support each other’s success.

A productive environment also requires high expectations. For some schools, that high expectation may be that every student graduates. For others, they may be ready to push for industry certifications and college enrollment. Every student, parent, and teacher must share the expectations to keep the community accountable to achievement.

“It’s making every stakeholder responsible for where this new concept of a school is going. It isn’t anymore ‘that school that was okay’... It is now something that is going to create a product that will open doors.”

Principals should set expectations for their school early. To give teachers a sense of ownership, principals can invite teachers to help set the school’s vision. To involve families, principals coordinate informational meetings and sessions for guidance, where students and parents can learn about postsecondary options. Families may be unaware that options such as college are feasible for their children, so exposing a broader range of opportunities can motivate and inspire hard work. As students’ hard work begins to show progress, even if their grades remain low, teachers can help maintain students’ spirits by celebrating small wins.

Lastly, the principals emphasized using data to inform decisions. Data help reveal students’ needs, but educators should be cautious to consider the extraneous factors that can lower grades and test scores. Effective principals model to teachers how to interpret and utilize data. When teachers own the data, they can develop supporting lessons and empower students with goalsetting. One school encourages a fast reaction to data by requiring a daily intervention period based upon the findings of formative assessments.

“When we make the decisions without data, it is not a plan. It is merely an opinion.”

Supporting Research

Research suggests that the best administrators spend an immense amount of time developing, improving, and investing in relationships, 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.¹³

Many schools address out-of-school barriers to learning to cultivate a more productive environment. Community schools provide resources and services, which has been linked to improved “attendance, behavior, social functioning, and academic achievement” in under-resourced, underserved areas.¹⁴ Schools that prioritize time for fitness help their students achieve the associated health benefits of physical activity, improved grades, and better focus in the classroom.¹⁵

Research suggests students are likely to meet expectations, so setting an environment with an emphasis upon achievement is crucial. As the instructional leader, principals should set the vision for the school and help teachers understand the role of differentiated instruction for ensuring academic growth for all students.¹⁶

Data is the crux for monitoring and understanding student needs, measuring the effectiveness of teaching practices, and informing the trainings of teachers. It also enables a measurable, goalsetting 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.¹⁷

Key Takeaways

- Effective principals remain visible and approachable through the school day. They are the first and last person that the teacher sees on a regular day. They greet their students at the school door and move with the student body throughout the school day.
- 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 not only encourage the formation of positive relationships but equip their teachers with strategies to do so.
- 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.

13 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.

14 Learning Policy Institute, “Community Schools as an Effective School Improvement Strategy: A Review of the Evidence,” December 2017.

15 Center for Disease Control and Prevention, “CDC Healthy Schools: Physical Education,” retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/physicalactivity/physical-education.htm#:~:text=There%20are%20many%20benefits%20of%20physical%20education%20in,education%20does%20not%20negatively%20affect%20students%E2%80%99%20academic%20achievement.,> accessed on May 24, 2022.

16 Hanover Research, “High Expectations and Student Success,” November 2012.

17 Pathways to College Network, “Using Data to Improve Educational Outcomes,” 2007.

Inviting Stakeholders into the Building

Roundtable Summary

Student learning gains occur in the classroom, but they can be more impactful when paired with encouragement beyond the building. The winning PLA principals have all transformed their schools into beacons for the community.

“Once they are in, they are part of the solution, but you can’t have a relationship with people you never see.”

The principals discussed being sensitive to the needs of family, whether they be biological relatives or current guardians of students. Families may not be comfortable using school portals, so principals should allow alternate forms of communication. When families are needed at student achievement conferences or informational meetings, schools can operate with extended hours that accommodate work schedules. Schools can provide free meals and babysitters (older students earning volunteer hours) to further increase accessibility. One principal recommended pairing meetings with student performances, such as a dance recital or band concert, which enhances the incentive for visiting the school.

Schools must also remedy negative perceptions of academia. Prior experiences with schools, among other circumstances, can make families hesitant to visit. An effective principal institutes practices and routines that help students’ families feel welcomed. To build trust, staff can be encouraged to visit local hangouts and events. This shows respect, appreciation, and support for the families they serve.

“We would go to the homes. We would go to the neighborhood parks. We would go to the local ball games... It’s a two-way street. We welcome you here and we also want to come there and support you.”

Schools can also become a community resource. One principal recommended partnering with local organizations to host a resource fair coinciding with student orientation. Another principal utilizes community grants, which enabled her school to open a food pantry, provide free clothes, host a dental bus, and hire a social worker. Soon they will hire an onsite doctor. By providing important resources in the building, school visits not only become a priority but also reduce the stress factors students face at home.

“We became the hub not only for educating your kid but for helping you with everything, so that’s when our parents became involved with everything we had going on at our school.”

While families are key contributors to a school’s community, other stakeholders can also help. For example, one principal has opened his doors to alumni. United by school pride, the alumni have visionary ideas for helping the school and are energized to help the current students reach more successful outcomes. Another school strives to make partnerships with businesses so that curriculum and school programs can best align with positive employment outcomes.

Supporting Research

Family involvement and community partnerships hold the potential to improve students’ attendance, academic achievement, and behavior. Family involvement is impactful at all levels of education, but the greatest gains are seen within elementary school. 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; therefore, schools should equip parents with the information needed to hold such conversations.¹⁸

¹⁸ 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.

While families typically want to support their children, situations such as limited financial resources, rigid work schedules, being a single parent, and negative perceptions of school all challenge a families' ability to visit the school. To realize the positive outcomes bestowed by family involvement, effective principals actively work to welcome participation and remove barriers to access.¹⁹

Families with greater involvement describe their schools as “empowering and welcoming.” A developing area of research, studies suggest the following as features that foster an environment facilitating 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.²⁰

In underserved and under-resourced areas, community grants have been utilized to better integrate families by providing resources and services, such as free food or dental care. Once families are in the building, they can participate in shared decision-making that helps educators better serve the students. Specific outcomes, such as reduced absenteeism, improved learning outcomes, and reported positive school climates, are attributed to the meaningful engagement of families and locals.²¹

Schools also benefit from activating community members beyond students' families. Community members, from museum coordinators to business leaders to pastors, 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 student achievement.²²

Key Takeaways

- Effective principals prioritize connections with students' families by removing obstacles to contact and encouraging staff members to partake in the local community.
- 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.

19 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.

20 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.

21 Learning Policy Institute, “Community Schools as an Effective School Improvement Strategy: A Review of the Evidence,” December 2017.

22 School Community Network, “Handbook on Family and Community Engagement,” 2011.

Managing Time and Personnel

Roundtable Summary

Principals wear many hats—vision setter, key administrator, instructional leader, liaison to families—and, to balance their responsibilities, they must learn to manage their most scarce resource: time.

For many principals, their schedules extend beyond an average school day. Often choosing to maximize their role as vision setter and instructional leader, principals spend their days in classrooms and leave administrative duties for after-hours. Serving as a liaison to families means never having a closing time, with principals willing to take calls throughout the night to ensure the wellbeing of their students. The principals acknowledged times that were once natural breaks, such as traveling, have vanished in a world where one virtual meeting can end at the start of the next, which can be overwhelming.

“Even though we’re off the clock, we’re not off the clock... We’re humans, and if we don’t have that mental health in check, then we’re not going to deliver.”

The list of things to do seems endless, but effective principals know they must set priorities and boundaries. One principal discussed creating a list of the most pressing items each week with time built-in for the flexibility needed to tackle unforeseen demands. Another claimed they saved one day of their weekend to be work-free, ensuring a time of restoration before the upcoming week. Time is also better managed when personnel are managed effectively.

Effective principals do not run schools by themselves; they ensure they have the right people in the right places. They hire an administrative team that facilitates their vision and are trusted to perform delegated tasks. As they consider the performance of teachers, they should be willing to adapt placements based upon students’ needs; for example, if one of the most experienced teachers is assigned to advanced students, it may make more sense to utilize the teacher’s skillset to aid the achievement of students in greater need of support. Effective principals can also manage how their personnel interact with each other, establishing times, teams, and agendas for planning sessions and trainings. One principal mentioned compensating teachers to plan together during the summer.

“I put my aces in places.”

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.²³ Regardless of why principals lacked presence in classrooms, teachers consistently shared their belief that administrators’ absences limited their credibility among the faculty.²⁴

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. And there is no substitute for that knowledge.²⁵

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

24 *Ibid.*

25 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.

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 should 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 specific leadership 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.²⁶

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.²⁷

Historically, it has been a principal's duty to counsel whether departure is the right career step for teachers who do not align with their vision.²⁸ Present teacher shortages seem to shift principals away from the practice of removing teachers and toward greater focus upon professional development.

Key Takeaways

- Much of principals' work is done during non-working hours (nights and weekends). With cell phones and virtual meetings, the principal is always accessible.
- Effective principals identify the strengths of their staff in order to place employees in the positions where they are most needed.

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

27 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.

28 Ibid.

Growing Insights of PLA

The 72 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 to the winners' schools, and with the holding of education roundtables since 2018, 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 guardians, whether it be providing babysitters during parent conferences or running a food pantry on campus.

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 as well as encourage conversation and collaboration among principals.

Government Officials and Policymakers

K-12 education is the foundation of workforce development. When workers are able to complete workforce development, they are more likely to maintain self-sufficiency, attract high-wage industry, and contribute higher earnings to the state's Gross Domestic Product 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 as they seek the best educational outcomes for Floridians:

- An administrative team with effective training and sufficient funding helps principals juggle 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, so schools should hold the autonomy and flexibility to be a community built by its members; 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. Supporting schools contributes to the availability and development of talent, especially within local areas. Businesses can support schools by providing advice, financial assistance, donations, after-school programs, and internships.

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 help enable guardians to visit the school, opening the doors to greater influence upon their student's achievement.

Appendix

Moderator

Charles Hokanson, Senior Vice President, Community Engagement and Strategic Partnerships, Helios Education Foundation

Participants

Kathleen Adkins, Reynolds Lane Elementary School

Bonnie Brett, Manatee Charter School

Tiffany Green, Annie R. Morgan Elementary School

Lewis Jackson, Dania Elementary School

Judith Marty, Mater Academy, Inc.

Jose “Tiger” Nunez, Mater Academy High School

Jose Rubio, Oak Creek Charter School

Jacob Russell, Chamberlain High School

Laura Touchstone, Pine Forest High School

Hollie Wilkins, Montclair Elementary School

Florida TaxWatch Staff

Bob Nave, Sr. Vice President of Research

Meg Cannan, Policy Researcher

ABOUT FLORIDA TAXWATCH

As an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit taxpayer research institute and government watchdog, it is the mission of Florida TaxWatch to provide the citizens 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 residents and businesses.

Florida TaxWatch is supported by voluntary, tax-deductible memberships and private grants, and does not solicit government appropriations. Membership support provides a solid, lasting foundation that has enabled Florida TaxWatch to bring about a more effective, responsive government that is accountable to the residents it serves since 1979.

FLORIDA TAXWATCH RESEARCH LEADERSHIP

Dominic M. Calabro	President & CEO
Tony Carvajal	Executive VP
Robert G. Nave	Sr. VP of Research
Kurt Wenner	Sr. VP of Research
Steve Evans	Senior Advisor

FLORIDA TAXWATCH VOLUNTEER LEADERSHIP

U.S. Senator George LeMieux	Chairman
Piyush Patel	Chairman-Elect
James Repp	Treasurer
Marva Brown Johnson	Secretary
Sen. Pat Neal	Imm. Past Chairman

RESEARCH PROJECT TEAM

Tony Carvajal	Executive Vice President	
Meg Cannan	Policy Researcher	<i>Lead Researcher & Author</i>
Chris Barry	Vice President of Communications	<i>Design, Layout, Publication</i>

All Florida TaxWatch research 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.


The research findings and recommendations of Florida TaxWatch do not necessarily reflect the view of its members, staff, Executive Committee, or Board of Trustees; and are not influenced by the individuals or organizations who may have sponsored the research.



Stay Informed

 floridataxwatch.org

 [@floridataxwatch](https://www.facebook.com/floridataxwatch)

 [@floridataxwatch](https://twitter.com/floridataxwatch)

 [@fltaxwatch](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC...)

Florida TaxWatch
106 N. Bronough St.
Tallahassee, FL 32301

o: 850.222.5052
f: 850.222.7476

Copyright © August 2022
Florida TaxWatch
Research Institute, Inc.
All Rights Reserved