Deborah Jackson
As told to Valerie von Frank

As a classroom teacher and administrator, I worked under some very dynamic principals who modeled for me what good leaders do. They created environments in which kids achieved and schools became communities. I observed my middle school principal's instructional leadership and how she helped the school close achievement gaps. At high school, the principal modeled partnering with the community, an important principle today with such scarce resources.

Years ago, a principal was just a manager, managing resources. Everything else fell into place. Now, we've been forced to dig deeper. We've changed, our kids have changed, and our world has changed. Leaders have to look at instruction, ensure students are receiving a viable curriculum, and look at standards and assessments to be able to apply those. Then we have to align with the state. We have to look at the effectiveness of teachers and administrators and see what they need in order to do the work. We're asked to be little mayors, because we are in our communities facilitating discussions about instruction. We have to be knowledgeable about data. Our schools are very complex.

We have to be able to lead a range of teachers. We have generational pockets. Teachers who have been previously trained to go into their classrooms and close the door now have to collaborate in teams, have to talk about instruction and the impact on kids. Leaders can't assume adults know how to collaborate, because collaboration takes trust. Leaders have to facilitate discussions and professional development around how to collaborate. That learning is critical when you bring people from various backgrounds and knowledge bases together and ask them to open up about their classrooms, students, and personal instruction.

We have to select personnel and support and retain them. With frozen salaries, we have to keep teachers motivated. Leaders need the skill set to be able to move people. Professional learning time is critical to sustaining teachers.

We have redesigned our school's master schedule to allow teachers to meet for professional development during the school day. Our school has to have common language around professional development. Teachers all meet in collaborative teams by department for 90-minute blocks at least once a week and usually twice.

School leaders have to be experts in what we're talking about for our teachers to build capacity. Every other month, my administrators, myself, or other experts come in to guide learning. We monitor teacher learning, knowing that educational power is in the staff, and motivate by offering professional development points for teachers to participate. The points are good toward their recertification. We also have to build teacher capacity to be leaders, so teachers sometimes lead our professional development.

Finally, as school leaders, we are brokers with the district to get the resources we need, whether that is a released day for professional development, a two-hour student released time for additional teacher learning, or other resources. Professional development increases individual and team effectiveness -- improving teaching and learning in the process and benefiting students.

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