

2025 PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP AWARDS ROUNDTABLE SUMMARY

August 2025





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Piyush Patel
Chairman of the Board of Trustees

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DEAR TAXPAYER,

Research has consistently shown that, next to teachers, principals have the most significant impact on student academic achievement when it comes to in-school factors. Having an effective principal has the same impact as a student having an additional three months of learning per year. The principal's role as a school's instructional leader is to provide a climate that fosters positive learning and quality education for all students. Effective principals can transform mediocre schools into exceptional schools with high student achievement levels, and these principals continue to gain the attention of lawmakers and policymakers.

On May 14, 2025, Florida TaxWatch convened a roundtable of this year's winners of Florida TaxWatch's prestigious Principal Leadership Award to discuss strategies, leadership techniques, and insights required to bolster the achievement of at-risk students. Quality education is important to the development of productive, self-sufficient, well-informed citizens and is 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 steady advancement.

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 in advance of the 2026 legislative session.

Sincerely,

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

Dominic M. Calabro
President & CEO

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Attracting and Retaining High-Quality Teachers.....	2
Developing Teachers.....	4
Building Relationships with Stakeholders Beyond the Campus	6
Managing Time and Personnel	8
Growing Insights of PLA	10
Continuing the Discussion.....	11
<i>Superintendents</i>	11
<i>Government Officials and Policymakers</i>	11
<i>Business Leaders</i>	11
<i>Non-Profits and Community Organizations</i>	11
Appendix.....	12

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 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; however, high quality principals have a direct and compelling impact on securing, nurturing, and retaining great teachers. 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 those students consistently outperform other 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.

This program, the first of its kind in the United States, 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.

On May 14, 2025, Florida TaxWatch hosted a one-hour roundtable discussion with the latest PLA winners to discuss the strategies, leadership techniques, insights, and challenges of effective principal leadership. 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.

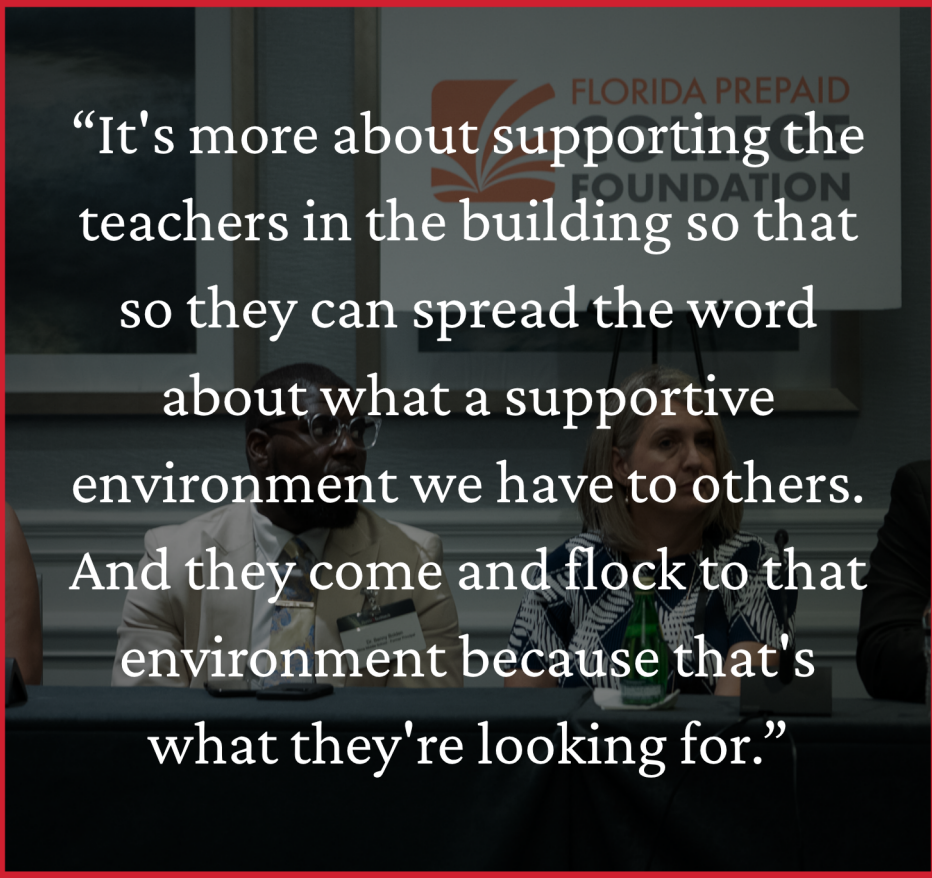
Please note that this report is intended to be a starting point for further discussion and examination of what these principals are doing to make their schools so successful, and what policymakers can do to begin to institutionalize these effective leadership practices, and not a comprehensive review 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 DISCUSSION



“It's more about supporting the teachers in the building so that so they can spread the word about what a supportive environment we have to others. And they come and flock to that environment because that's what they're looking for.”

Finding, developing, and retaining teachers looks different now compared to five years ago, as schools face increasing burn-out and low teacher wages that strain individuals' ability to adapt to changing environments. With fewer young professionals choosing to pursue teaching degrees, a dwindling talent pool also threatens the education industry. One principal discussed the value of building a team of trusted individuals they can lean on to help in areas that are lacking or facing staffing shortages.

While heavy turnover within these principals' schools is not prevalent, many credit this toward building supportive relationships with their teachers. Others commented on the value of finding creative ways to give their staff time to earn extra income at second jobs or additional planning time through eight-period school schedules. These efforts create a more flexible environment for their staff to take advantage of work opportunities others may not have and continue to fulfill a crucial role within the education system as educators.



“We partner with community organizations who hire teachers to also work after school hours and, so on top of the \$15,000 or \$20,000 [yearly income] increase, there's also an opportunity to make hourly dollars.”

The winning principals are transparent about the challenges within their communities and how they can transform the challenges into success for their staff and students. Principals want to provide incentives and investment opportunities for their teachers and students. This not only helps to enhance the culture within the school but also within their surrounding community. The principals were also open about the challenges of addressing mental health among their staff. Creating environments and relationships with their faculty where they feel safe and heard when airing their concerns and issues to their leaders is a significant role many principals encompass.



Encouraging autonomy for high-performing teachers is another tool effective principals use to instill trust and confidence among their staff. This autonomy also helps teachers work together and empowers each other to create successful school outcomes which, in turn, reduces the attrition rate of teachers in these schools. The principals acknowledged that today's teachers may have different mentorship needs than previous generations of teachers, but these changes often provide greater opportunities for personal and professional growth that benefits school outcomes.

SUPPORTING RESEARCH

Nationwide, states are struggling to hire, develop, and retain teachers. In 2024, Florida ranked 50th nationwide in teacher pay. Over the last several decades, salaries for teachers have decreased by 15.7% when adjusted for inflation, despite recent investments in raising teacher pay.³ At the beginning of the 2024-25 school year, teacher vacancy rates were at 64 percent across the state. Furthermore, a recent report from the Florida Department of Education shows a 9.8 percent decrease in people completing a teacher-education program during 2022-23. Consistent with previous years, Exceptional Student Education (ESE) teachers have the highest percentage of courses taught by out-of-field teachers.⁴

Teacher salaries and compensation continue to be major considerations for teachers' choice of workplace but often are beyond the principals' ability to directly control. During the 2023-24 school year, the average teacher salary in Florida was \$54,875 and even with the 3.26 percent increase from the previous year, compensation and salaries remain a challenge with rising inflation and cost of living expenses. Providing opportunities for teachers to make extra money through additional roles within school functions or connecting them with outside organizations that have working hours outside of traditional school schedules go a long way to help close some of the financial barriers for attracting, developing and retaining teachers.

Aside from compensation, strong administrative support and team building efforts are highly coveted practices for attracting and maintaining staff. These efforts contribute to improving instructional, environmental, and emotional wellbeing and can, at times, outweigh salary conditions for some teachers.⁵ These factors are especially true in hard-to-staff schools where teacher retention is more difficult due to the lack of professional development and flexibility offered at many of these schools. According to the Learning Policy Institute, there are five major factors and related policies that impact teachers' decisions to enter, stay, or leave their profession.⁶ Three of the five include improving teachers'

3 National Center of Education Statistics, "Table 211.20. Estimated average annual salary of teachers in public elementary and secondary schools, by state: Selected years, 1969-70 through 2021-22," August 2022.

4 Florida Department of Education, "Identification of High Demand Teacher Needs Areas for 2025-26," January 2025.

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.

working conditions, providing support to new teachers, and ensuring a pathway to employment. All these conditions were strategies discussed during this PLA Roundtable.

Effective principals do not expect their students to leave their personal life and challenges they face at home when they walk through the door. Some principals even go above and beyond and secure funding or resources that alleviate some of the students' needs. Creating better access to student support programs—such as medical care, nutrition services, or counseling—has been linked to improved attendance, social and behavioral functioning, and academic achievement.⁷ This is especially important in underserved areas where hard-to-staff schools often reside.

Research on principal leadership suggests that principals are most effective at developing strong teachers and school administrators when autonomy and support are given to them to execute their jobs. Not only does this build a positive and incentivizing environment for the staff,

but it also improves classroom instruction and better understanding of students and builds trust within the school.⁸ By focusing on building this autonomy and trust between leadership and staff, principals continue to build foundational skills for their teachers and develop high-leverageable skills that improve overall classroom instruction.

Key Takeaways

- Effective principals address teachers' classroom and personal needs to help prevent burnout.
- Effective principals leverage a teachers' skillset and passion, then support their progress through professional development and community partnerships, to leverage opportunities to supplement their earnings.
- 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.



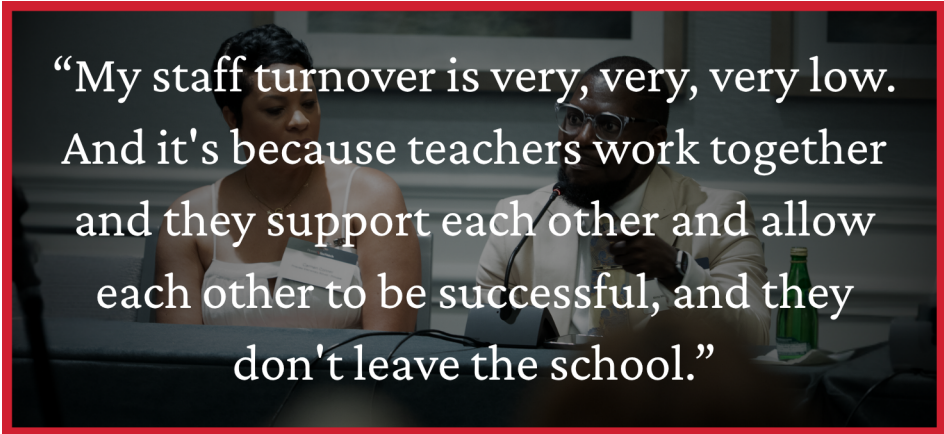
⁷ Learning Policy Institute, "Community Schools as an Effective School Improvement Strategy: A Review of the Evidence," December 2017.

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.

DEVELOPING TEACHERS

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

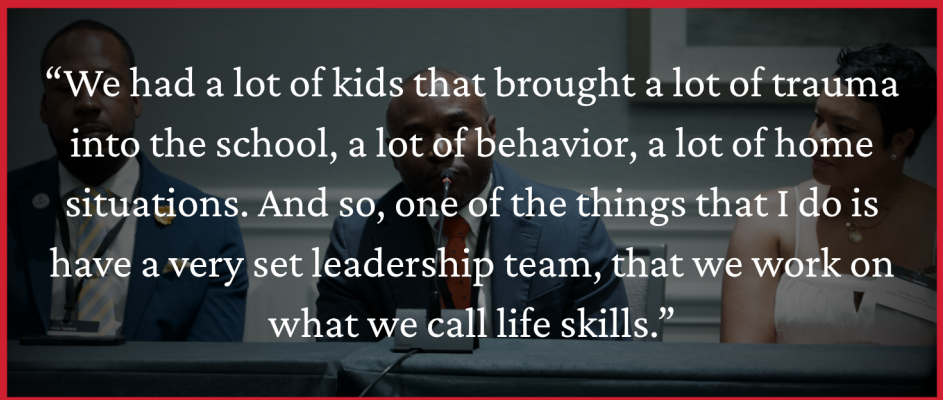
The principals recognize the importance of investing in the professional and personal development of their teachers. Having effective teachers in the classroom is the most influential factor of student achievement. When principals recognize and reward the positive influence teachers have within their classrooms, teachers become inspired to believe in their own abilities and significantly contribute to overall school success. Strong leadership also encourages teachers to feel supported, which reinforces retention.



“My staff turnover is very, very, very low. And it's because teachers work together and they support each other and allow each other to be successful, and they don't leave the school.”

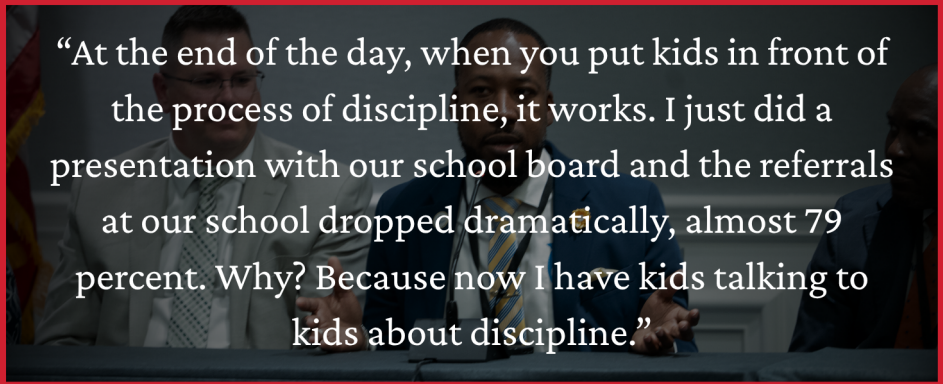
Effective principals set high expectations for themselves, their staff, and students. These expectations help instill order and trust and build strong relationships between everyone involved. Several principals mentioned the importance of “walking-the-walk” and “talking-the-talk” and how it sets an example for both students and teachers to do the same, no matter how difficult a situation may be.

In at-risk schools, many students may carry trauma and out-of-school stress into the building. Finding ways to allow the student to pivot their focus on more positive actions or give them a sense of safety go a long way. Establishing routines and systems in at-risk schools helps teachers, administrators, and students understand their roles and expectations in a clear manner and creates a safe environment for students to learn and interact with others regardless of what happens outside of school hours.



“We had a lot of kids that brought a lot of trauma into the school, a lot of behavior, a lot of home situations. And so, one of the things that I do is have a very set leadership team, that we work on what we call life skills.”

Setting clear expectations can diffuse high-stress and behavioral issues before they become explosive and prepare and equip individuals involved in these situations with skills and resources to deescalate situations and reduce formal referrals. Reducing referrals among students was something many principals focused on within their schools by creating incentive programs that promote buy-in from the staff, principal, and students to achieve the school's goal.



“At the end of the day, when you put kids in front of the process of discipline, it works. I just did a presentation with our school board and the referrals at our school dropped dramatically, almost 79 percent. Why? Because now I have kids talking to kids about discipline.”

Creating tiered support systems was also mentioned among the participants as a crucial strategy to help address academic and behavioral issues with students. These tiered support systems often include several professionals, including a social worker, guidance counselor, principal, assistant principal, special education staff, and a Title One support person. These support systems are even more valuable as these individuals are directly involved in the students' continued support initiatives and as these professionals collaborate and learn from one another.

SUPPORTING RESEARCH

The time a principal spends in the classroom should be focused on enhancing the ability of the teachers to serve their students. Research reveals that principals are most effective when they focus on educational instruction improvement, share decision-making with teachers, and encourage teachers to work collaboratively towards common goals that increase educational outcomes.⁹ This collaboration shows improvement in teacher efficiency, positive school cultures, and positive relationships between students, teachers, and administrators.

Facilitating opportunities for teachers to support each other is another distinguishing factor among effective principals. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) can be effective tools for collaboration and lead to improved student learning outcomes. Successful PLCs often have five features that 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.¹⁰

Applying the core elements of PLCs within schools helps build better leadership capacity by sharing responsibilities among trusted faculty which in turn creates a lasting positive effect throughout the entire school. Effective principals set the vision and initiate the leadership of teachers, which provide a sense of ownership and investment to the school's direction.¹¹ These PLCs also establish support systems for faculty to lean on and learn from to further their professional development while contributing to the school's mission.

Key Takeaways

- The importance of investing in teachers and developing them professionally cannot be overstated.
- Effective principals set high expectations for the schools and foster commitment from students, teachers, and administrators to positively impact school outcomes.
- 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 so they can focus on class instruction.
- 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.



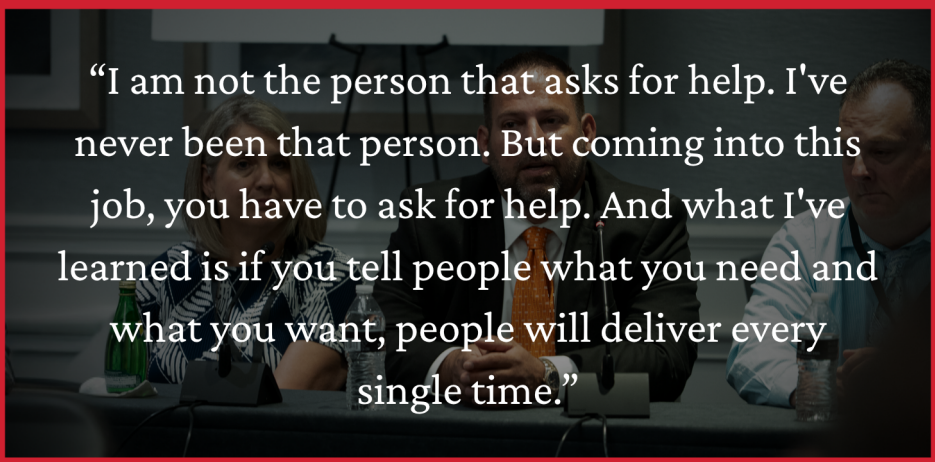
⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ 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/full-text/EJ1111683.pdf>, July 11, 2021.

¹¹ 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 RELATIONSHIPS WITH STAKEHOLDERS BEYOND THE CAMPUS

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION



“I am not the person that asks for help. I've never been that person. But coming into this job, you have to ask for help. And what I've learned is if you tell people what you need and what you want, people will deliver every single time.”

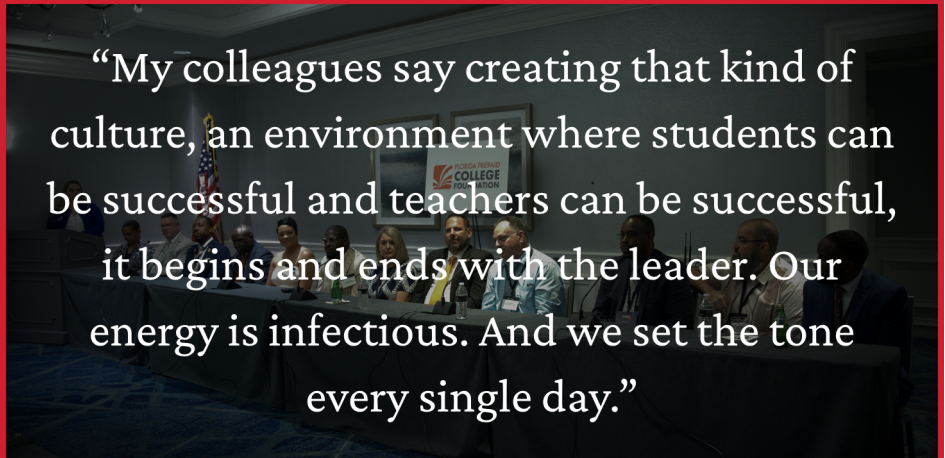
Effective principals are always willing to step up for their students and ask for help when they need to. They rely on feedback from students, faculty, and parents to learn about what is missing or needed within their school community. When this feedback is transformed into positive change, the surrounding community benefits from the improvements and provides a stronger sense of ownership for all involved.



“They can see it translating into community organizations and make that focus within the school even more, intense.”

One principal talked about their community connection made with the National Football League (NFL) organizations that helped establish dream and skill centers along with mentoring services for their students. Another principal connects their students with helping at a local feline care center that takes in large wild cats, mountain lions, cougars, bobcats, and arctic lynxes. These connections to local organizations and opportunities create a sense of pride and belonging for their students which strengthens the trust between students, teachers and principal.

Trust and motivation are important factors that impact student achievement, and building the trust and motivation within the school building starts with the principal. Training teachers how to strengthen relationships with students and how to uplift students to form positive relationships with each other is an invaluable benefit to all.



“My colleagues say creating that kind of culture, an environment where students can be successful and teachers can be successful, it begins and ends with the leader. Our energy is infectious. And we set the tone every single day.”

Principals reinforce the importance of being more than a principal or a spokesperson for their schools. Schools can become an integral part of the community. Some principals mentioned the importance of having parent conferences at places outside of the school walls –such as a Dollar Tree or Ross—to follow up with families with students struggling with issues at school.

Lastly, principals that work alongside the community often yield the most effective community partnerships with businesses. These partnerships can align with the needs of the school and provide opportunities for improvements and educational openings for students to become more involved within their community.

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.¹² To realize the positive outcomes produced by family involvement, effective principals actively work to welcome participation and remove barriers to access.

“Empowering and welcoming” school environments are often associated with greater family involvement. Studies show the following characteristics are found at schools that successfully facilitate strong levels of 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.¹³

Principals and teachers are responsible for setting the expectations and leading by example for their students. Creating an environment that encourages student achievement is also crucial. Students tend to increase or decrease their academic efforts based on the expectations they perceive from their surroundings.¹⁴ Fostering a “growth mindset” within schools encourages students to meet high expectations and understand that hard work to improve academic skills pays off when there are proper support systems in place.

Schools also benefit from activating community members beyond students' families. Community members, from local animal shelters 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.¹⁵

Key Takeaways

- Effective principals prioritize connections with students' families by removing obstacles and maintaining easy pathways for families to connect with school faculty to know 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, and potential partners, such as political or business leaders.

¹² 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.

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ Hanover Research, “High Expectations and Student Success,” November 2012.

¹⁵ School Community Network, “Handbook on Family and Community Engagement,” 2011.

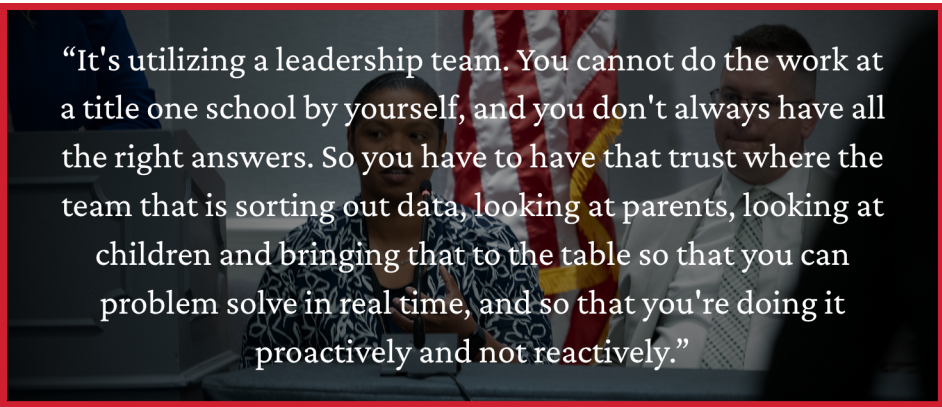
MANAGING TIME AND PERSONNEL

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

Numerous principals mentioned that they are often the first and last to enter the school building each day. There are often not enough hours in the day for the principals to do everything they set out to accomplish. One principal mentioned using the afternoon on Fridays—with the school’s four-day school week—to work on team building exercises like playing putt putt golf or sitting around and getting to know one another. These activities help build stronger relationships between staff and create positive workplace environments where a work-life balance can be more easily achieved.

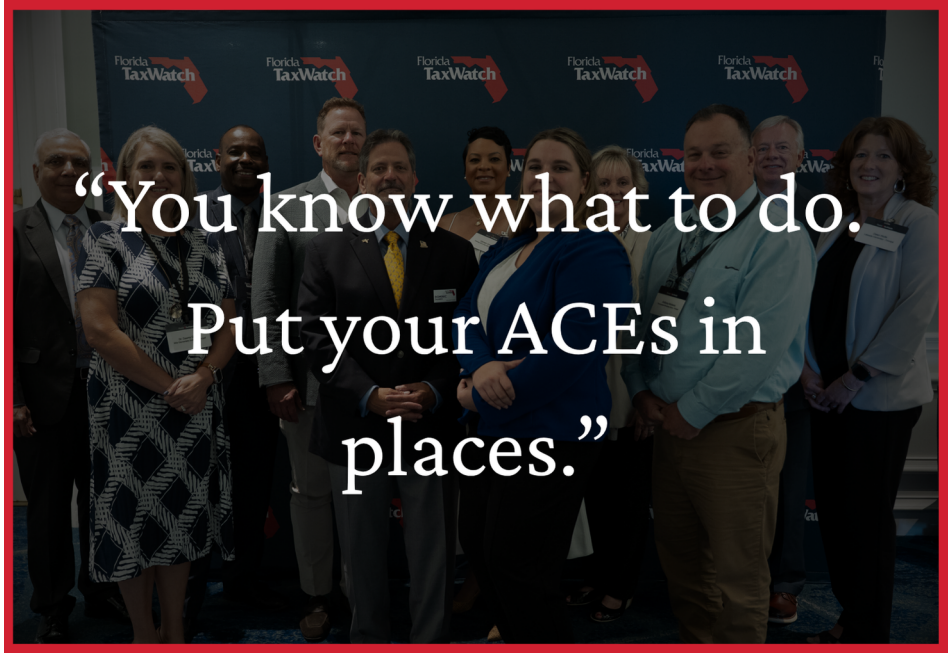
Principals work closely with their assistant principals and often rely on them whenever the principal is unavailable. This partnership gives flexibility for principals to address emerging issues and de-escalate situations before they become major disruptions. Assistant principals often perceive these opportunities to step in and help as opportunities to further develop their career skillsets and become more effective leaders.

Delegation is another critical component for managing time and personnel. Utilizing faculty and staff to implement routines and systems that leverage the strengths of others to improve the school’s ability to run smoothly goes a long way. With these improved routines and systems, greater flexibility is provided to principals to address pressing issues. Building trust and respect between the principal and personnel is the foundation for setting up successful delegation efforts.



The list of responsibilities and “to do” lists seems endless, but effective principals know they must set priorities and boundaries. One principal mentioned knowing the times of the school year where they know they will be staying late to work and figuring out other times throughout the year where they can leave earlier to attend their child’s baseball games. Time management also becomes more efficient when personnel are properly leveraged to meet the needs of the school.

Effective principals do not operate the schools by themselves; they make sure to have the right people in the right places. Hiring administrative teams that carry out their vision and are trusted to execute those delegated tasks is essential. As they consider the performance of teachers, effective principals 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. Leveraging and embracing these changes and supporting the faculty through these changes go a long way in successfully managing personnel while managing to maintain boundaries and effective leadership even when the principal is absent.



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. Regardless of why principals lacked presence in classrooms, teachers consistently shared their belief that administrators' absences limited their credibility among the faculty.¹⁶

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.¹⁷

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.¹⁸

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 which is a flawed practice. 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.¹⁹

Key Takeaways

- Effective principals remain visible throughout the day, modeling their expectations and building trust with staff and students.
- The most important work performed by principals cannot be done from their desk.
- Much of the effective principal's work is done during non-working hours (nights and weekends).
- Effective principals identify the strengths of their staff to place employees in the positions where they are most needed.

¹⁶ Olaf Jorgenson and Christopher Peal, "When Principals Lose Touch with the Classroom," *Principal*, March/April 2008.

¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ Ellen Goldring, Mollie Rubin, and Mariesa Herrmann, "The Role of Assistant Principals: Evidence and Insights for Advancing School Leadership," Wallace Foundation, April 2021.

¹⁹ 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.

GROWING INSIGHTS OF PLA

The 111 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 person staff members and 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 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. 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, 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, and personal stress 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

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- Carmen Conner, Pineview Elementary School
- Dr. Dawna M. O'Brien, Mila Elementary School
- Anthony Montoto, Thonotosassa Elementary School
- Robert Gibson, Palmview Elementary
- Dr. Benny Bolden, Jr., former principal, R. Frank Nims Middle School
- Joshua Bing, Conway Middle School
- Leon Mungin, Jr., Highlands Middle School
- Dr. Henrissa Berry, Young Middle Magnet School
- Walter C. Hall, Leisure City K-8 Center
- Jeremy Knapp, Central High School
- George Morse, Acceleration West
- Kevin Tunning, Lake Placid High School
- Reginald Jeudy, South Area Secondary Intensive Transition

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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.

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