

Management practices

Is the school adapted to the social makeup and various characteristics of its environment? For instance, does it pay attention to the concentration of students from underprivileged areas in its classrooms? If it is situated in a well-off area, does it tailor activities for students arriving with a broader and more diversified base of knowledge and experiences? What sorts of educational and career guidance does it provide for students? Does it promote two-way and effective communication with families and the community? How does it support its teachers? Is teamwork encouraged among the various interveners working with students? The importance placed on school perseverance and monitoring student success by administrators will be reflected in the organizational structures and educational practices put in place. And the quality and relevance of such measures will influence graduation rates.

What the research says

For years, researchers have studied the factors that cause students at some schools to do better than others. More recently, work has focused on certain schools, generally located in disadvantaged areas, where students achieve exceptional results, stay in school, and succeed better than in other comparable schools. These are called “effective schools.”¹

Characteristics of effective schools

- Leadership of the school principal (shared leadership)
- High expectations of all students
- Safe, ordered and positive environment
- Protected school hours (viable, guaranteed curriculum)
- Parental involvement
- Regular evaluations
- Fixed goals and constant fine-tuning
- Celebration of academic achievements
- Effective, harmonized teaching practices

Researchers have closely examined how these schools are organized, how they make decisions, what teachers do in class, and how parents are involved. A series of specific characteristics has gradually been unanimously accepted among education researchers. It has become clear that the leadership provided by these schools’ administrations plays an important role in their success. However, this leadership does not have a direct influence on student performance; rather it occurs through other indirect channels.

The research shows that in effective schools, the school principal acts to focus community efforts and develop the capacity of individuals to promote student success. The influence of the principal’s administration is visible in how it affects the school’s objectives and orientations, its structure, its interactions with families and the community as a whole, behavioural changes, personal development, organizational model and culture, as well as the learning climate. The principal’s and the administration’s influence is thus felt daily through key and tangible gestures.

For more information

La gestion scolaire : une situation à améliorer ?

http://www.acef.ca/c/revue/pdf/XXXII_2_158.pdf

Effective Schools

http://www.ontariodirectors.ca/CODE_Advisories/Downloads/CODE%20Advisory%20No%209%20WEB.pdf

[1] S. Bissonnette (2007), *Les écoles efficaces favorisant la réussite scolaire des élèves à risque : une revue de littérature*. Paper presented at the 68th annual Canadian Psychological Association Convention, Ottawa, Ontario

Taking effective action

In a recent study conducted in the Estrie region on the links between school administration practices and student performance, Colletette et al. reported that four types of management practices have positive effects on student learning and perseverance.¹ The greater the degree to which a school implements these practices, the more likely it is to improve factors that directly influence student performance. This effect can be enhanced even further by sharing power and initiatives among teachers, parents, students, and administrative staff, using what is generally called participative leadership.

Establish school orientations

- Build a shared vision
- Encourage commitment to shared goals
- Demonstrate high expectations for student performance

Enhance the skills of teaching staff

- Provide individualized support and be considerate
- Stimulate intellectual thought
- Act consistently with the desired model of behaviour

Review the organizational model

- Develop a collaborative culture
- Review the organizational structure
- Build constructive ties with families and the community
- Maintain contacts with the local neighbourhood

Manage the education program

- Recruit, retain, and encourage loyalty from competent staff
- Provide educational support (teaching and learning)
- Monitor student progress
- Minimize factors that may distract staff from their work

Avenues for effective action related to management practices

Recruit the best leaders and develop the leadership skills of current managers in the school administration:

- to assign the best leaders to schools that need them most;
- to benefit from strong, positive leaders who share their power, vision, and goals with their team;
- by reducing irritants that discourage people from rising to administrative positions in schools (isolation, high demands of position, challenging or violent behaviours, difficult relationships with some parents, media intrusion, etc.);
- to maintain a high level of skill and professionalism among teaching staff;
- to set up the services and structures required to ensure student success, especially for students at risk or having difficulty;
- to monitor students' learning and achievements by maintaining high expectations of them.

Establish a climate of achievement at all levels within the school (respect, high expectations, support, consistency, partnership, low staff turnover, solidarity, safety, etc.).

Encourage family involvement and participation (meetings, events, committees, decision-making bodies, etc.).

Promote community partnerships that benefit youth (screening, extracurricular activities, family or youth support organizations, etc.).

Make parents aware that the importance they place on school attendance and how they value teachers affects their children's performance (supporting the school rather than criticizing it, always speaking positively about school, helping with homework, working with teachers, expressing confidence in the school, etc.).

[1] P. Colletette, D. Pelletier, and G. Turcotte (2013), Relations entre les pratiques de gestion des directions d'écoles secondaires et les résultats des élèves. Study funded by the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation in research by the Université de Sherbrooke, Chaire de recherche de la Commission scolaire de la Région-de-Sherbrooke sur la réussite et la persévérance des élèves.