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What strategies support principals in becoming instructional leaders?



Background

[Research shows](#) that principals' instructional leadership skills—that is, their ability to define and communicate school goals, manage the instructional program, and promote a positive school climate—can have positive effects on student achievement. While some strategies may be context- and resource-dependent, the information that follows provides some potential considerations for supporting principals to become instructional leaders.

- **Participation in certain professional development programs has shown mixed results on principal practice.** A [professional development program](#)¹ for principals that focused on 21 evidence-based leadership responsibilities increased principals' perceptions of their leadership ability and reduced teacher turnover, but no effect was found on teachers' perceptions of principal leadership. [Another principal professional development program](#),² which provided summer training, group learning opportunities throughout the school year, and individualized coaching, was found to have some negative effects on principals' instructional leadership practices.
- **Understanding principals' backgrounds and how they currently spend their time may help identify areas of focus for principal professional development or other supports.** [Follow-up descriptive analyses](#) from the second study cited above sought to understand how principals used their time during the school week. The study revealed that this group of principals spent more than half of their time on tasks other than providing instructional supports.
- **Participating in professional learning communities with other principals may help build principals' confidence in improving practice.** One program provided principals opportunities to learn from each other, observe other schools, and strengthen their theoretical understanding of leadership; these strategies were seen by principals as contributing to their improved leadership [in an international study](#).
- **Principals could also consider building capacity for instructional leadership more widely.** [A study](#) across three school districts described three macro-strategies that were seen as beneficial for improving instructional leadership capacity among department chairs: “redefine leadership roles, responsibilities, and structures; provide individual and team learning opportunities; and connect the work of the department chairs to school and district improvement efforts” (p. 334).



Additional Resources



An Ask A REL created by REL Mid-Atlantic answers [what is known about the characteristics of effective school leaders](#).



A blog from Prodigy compiled [12 instructional leadership strategies](#) for principals to consider.



The National Association of Secondary School Principals offers some strategies for [improving instructional leadership](#).



[The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement](#) provides some tips for using classroom walk-throughs as an instructional leadership strategy.

¹ This study met WWC group design standards [without reservation](#); however, the WWC only reviewed the principal turnover outcome.

² This study has not yet been reviewed by the WWC.