Effective Leadership Practice—
An Integrated Approach to Assessing
and Developing Principals’
Leadership Capacity
Introduction

The role of the principal is more challenging than ever. The current reform agenda requires principals to implement more robust teacher evaluation systems, lead whole school change around the Common Core State Standards, and to transform schools into autonomous professional learning communities that embrace rather than resist change (Moore, 2009). While these responsibilities are not directly tied to student learning, they are certainly related to it. In fact, recent principal research has demonstrated that leadership is second only to classroom instruction among school-related factors associated with improving student learning (Leithwood, Seashore Lewis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom, 2004). **School leadership has never been more important.**

At times, the competing demands for a principal’s time and attention can be overwhelming. Principals need support to filter out the noise and focus on leadership practices that promote high academic gains. Battelle for Kids (BFK) in collaboration with the Ohio University Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs developed the **Integrated Leadership Survey** to provide principals with feedback on critical aspects of their leadership practice. The survey is based on some of the most prominent school leadership research along with BFK’s work with highly effective principals and high-growth schools across the country.

Guidance to transform survey feedback into purposeful action is provided by the **BFK•Connect™ Framework**. This framework identifies and connects four core aspects of effectiveness across all levels of the education system. With this tool, educators are better able to understand and leverage the creative tensions that arise when collaboration, structure, performance, and creativity are all valued in the pursuit of excellence. These same tensions are reflected in leadership research, including “loose-tight leadership” (Dufour, Dufour, & Eaker, 2008), avoiding extremes (Fullan, 2008), “structures and autonomy” (Kanter, 1983), and “empathetic assertiveness” (Goleman, 1998).

Feedback from the Integrated Leadership Survey, when used in conjunction with the **BFK Connect™ Framework**, provides a unique platform for coaching, reflection, and powerful implementation of school improvement strategies.
Identifying Key Leadership Practices that Promote Student Success

The Integrated Leadership Survey is comprised of 35 leadership practices organized into five broader categories. The categories represent a range of leadership practices displayed by principals of high-growth and high-achieving schools.

1. Setting Directions.
   Facilitate the creation of shared meanings and understandings that support the school’s vision. Identify and articulate a limited number of goals.

2. Developing People.
   Build staff members’ skills and knowledge. Create a culture of trust and collaboration.

3. Developing the Organization.
   Build and sustain a supportive work environment. Establish structures and routines that support the school’s goals and vision.

4. Improving the Instructional Program.
   Maintain a focus on student learning. Monitor and provide support to improve the quality of instruction.

5. Securing Accountability.
   Promote collective responsibility for student learning. Establish connections between school, district, and state goals.

The first four categories align with the findings of the Wallace Foundation’s Learning from Leadership Project, which examined the relationship between educational leadership and student achievement. In addition, an important perspective emerged from the Wallace Foundation’s research on leadership that directly aligns with BFK’s research on highly effective principals and schools:

*Leaders who strike a proper balance between stability and change emphasize two priorities: they work to develop and support people to do their best, and they work to redesign their organizations to improve effectiveness (Wahlstrom, Seashore Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010, p. 7).*
Research Basis for the Development of the Integrated Leadership Survey

Leadership practices included in the survey are grounded in current education research including:

- **Wallace Foundation Learning from Leadership Project:** From 2004 through 2010, researchers supported by the Wallace Foundation conducted the largest ever study on school leadership. This study spanned nine states, 43 districts, and 180 schools and captured survey data from 8,391 teachers and 471 administrators.

- **SOAR Collaborative:** For the past 10 years, BFK has led SOAR, one of the largest school improvement collaboratives in the United States. Today, SOAR is comprised of more than 120 Ohio school districts. Through SOAR, BFK has conducted research to better understand how some schools, districts, principals, and teachers are able to produce higher than expected student growth.

- **Global Education Study:** In spring 2012, BFK organized visits to five of the highest-performing school systems in the world to engage, observe, and learn from educators. The study identified six drivers of student success that are common across the five school systems.

- **Ontario Leadership Framework:** Developed for Ontario’s Ministry of Education by Ken Leithwood, this framework added a fifth component (Securing Accountability) to the Wallace Foundation Research. It also identifies a list of specific leadership practices that are associated with high-performing schools from an extensive literature review.
Assessing Leadership Effectiveness

The BFK Integrated Leadership Survey collects responses on school leadership practices as perceived by the principal and his/her teaching staff. These responses are useful for assessing leadership practice and providing guidance on areas of improvement.

Why is staff feedback important?
A leader’s staff is in the best position to observe his/her ability to manage and lead (Greguras, Ford, & Brutus, 2003). While supervisor observations are important, they are usually limited to hearsay or information from outside of the school environment. Staff ratings create a much more accurate picture of performance because they offer a better overall assessment of the individual’s daily leadership practices and dispositions (Fletcher & Baldry, 2003). Gathering feedback from teachers also provides a tremendous opportunity to build trust and respect. When teachers have an anonymous method to offer input on the ways they are led, as well as on the culture and support systems of the school, it gives them an opportunity to help create the world in which they work.

Self-Awareness
Managerial Self-Awareness (MSA) is the relationship between self-awareness and the perception of others. In general, managers tend to rate themselves higher than others rate them in management competencies and leadership effectiveness (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1998). This is why self-assessments are considered less accurate than multi-rater assessments. Bass and Yammarino (1991) found that the stronger the leader’s MSA, the more likely he/she is recognized as a transformational leader by his/her staff.

Survey Reporting
Self and staff ratings are compiled in a summary report that gives principals a starting point for improving their leadership practice. The report provides principals the opportunity to examine their practice from multiple perspectives.

1. Results are displayed for each of the five categories of effective leadership practice. Principals can use this information to assess whether they are engaging in the types of behaviors that contribute to student success.

2. Results are displayed for each of the four dimensions of the BFK•Connect™ Framework. When any of the four dimensions are over or underemphasized, performance deteriorates.

3. The report provides information on the congruency between self and staff ratings and highlights the items with the greatest discrepancy between self and staff ratings. Differences in self and other perceptions provide fruitful areas for professional development.
Using the BFK•Connect™ Framework to Develop Leadership Capacity

The BFK•Connect™ Framework emerged from work with highly effective educators around the country. The framework identifies four core dimensions of effectiveness: relationships, high expectations, stable environment, and continuous improvement. Effective leaders not only possess skills in each of these areas; they are also able to connect them in powerful ways.

The framework is a useful tool for professional development because it captures the complex aspects of leadership in simple, visual display. BFK has created a comprehensive set of tools, training, and resources to support leaders as they stretch and grow their leadership practice using the framework.

Conclusion

To develop the most effective survey instrument possible, Battelle for Kids combined the results of recent research, performed by respected scholars in the field of school leadership, with our own global and local education research studies. This enabled us to create the BFK Integrated Leadership Survey to provide principals with targeted information aligned to effective leadership practices.

Empowering principals to lead schools into the next generation of school reform requires giving them access to reliable data and the means of acting on that data. The BFK Integrated Leadership Survey provides the actionable data, and The BFK•Connect™ Framework provides the model for action.
References


About Battelle for Kids

Battelle for Kids is a national, not-for-profit organization that provides counsel and solutions to advance the development of human capital, the use of strategic measures, practices for improving educator effectiveness, and communication with all stakeholders. At the heart of this work is an unwavering focus on accelerating student growth.