

An equitable environment creates high levels of learning for *all* students

The Coleman study, which suggested family background *rather than schooling* was a better predictor of student success, caused an uproar when it was published 40 years ago. Yet many modern-day schools seem to act as if those findings were scientific fact. Later, a more sophisticated analysis revealed contrary findings using the same data and showed that “highly effective schools produce results that almost entirely overcome the effects of student background” (Marzano, 2003, p. 7).

So, what is the principal’s role in developing an equitable school environment? The principal **communicates high expectations for self and for all teachers and students.**

High expectations is a complex and misunderstood concept.

Let’s dissect this idea. First, the principal **accepts no excuses for the lack of**

achievement by subgroups of students. Instead of accepting the idea that some students will not or cannot learn because of their family background or other factors, the principal must believe and then communicate the belief that all students can learn, although possibly at different rates and in different ways. Principals who have closed the achievement gap identify that belief as a critical first step in the process.

Second, the principal **changes school schedules, curriculum, and use of staff time to support the learning of struggling students.** Schools have to operate differently to cause the desired changes in achievement. Every routine is questioned and adjusted in order to accomplish high levels of learning for students.

The principal also **expects teachers to change classroom practices to support the learning of struggling students.** The reason many educators do not change their classroom practice is that they don’t believe it will make any difference in student learning. The principal may need to highlight changes in student learning that result from changes in classroom practice that occur within the school. This expectation is also supported by **encouraging**

respectful dialogue among faculty regarding their role in helping all students learn.

Work by the Education Trust and Marzano indicate that teachers can make a difference in student learning by using strategies that are not yet widely used in schools. Part of the faculty dialogue needs to include the principal **challenging educators’ underlying assumptions concerning the role of parents, SES, race, and**

background in student learning. The principal can encourage faculty to learn about high-performing, high-poverty/high-minority schools studied by the Education Trust (2001). This work dispels the myth that poverty and minority status prevent high achievement.

Last, the principal **provides an ongoing system of staff development to enhance teacher skills and knowledge about teaching struggling students.** This staff development helps and supports teachers implement new practices that will make a difference in student learning.

An equitable learning environment is possible. But schools will not achieve high levels of learning for all students without the courageous efforts of principals.

EQUITY

Staff development that improves the learning of all students prepares educators to understand and appreciate all students; create safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments; and hold high expectations for their academic achievement.



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Learn more about NSDC's standards, www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm

REFERENCES

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- Marzano, R. (2003).** What works in schools: Translating research into action. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.