

# PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP MATTERS

**Scott Seaman**

*Executive Director, AWSP*

## If there has ever

been a more important time in education to talk about the importance of principal leadership, the time is now. Did you hear me? Principal leadership matters. There is no other way to say it.

Thanks to research by the Wallace Foundation and our own data collection at AWSP's *Principal Education Research Center*, the evidence is clear. According to the Wallace Foundation, Leadership is "second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school. And, leadership effects are usually largest where and when they are needed most." What does that mean? It means that you matter. Your leadership matters. Your growth as a professional matters. And, most importantly, your impact on kids matters. There is no other way to say it. Principals matter. And, principalizing in schools where students face the greatest challenges is even more important. Got the point?

Through decades of education reform, the role of the principal —, whether principal or assistant principal —, has grown exponentially. More and more has been added to your plate as the world of education becomes more



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complex and demanding. You are a self-sacrificing servant to all. You are a leader, counselor, advocate, mentor, coach, father, mother, security guard, custodian, food server, social worker, emergency first responder, therapist, and friend to everyone in the system. You can go from observing a classroom, to mopping the floor, to wiping away tears within the swing of fifteen minutes. The best word to describe your work is unpredictable and very similar to running an inner city emergency room.

Serving as a principal today is no small task. It is often described as both the hardest job in the world, yet the most rewarding. Even though our research indicates that 70% of our members report working 60+ hours per week over the course of 5-7 days, you also say that you love your work and the impact you have on kids. It's not very often that a principal isn't moved to tears describing the impact of their work. However, sustaining the pace, demand, and increasing

responsibility is bearing a toll on how long you stay in your buildings.

Principals matter. Principals set the tone in schools by creating a safe and positive school culture. Principals tackle systems that either support or erode that culture. And principals lead the learning for everyone in the system, including themselves. Without principals; culture, systems, and learning can remain untouched and unphased for years. It takes an effective principal to step in and create a long term vision for the school where culture, systems and learning are data-driven and student-centered. Principals lead hope in our schools. And yes, I said hope.

As your Executive Director, I'll never shy away from a conversation with anyone about the important role principals play in our schools. Our goal is to elevate this point to any and all stakeholders in education. Everyone in the system talks about

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the stress, anxiety and unrealistic workload for principals, but now we need to change that conversation to how we can all better support the number two influence on student learning: principals. We need effective principals to commit long-term to their schools and break the national average of 1 in 4 remaining in the same building after five years.

Principal churn is bad for kids and bad for schools. Without effective building leadership, inequitable systems will persist and students will suffer. One of our main goals at AWSP is to partner with key stakeholder groups to reduce principal churn in our state. This can't be an effort by AWSP alone, but rather a statewide and collective response. Our kids deserve consistent leadership because principal leadership matters. If we truly want to close gaps in our state and increase student access, opportunities, and achievement, then we'd better start talking about the importance of consistent and effective principal leadership.

Although recent events might have planted ideas into your heads of moving back into the classroom, we would argue that the kids need you to stay. Your teachers, your school, and your communities need you to stay. It's your leadership that will create the culture, systems, and learning that closes gaps, changes lives, and makes a forever impact on kids. Let's work together to change the equation in our state for principals and build systems to better support you and the best job in the world.

Keep up the great work for kids because you matter. ■



Scott Seaman Scott joined AWSP in the fall of 2013 after serving as the principal at Tumwater High School. In July 2018, he assumed duties as Executive Director.

# Humor me!

Created by **David Ford**, Retired Washington State Principal

