

Out of the Ivory Tower and Into the Schools

Central office administrators have much to gain from becoming more visible in their schools. They put themselves in touch with each school's particular problems, pass on one school's ideas to others, and inspire principals and teachers to become more available to the students.

Visiting school campuses is one of the central office administrator's most important jobs. James Lewis, in his book *Achieving Excellence in Our Schools*,¹ calls this visible management, which he defines as the practice of managerial personnel going to the employees to listen, to inform, and to facilitate understanding.

I have reaped many benefits from making school visits a big part of my day. Our district is made up of 16 schools: 11 elementaries, 2 junior highs, 2 high schools, and a vocational training center. We've been pushing hard to get our building administrators functioning as instructional leaders on their campuses by encouraging them to become more visible in classrooms and anywhere that students and teachers are working. As I've increased the number of my school visits, principals' visits to their classrooms have increased proportionately. My school visits increased from 621 in 1986-87 to 813 in 1988-89, and during that period the principals' time spent in classrooms and around campus grew from 30 to 37 percent. They also expanded their use of individualized attention, one-on-one coaching, and role modeling as a result of my own visible management.

As I move from school to school, I find myself suggesting ideas to one school that I've picked up from an-

other. For example, the principal of an elementary school I was visiting told me that two physical education teachers were having a hard time developing a motivating program for their students. I sat down with the principal and both teachers and described an elementary physical education class I'd observed that week where the students couldn't seem to get enough. Then I helped arrange for them to observe the other class. By semester's end, they had created another highly successful and motivational program for our kids.

Paperwork that builds up back at the "Tower" is one of the disadvantages of increased school visits. I stay

in the office when the work there is more important. If it is not, I assign it out or put it aside to deal with on my return.

For central office administrators who would like to be more visible on school campuses, I offer the following tips:

1. Before you begin to make school visits a part of your day, explain to all building administrators just what you are planning to do, and then be *consistent*. You will severely jeopardize your credibility if you fail to follow through or let your visits just die out.

2. At first, always inform the teacher before you visit a classroom. If you demonstrate that you are trustworthy and honest in your intentions, you will soon be able to do away with this announcing of visits. You might start by adopting a class for the year. Do things with the class, and even take over the teaching once in a while—but be sure you have cleared this with the teacher and adequately explained your intentions.

3. Make a list of the schools in your district and check off the date after you visit each school. Also, note the amount of time you spend at each school so that you can compute the average time of visits districtwide. This will allow you to compare times spent at individual schools and plan where you need to spend more time.



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4. Each day, give your secretary a list of the schools you'll be visiting and an estimate of the time you will spend at each one. You can then be reached quickly if an emergency arises. A paging beeper or a car phone can be helpful.

5. Give your school board, immediate supervisor, principals, teachers, and parents a monthly report from the schools you have visited. Let them know about the exciting things you see happening.

6. The school office is an excellent

indicator of the school climate, so spend some time there. Elementary school playgrounds and the hallways of junior high and high schools will also reveal a great deal about your schools. Schedule your lunch in one of the cafeterias so that you can break bread with those people closest to the kids and even with the kids themselves.

Central office "Ivory Tower" people need to monitor their schools and give them appropriate feedback. This forms the foundation for the best and

quickest improvements. To give meaningful feedback, however, they must go to the schools to see where their support is most needed. But if you try it, be prepared: once you start, the schools may never let you stop. □

¹J. Lewis, (1986), *Achieving Excellence in Our Schools* (Westbury, N.Y.: J.L. Wilkenson Publishing Company).

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— SALLY HENRY AND JEANNE VILZ —

School Improvement: Together We Can Make a Difference

Schools sometimes overlook nonteaching support staff in their discussions of goal setting and restructuring, but these employees are vital to school improvement.

For the past several years, the nation has placed great emphasis on the notion of school improvement. Although many programs and methods claim they will help us to achieve an "effective school," few of these programs, if any, discuss the importance of the nonteaching staff of a school district. So often we fail to recognize all that support staff does to make a school run smoothly. Why is this? Teachers are not the only ones who make a school effective or successful.

Our school district—the Kenmore-Town of Tonawanda School District in Buffalo, New York—created a school improvement program approximately

eight years ago that has been in effect ever since. Each of our 13 schools has a school planning team made up of administrators, teachers, parents, and community members—and in the case of high schools—students. Kenmore also has a District Support Staff Planning Team. Clerical, food service, transportation, and building and grounds employees serve as representatives from various schools and the central office. As team facilitators, we received the same I/D/E/A/ Phase I and II facilitator training as teachers and administrators. Our operation is identical to the school planning team's process. We communicate with the school planning teams and serve as a

liaison between school buildings. For example, we recently planned workshops for support staff on such topics as listening skills, self-esteem, and improving student behavior. Afterwards, we shared feedback information with principals and department supervisors. This kind of input helps to break down barriers between employee groups and buildings.

School planning teams work with nine principles of education which provide a base for discussion and help them to develop a long range plan or "vision." Similarly, our planning team developed its own set of six principles. We used these principles to develop initial as well as long-range goals by

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