

Research Brief

Co-Principals

Question: What is the evidence supporting the use of Co-Principals?

Summary of Findings: There is not much research on the effectiveness of co-principals. A simple Google search reveals how many schools have implemented the idea. What little is written was written either in the early 1980's or within the last few years. Very little focuses specifically on high schools.

The idea of co-principals has been used to devote more time to instructional issues and less to managerial, to promote the complexities of school reform, to fight administrator burnout, and to use a distributed approach to administration allowing several administrators to share the seemingly overwhelming responsibilities of the position.

When it works well, co-principals have an increased "principal presence" in the school; help guide (not control) teachers and their instruction; help facilitate the multiple leaders in the building toward the common goal of helping all students learn well; reduce the sense of "loneliness at the top"; play a crucial role in encouraging and modeling nontraditional forms of leadership; increase participation in all levels, creating a learning community.

As Lashway (2003) summarizes, "Even amid this 'decentered' leadership, principals played a strong role in hiring the right people, buffering the school from conflicting district demands, and modeling inquiry by habitually asking questions rather than drawing conclusions. In at least a few schools, the principal was still seen as the "person in charge."

Online Resources:

The Co-Principal Plan: Some Insights and Some Cautions.

Korba, William L.;

One alternate approach to school administration centers on the use of two principals, one for administration and one for instruction. This article examines the approach and offers some cautions.

NASSP Bulletin, v66 n456 p57-63 Oct 1982

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http://www.eric.ed.gov:80/ERICWebPortal/Home.portal?_nfpb=true&eric_viewStyle=list&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=co-principal&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=eric_metadata&eric_pageSize=20&eric

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Distributed Leadership.

Lashway, Larry;

School-reform efforts in recent years have stressed, and expanded, the leadership role of the principal. But in the view of many analysts, the task of transforming a school is too complex for one person to accomplish alone. Consequently, a new model of leadership is developing: distributed leadership. This

Research Roundup summarizes five documents that discuss different facets of the distributed leadership model. (1) "Investigating School Leadership Practice: A Distributed Perspective" (James P. Spillane, Richard Halverson, and John B. Diamond) provides a coherent theoretical foundation for a distributed view of leadership. (2) "Building a New Structure for School Leadership" (Richard F. Elmore) links distributed leadership to the school's fundamental task of helping students learn. (3) "Co-Principals: A Double Dose of Leadership" (Michael Chirichello) explains how one district has successfully established co-principalships in its elementary schools. (4) "The Bridgeport Story: What Urban School Districts Need to Know About School Leadership Teams" (The Education Alliance) shares a framework and some practical tools for formalizing distributed leadership. (5) "The Bay Area School Reform Collaborative: Building the Capacity to Lead" (Michael Aaron Copland) describes how one school-reform network has succeeded in creating a broader base of leadership in its schools.

Research Roundup, v19 n4 Sum 2003

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Disappearing Principals.

Cushing, Katherine S.; Kerrins, Judith A.; Johnstone, Thomas;

The first of two articles by members of a committee researching administrative shortage shows that administrator burnout may be the cause. Districts are exploring systemic ways to provide additional support to site administrators, including additional released time, rethinking job responsibilities, and the notion of co-principals.

Leadership, v32 n5 p28-29,37 May-Jun 2003

ERIC #: EJ666097

http://www.eric.ed.gov:80/ERICWebPortal/Home.portal?_nfpb=true&eric_viewStyle=list&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=co-principal&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=eric_metadata&eric_pageSize=20&eric_displayNrtiever=false&eric_displayStartCount=1&_pageLabel=RecordDetails&objectId=0900000b80005a6f

Co-Principals: A Double Dose of Leadership.

Chirichello, Michael;

Describes benefits of a leadership team consisting of co-principals and an assistant principal at two elementary schools in Mansfield, Massachusetts, the goal of which is to reduce time devoted to management and increase time devoted to instructional activities.

Principal, v82 n4 p40-44 Mar-Apr 2003

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http://www.eric.ed.gov:80/ERICWebPortal/Home.portal?_nfpb=true&eric_viewStyle=list&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=co-principal&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=eric_metadata&eric_pageSize=20&eric_displayNrtiever=false&eric_displayStartCount=1&_pageLabel=RecordDetails&objectId=0900000b80004cff

Towards Democratic Leadership: Co-principal Initiatives.

Court, Marian;

A case study of a New Zealand primary school coprincipalship describes the impact of some intergroup misunderstandings and struggles over power. Concludes that building a democratic school community requires a set of considerations and practices different from those promoted within a market-managerial approach.

International Journal of Leadership in Education, v6 n2 p161-183 Apr-Jun 2003

ERIC #: EJ672882

http://www.eric.ed.gov:80/ERICWebPortal/Home.portal?_nfpb=true&eric_viewStyle=list&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=co-principal&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=eric_metadata&eric_pageSize=20&eric_displayNrtiever=false&eric_displayStartCount=1&_pageLabel=RecordDetails&objectId=0900000b80000529

The Co-Principal: Looking at Realities.

Shockley, Robert E.; Smith, Denis D.;

Because school administration has become a job of vast dimensions, the authors propose replacing the traditional assistant principal structure with a co-principal model, in which a Principal for Administration and a Principal for Instruction share responsibility for one school. Duties of each are listed.

Clearing House, v55 n2 p90-93 Oct 1981

ERIC #: EJ251839

http://www.eric.ed.gov:80/ERICWebPortal/Home.portal?nfpb=true&eric_viewStyle=list&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=co-principal&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=eric_metadata&eric_pageSize=20&eric_displayNrtiever=false&eric_displayStartCount=1&_pageLabel=RecordDetails&objectId=0900000b80087088

RB high school finds that 2 heads are better than 1

Daily Breeze, January, 2005 by Ian Hanigan

It's a line of questioning Mary Little still hears every so often. "A lot of people say, 'Are you the real principal?' " Little says. " I know you're the co-principal, but who is the real principal?" She is. And so is Goy Casillas. For the past 15 months, both educators have shared the title at Redondo Union High School, the first campus in the South Bay to employ a duo of top administrators. It's part of a trend in which a growing number of school districts throughout the country are seeking to unburden their high

school principals by dividing up their some-times overwhelming responsibilities, which include everything from raising test scores and making personnel decisions to attending committee meetings and football games.

http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4187/is_200501/ai_n9955852

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