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A Comparison of Urban, Suburban, and Rural Principal Leadership Skills by Campus Student Achievement Level

Susan Erwin

Pam Winn

John Erwin

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Susan Erwin
Pam Winn
John Erwin
Tarleton State University

Because of the importance of developing highly skilled school leaders, statewide assessments of 784 Texas public school administrators were compared to determine how leadership skills varied by type of campus (urban, suburban and rural) and by campus student achievement ratings. Important findings indicate differences exist by campus type and by campus student academic achievement as measured by state accountability ratings. In particular, leadership skills of urban, suburban, and rural principals at campuses with the state's highest student academic achievement ratings differ from skills of principal at schools with lower student academic achievement ratings.

Keywords: Principalship, Leadership skills, Urban schools, Suburban schools, Rural schools

In spite of overwhelming evidence (Winn, et.al, 2009 a, 2009b) that principals have an essential role in creating effective schools (Marzano, et.al., 2005; Leithwood, et.al., 2004; Lesotte, 1992, 1991), comparisons of leadership skills in terms student academic achievement and type of school population (urban, suburban, or rural) have not been conducted. Because of the urgent need for highly skilled school leaders, this study compared the leadership skills of practicing urban, suburban, and rural administrators to determine to what degree their skills differed by campus student achievement.

Method

Principal Assessment of Student Success (PASS), provided the data for this study. PASS data accessed from Texas principal evaluations conducted state-wide from 2006 through 2008 yielded records of 784 elementary, middle, and high school principals from 248 urban, 277 suburban, and 259 rural schools (see Appendix B).

Leadership skill was assessed using records provided by principals (campus improvement plan, state accountability data, Adequate Yearly Progress, phone interview, teacher performance data, and student performance data) PASS assessor teams (two assessors per principal; recruited among Texas veteran campus and central office administrators, and university educational leadership departments) rated principal leadership skills within three domains: functional, programming, and interpersonal (see Appendix A).

The assessor-identified leadership skills were compared to Texas public school accountability ratings (from low to high): Academically Acceptable (AA), Recognized (R) or Exemplary (E).

Descriptive statistics were used to calculate principal and assessor rankings. Chi-square cross tabulation tables used to determine dependence/independence by school accountability ratings and principals' NPBEA skill rating frequency counts were not found to be statistically significant and, thus, were not reported.

Results

Assessor ratings of the top five skills by campus accountability ratings produced 672 ratings for 244 urban principals (see Appendix C), 711 ratings for 277 suburban principals (see Appendix D), and 714 ratings for 259 rural principals (see Appendix E). The five most frequently rated skills by campus type (urban, suburban, or rural) and state

accountability group (AA, R, E) are listed in Appendix F. Of the 14 NCBEA skills assessed, five did not appear (Problem Analysis, Curriculum Design, Measurement and Evaluation, and Resource Allocation) among those most frequently observed.

Assessors consistently highly rated AA campus leaders on three functional domain skills (Leadership, Sensitivity, Information Collection and Organizational Oversight) and one interpersonal domain skill (Sensitivity) regardless of campus type (urban, suburban, rural). Only Student Guidance and Development (urban), Judgment (suburban) Instructional Management (rural) differed among AA campus leaders. Notably, these skills all fall within the programming domain. Six of the 14 NPBEA skills were exhibited most frequently among AA campus leaders.

At R rated campuses, urban, suburban, and rural principals were rated the same in two functional domain skills (Leadership, Organizational Oversight) and one interpersonal domain skill (Sensitivity). Information Collection, a functional domain skill, was rated highly for all except urban campus principals, and Judgment, a programming domain skill, was common to all except suburban campus principals. Unique skills exhibited by only one R campus type were Oral Expression (suburban), an interpersonal domain skill, and Student Guidance and Development (urban), a programming domain skill. Seven of the 14 NPBEA skills were exhibited most frequently among R campus leaders.

Leaders from E rated campuses shared two functional domain skills (Leadership, Information Collection) and one interpersonal domain skill (Sensitivity). Organizational Oversight, a functional domain skill, was rated highly for all except urban campus principals, and Student Guidance and Development, a programming domain skill, was common to all except suburban campus principals. Unique skills exhibited by only one E campus type were Oral Expression (urban), an interpersonal domain skill, Instructional Management (suburban), a programming domain skill, and Staff Development and Judgment (rural), both programming domain skills. Nine of the 14 NPBEA skills were exhibited most frequently among E campus leaders.

Significant Conclusions

Of the 14 NPBEA skills assessed, only nine were consistently identified among the top skills of sampled Texas principals. Regardless of school type (urban, suburban, and rural) or campus achievement rating (AA, R, E), sampled principals were rated highest in the same four of the 14 NPBEA skills assessed (Leadership, Sensitivity, Information Collection, and Organizational Oversight). This indicates the importance of these skills in school leadership. However, the absence of Problem Analysis, Curriculum Design, Measurement and Evaluation, and Resource Allocation also has strong implications. Four of the five are programming domain skills requiring systemic campus leadership and holistic perspective, enabling principals to develop frameworks, design anticipated outcomes, implement supervision, set goals, and utilize inferential thinking.

Differentiated by only two skills per campus type (urban, rural, suburban), leaders at AA rated schools were more likely to exhibit similar skills than their counterparts at R or E rated campuses. Among leaders from R rated campuses, suburban/rural leaders were most alike, differing by only two skills; whereas, urban/rural leaders differed by three skills, while urban/suburban leaders differed by four skills. The greatest differences in leadership skills were exhibited among E campus leaders. Three skills differentiated E leaders in urban/suburban and urban/rural comparisons, while four skills differentiated E leaders in suburban/rural comparisons. Overall, AA campus leaders were most similar regardless of campus type, supporting studies indicating when schools face sanctions, principals utilize management versus systemic leadership strategies (Anagnostopoulos & Rutledge, 2007).

The largest differences among leadership groups were found between suburban/rural E campus leaders. These differences may result from differences in suburban/rural financial resources (Hill, 2009; Warren & Peel, 2005) and suburban demographic changes more comparable to urban, rather than rural, schools (Howard, 2007; Nevarez & Wood, 2007).

Recommendations

Study findings indicate that principals from all campus achievement levels demonstrate functional domain (managerial) skills; however, as principals increasingly demonstrate programming domain (systemic) skills, campus student achievement increases. This finding suggests the need for professional development aimed at nurturing systemic practices among campus leaders. In addition, clear communication, both individually (i.e. Oral Expression) and within groups (i.e. Staff Development) appears to differentiate leaders at more highly rated campuses, indicating a need to develop these skills to a greater extent.

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Appendix A

National Policy Board of Educational Administration (NPBEA):
Knowledge and Skill Domains

Functional Domain Skillscomprise base-level management and organizational structure to supervise daily, routine campus business (e.g. to run the buses on time, schedule classes, or maintain order). Evidence of effectiveness is typically quantifiably measurable (e.g. attendance records, disciplinary referrals).

1. Leadership: Providing purpose and direction, formulating goals with staff and setting priorities based on community and district priorities and student and staff needs.
2. Information Collection: Classifying and organization information for use in decision making and mentoring.
3. Problem Analysis: Identifying problems, identifying possible causes, seeking additional needed information, framing possible solutions.
4. Judgment: Giving priority to significant issues then reaching logical conclusions and making quality decisions.
5. Organizational Oversight: Planning and scheduling own and other's work so that resources are used appropriately and monitoring priorities so that goals and deadlines are met.

Programming Domain Skills provide systemic campus leadership requiring a holistic perspective that incorporates but surpass functional domain skills. More complex and difficult to quantify, these skills enable principals to develop frameworks, design anticipated outcomes, implement ongoing supervision, set goals, and draw inferences.

6. Instructional Management: Ensuring appropriate instructional methods are used to create positive learning experiences.
7. Curriculum Design: With staff, planning and implementing a framework for instruction and aligning curriculum with anticipated outcomes.
8. Student Guidance and Development: Enlisting the support and cooperation of diverse professionals, citizens, community agencies, parents and students to promote the growth and development of all students.
9. Staff Development: Supervising individuals and groups and providing feedback on performance and initiating self-development.
10. Measurement and Evaluation: Examining the extent to which outcomes meet or exceed previously defined goals, or priorities and drawing inferences for program revisions.
11. Resource Allocation: Allocating, monitoring and evaluating fiscal, human, material and time resources to reach campus goals and objectives.

Interpersonal Domain Skills employ functional and programming domain skills, but are subject to individual perception, making measurement more difficult. For example, principals may perceive themselves to be sensitive while faculty members disagree. Nevertheless, these skills improve effective implementation of both functional and pro-

gramming skills.
12. Sensitivity: Perceiving and responding to the needs and concerns of others.
13. Oral and Nonverbal Expression: Making oral presentations that are clear and easy to understand.
14. Written Expression: Expressing ideas and appropriately in writing for different audiences.
(Thomson, 1993)

Appendix B

Sample

Urban Principals by Texas Accountability Ratings and School Type; Frequency count and percentage (N=248)

Urban Campus Type	AA Count %	Of Total AA %	R Count %	Of Total R %	E Count %	Of Total E %	Total Table Count	Total Table %
Elementary	68 39.3%	27.4	48 76.2%	19.4	12 100%	4.8	128	51.6
Middle School	39 22.5%	15.7	11 17.5%	4.4	0 0%	0	50	20.2
High School	66 38.2%	26.6	4 6.3%	1.6	0 0%	0	70	28.2
Total	173 100%	69.8	63 100%	25.4	12 100%	4.8	248	100

(Lowest to Highest: AA = Academically Acceptable, R = Recognized, E = Exemplary)

Suburban Principals by Texas Accountability Ratings and School Type; Frequency count and percentage (N=277)

Suburban Campus Type	AA Count %	Of Total AA %	R Count %	Of Total R %	E Count %	Of Total E %	Total Table Count	Total Table %
Elementary	43 31%	16	63 61%	23	31 94%	11	137	49.5
Middle School	39 28%	14	27 26%	10	2 6%)	1	68	24.5
High School	58 41%	21	14 13%	5	0 0%)	0	72	26.0
Total	140 100%	51	104 100%	38	33 100%	12	277	100

(Lowest to Highest: AA = Academically Acceptable, R = Recognized, E = Exemplary)

Rural Principals by Texas Accountability Ratings and School Type; Frequency count and percentage (N=259)

Rural Campus Type	AA Count %	Of Total AA %	R Count %	Of Total R %	E Count %	Of Total E %	Total Table Count	Total Table %
Elementary	27 18.9%	10.4	62 64.6%	23.9	19 95.0%	7.3	108	41.7
Middle School	40 28.0%	15.4	23 24.0%	8.9	0 0.0%	0	63	24.3
High School	76 53.1%	29.3	11 11.5%	4.2	1 5%	0.4	88	34.0
Total	143 100%	55.2	96 100%	37.1	20 100%	7.7	259	100

Appendix C

Urban Principal NPBEA Skills by Texas Accountability Ratings (N= 244 teams)

Functional Domain Skills *322/672 (47.9%)	AA	R	E	TOTAL RATINGS
Leadership	86	28	3	117
Information Collection	51	13	4	68
Problem Analysis	15	8	2	25
Judgment	29	14	2	45
Organizational Oversight	50	16	1	67
Programming Domain Skills *197/672 (29.3%)	AA	R	E	TOTAL RATINGS
Instructional Management	32	11	1	44
Curriculum Design	17	10	1	28
Student Guidance & Development	49	17	4	70
Staff Development	11	3	0	14
Measurement & Evaluation	19	6	2	27
Resource Allocation	11	3	0	14
Interpersonal Domain Skills *153/672 (22.8%)	AA	R	E	TOTAL RATINGS
Sensitivity	67	26	7	97
Oral & Non-verbal Expression	29	12	4	45
Written Expression	8	2	1	11

Note. *= Total by Domain; AA=Academically Acceptable, R=Recognized, E = Exemplary.

Appendix D

Suburban Principal NPBEA Skills by Texas Accountability Ratings (N= 264 teams)

Functional Domain Skills *440/711 (61.9%)	AA	R	E	TOTAL RATINGS
Leadership	70	64	11	142
Information Collection	49	37	11	97
Problem Analysis	18	16	6	40
Judgment	39	21	4	64
Organizational Oversight	33	35	9	77
Programming Domain Skills *147/711 (20.6%)	AA	R	E	TOTAL RATINGS
Instructional Management	29	20	14	63
Curriculum Design	9	2	4	15
Student Guidance & Development	16	6	4	15
Staff Development	4	4	1	9
Measurement & Evaluation	15	7	1	23
Resource Allocation	7	4	0	11
Interpersonal Domain Skills *144/711 (20.2%)	AA	R	E	TOTAL RATINGS
Sensitivity	42	34	10	86
Oral & Non-verbal Expression	23	22	7	52
Written Expression	3	2	1	6

Note. *= Total by Domain; AA=Academically Acceptable, R=Recognized, E = Exemplary.

Appendix E

Rural Principal NPBEA Skills by Texas Accountability Ratings (N= 259 teams)

Functional Domain Skills *365/714 (51%)	AA	R	E	TOTAL RATINGS
Leadership	71	59	7	137
Information Collection	45	39	7	56
Problem Analysis	16	12	5	33
Judgment	26	28	8	62
Organizational Oversight	37	29	11	77
Programming Domain Skills *204/714 (28.5%)	AA	R	E	TOTAL RATINGS
Instructional Management	34	20	3	57
Curriculum Design	27	2	0	29
Student Guidance & Development	27	14	15	56
Staff Development	13	6	8	27
Measurement & Evaluation	18	4	0	22
Resource Allocation	7	3	3	13
Interpersonal Domain Skills *145/714 (20.3%)	AA	R	E	TOTAL RATINGS
Sensitivity	48	36	7	91
Oral & Non-verbal Expression	20	15	2	37
Written Expression	8	6	3	17

Note. *= Total by Domain; AA=Academically Acceptable, R=Recognized, E = Exemplary.

Appendix F

Table 1
Comparison of top five Urban, Suburban, and Rural Principal NPBEA Skills by Texas Campus Accountability Rating

Top 5 Ratings (5= Highest)	5	4	3	2	1
Urban (AA) Campuses	Leadership (FD)	Sensitivity (ID)	Information Collection (FD)	Organization Oversight (FD)	Stud/Guid (PD)
Suburban (AA) Campuses	Leadership (FD)	Information Collection (FD)	Sensitivity (ID)	Judgment (PD)	Organization Oversight (FD)
Rural (AA) Campuses	Leadership (FD)	Sensitivity (ID)	Information Collection (FD)	Organization Oversight (FD)	Instructional Management (PD)
Urban (R) Campuses	Leadership (FD)	Sensitivity (ID)	Stud/Guid (PD)	Organization Oversight (FD)	Judgment (FD)
Suburban (R) Campuses	Leadership (FD)	Information Collection (FD)	Organization Oversight (FD)	Sensitivity (ID)	Oral Expression (ID)
Rural (R) Campuses	Leadership (FD)	Information Collection (FD)	Sensitivity (ID)	Organization Oversight (FD)	Judgment (FD)
Urban (E) Campuses	Sensitivity (ID)	*Info/collect (FD) *Stud/Guid/ (PD) *Oral/Express (ID)	*Info/collect (FD) *Stud/Guid (PD) *Oral/Express (ID)	*Info/collect (FD) *Stud/Guid (PD) *Oral/Express (ID)	Leadership (FD)
Suburban (E) Campuses	Instructional Management (PD)	Leadership (FD)	Information Collection (FD)	Sensitivity (ID)	Organization Oversight (FD)
Rural (E) Campuses	Stud/Guid (PD)	Organization Oversight (FD)	*Staff Devel (PD) * Judgment (FD)	*Staff Devel (PD) * Judgment (FD)	*Leadership (FD) *Information Collection

*same frequency counts; (AA) = Academically Acceptable, (R) = Recognized, (E)= Exemplary;
FD = functional, PD = Programming, ID = Interpersonal Domains

Susan Erwin, Ph.D., Assistant Professor
Curriculum and Instruction
Susan, holds a B.A. in history form Cameron University, a M.Ed. in special education from Southwestern Oklahoma State University and a Ph.D. in instructional leadership and academic curriculum from the University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma. With 23 years K-12 public school experience and 8 years in higher education, she presently serves as graduate program coordinator for the TSU Department Curriculum and Instruction.

Pamela Winn, Ed.D., Associate Professor
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
Pamela holds a doctorate in Educational Administration from the University of Texas A&M-Commerce. She has been employed with Tarleton State University since April 2002 where she serves as an associate professor and director of the New Century Educational Leadership Program (NCELP). She has served in both public and higher education with experiences ranging from teaching to administration. Pamela's research interests have centered on curriculum design, instructional management, and leadership development. She has presented extensively at conferences at both the national and state levels, and has trained principal assessors across the state.

John Erwin, Ph.D., Writing Lab Director
Southwest Metroplex Campus; Tarleton State University
John, holds a B.A. and M.A. in English from Northern Arizona State University and a Ph.D. in instructional leadership and academic curriculum from the University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma. With 24 years K-12 public school experience and 10 years in higher education, he presently serves as writing lab director for the TSU Southwest Metroplex Campus. John also co-edits the Effective Schools Project Journal for TSU and the Botanical Research Institute of Technology (BRIT) online journal.