

LOOKING FOR LEADERSHIP

What Classroom Teachers Expect From School Principals

By Kay Fukuda and Jennifer Padua

Outside the window, palm trees sway and the waves roll to shore. Inside, elementary school teachers are deeply engaged in a professional conversation. They are answering an important question: what skills do principals need to provide effective school leadership?

The Pacific Regional Educational Laboratory (Pacific REL) provides

know what is happening in their classrooms and in the rest of the school, to be visible to staff, students, and parents, and to be available as needed to offer support and suggestions. To provide effective instructional leadership, principals must be familiar with best practices and keep teachers informed about the instructional direction of their department or ministry of education.

Pacific teachers want a principal to be resourceful. They need leaders who think ahead and solve problems. Throughout the region, teachers echo the importance of having leaders who are, as one educator commented, “willing to accept help, hear suggestions, and receive critical feedback with understanding for the good of the school and community.”

Being an effective principal means being able to balance the forces of continuity and change and to tailor the school improvement process to local cultures and school

contexts. Principals must take responsibility for creating and maintaining a shared vision that meets the needs of all the stakeholders. They must be able to share leadership throughout the school and put the needs of the school and community ahead of local politics. Finally, Pacific principals must be able to help school staff, students, parents, and the community work together like a family toward a common goal.

A principal's job is complex. Principals have a wide variety of mandates to carry out, such as complying with legislation, distributing resources, sustaining an environment that is conducive to both teaching and learning, and making connections with the community. However, principals for the 21st

century must evolve beyond those roles. They must also evolve as instructional leaders, community leaders, and visionary leaders. This evolution requires a shift away from hierarchical, top-down leadership and toward partnership with teams of teachers and other stakeholders.

Throughout the Pacific, teachers have similar expectations of the characteristics a principal, as an educational leader, should possess. Pacific teachers live in an environment rich in culture and tradition. Their expectations confirm the research that shows changing roles and expectations for principals in the 21st century.

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Photo: Jennifer Padua

▷ School leadership is a key factor in school improvement. Teachers at Delap Elementary School discuss how principals can best help support student achievement.

opportunities for teachers to engage in reflective thinking about all aspects of their teaching, including the role that principals play. The following information was collected during conversations between Pacific REL staff and teachers at Co-Development Partner Schools in the U.S.-affiliated Pacific.

First, teachers acknowledged the importance of managing the school environment. In addition to ensuring that the school is clean and well maintained, the principal should see that there is an adequate supply of texts and other instructional materials.

However, a principal's job doesn't stop there. Principals should also provide guidance in classroom management and instruction. Teachers want principals to

Leadership Skills Teachers Look For

In discussions with Pacific REL staff, Pacific island teachers identified these skills and values as important to good school leadership.

Values

- Honest and trustworthy
- Open communication
- Shares decision making

Skills

- Good role model
- Good qualifications
- Knowledgeable about instruction and classroom management
- Good counseling skills
- Keeps the school clean
- Manages school resources well

Relationships

- Advocates for and works closely with teachers
- Treats everyone equally and fairly
- Visits classrooms
- Works well with teachers and the community
- Listens to others
- Respects teachers' privacy and confidentiality