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**Core Function:** High School Leadership and Decision Making

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**Effective Practice****Distribute management duties**

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**Overview:** Distributed leadership involves sharing management duties with all members of a school’s staff and contributes positively to student achievement. This type of leadership is important because it contributes to the entire group’s accountability for success and frees up administrator time to be more closely involved in practices that improve student performance and teacher success. Shared leadership also allows staff to grow within their roles as they take on additional responsibilities for student success.

**Evaluate Your Practice:** Why should principals distribute leadership and management duties within their schools? How can principals effectively distribute these management duties?

*Introduction*

While it may have once been expected that principals would handle all of their schools’ leadership tasks, it is no longer possible for one person to lead a school entirely on his or her own, given the ever growing burden placed on schools (Von Frank, 2011). All of the different types of responsibilities on a principal’s desk (e.g., finance, operations, instruction, discipline, etc.) are simply too much for one person to manage alone (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). The principal must work to establish the vision for the school and then ensure that staff members are in the best roles to maximize their own knowledge and skills, as well as ensure that the necessary resources are available to implement the vision (Murphy, Elliott, Goldring, & Porter, 2007). This practice brief highlights research that addresses how a principal can effectively distribute management duties so that he/she can serve as an instructional leader and positively impact student achievement.

*Why should principals distribute leadership and management duties within their schools?*

Distributed leadership in schools involves sharing responsibility on all administrative levels, working through teams, and engendering collective responsibility for student outcomes (Ritchie & Woods, 2007). Leaders of all kinds of organizations, including schools, need to depend on others to accomplish the group’s purpose and need to encourage the development of leadership across the organization (see Gardner, 1990; Kouzes & Posner, 2008; Yukl, 2009). Distributed leadership has been demonstrated to improve student performance. According to Walhstrom, Seashore Louis, Leithwood, and Anderson (2010), the more principals are willing to share leadership responsibilities and provide all stakeholders with greater influence on decisions, the better students perform on math and reading tests. Further, principals need not be concerned that they will lose influence as others gain influence. Although “higher-performing schools awarded greater influence to most stakeholders...little changed in these schools’ overall hierarchical structures” (Walhstrom et al., 2010, p.8). Finally, when principals and teachers share responsibility, teachers’ working relationships with each other are also better, which impacts student achievement positively (Walhstrom et al., 2010).

*How can principals effectively distribute these management duties?*

Freeing up time for administrators to be more directly involved in day-to-day instruction and organization management appears to be part of the reason that distributed management responsibilities improve student performance. Horng, Klasik, and Loeb (2009) report that in high- versus low-performing schools, as rated by state accountability systems, principals spent significantly less time on administrative tasks and more time on day-to-day instructional tasks. In order to be effective instructional leaders—by visiting classrooms, contributing to curriculum development,



and coaching teachers—the principal must step away from more managerial responsibilities (Hallinger & Murphy, 2013; Murphy et al., 2007). These non-instructional areas of work are still critical for the school to operate efficiently; though they can and often must be delegated, they are still a means to achieving the end goals outlined in a school’s vision.

By creating formal leadership structures, such as a leadership team, staff members will grow and develop in their roles, and the principal will be able to share leadership tasks among them (Hallinger & Murphy, 2013). Leadership teams often consist of lead teachers, instructional coaches, and assistant principals; because of the wide range of experiences within these groups, the delegation and distribution of tasks should be conducted according to their areas of expertise (Spillane, 2005). In addition, a principal does not have expertise in every area of his or her instructional responsibility, particularly when it comes to secondary content areas. Principals should share or distribute leadership to those with content area expertise and should partner with the leadership team to oversee their work (Hallinger & Murphy, 2013).

While it is ultimately the principal’s job to lead the school, manage daily operations, and model how to live the school’s vision (Murphy et al., 2007), leadership teams create an environment of mutual accountability for student achievement, so that a principal is not solely responsible (Von Frank, 2011). Distributing leadership in this way allows everyone to bear responsibility in the school’s goals around teaching and learning of students. As Robinson et al. (2008) concluded, the more closely tied a principal is to the work in the classrooms, and the more he or she is able to develop and empower the staff, the better student outcomes will be.

#### Indicators to Support the Effective Practice

The traditional roles of the principal and other administrators (e.g., management, discipline, security) are distributed to allow adequate time for administrative attention to instruction and student supports.

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