8

SCHOOL POLICIES

Because of the quality of teaching and the students themselves, classes within a school can vary greatly in their capacity to advance achievement. Even so, the school as a whole may have psychological features that set it apart from other schools and that affect its overall influence on what students learn. Though the research basis of school-level findings are less rigorous than those on classroom practices, two topics—safe, welcoming schools and school leadership—are worth considering since they help set the stage for effective classroom practices.[1]

Safe, Welcoming Schools

Psychological studies suggest that good morale in firms and other organizations promotes productivity. Similarly, schools that are secure and friendly appear to be better than others in promoting

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1. Derived from the United Nations booklets Sharon L. Foster, Patricia Brennan, Anthony Biglan, Linna Wang, and Saud Al-Ghaith, *Preventing Behavior Problems* and John E. Mayer, *Creating a Safe and Welcoming School.* Discussed earlier, the booklets are available from the United Nations International Bureau of Education, Geneva, Switzerland, and also freely downloadable and republishable from the Internet site http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/services/publications/educational-practices.html.

learning. In various ways, schools can encourage students concern with the well-being of others and tolerance of views that differ from their own. Arriving to class on time, following school dress codes, and avoiding disruptions may reveal students' social maturity. To help establish these things, some schools issue handbooks with reasonable expectations and rules clearly set forth. Some psychologists believe that engaging students to develop and revise such handbooks makes them more effective.

School-related extracurricular activities and exhibiting student work may help students feel psychologically closer to their schools. Newsletters for parents may also encourage their presence and pride in the school. Teachers can send notes to them about the class's academic progress and ways that parents can help students learn. Teacher-parent conferences and social occasions can reinforce desired behavior through positive communication.

Many schools are plagued with behavior problems, including violence and illegal drugs. Though such problems are not educators' primary responsibility, they may be able to help prevent them at least on school grounds. Prevention might best start early, even though educators may have little influence at life's beginning. Even the mother's stress during pregnancy can affect the child's later well-being. In areas with high instances of crime and delinquency, schools, hospitals, and other community organizations offer parenting programs that can help children face decisions about their behavior starting even in preschool. Early intervention can lead to lower instances of smoking, illegal drug and alcohol use, sexual activity, and delinquency by the time children reach adolescence. Removing opportunities may also be helpful. Some schools must regrettably search students as they enter campus to detect weapons, alcohol, and drugs.

Parents and teachers can set good examples and thoughtfully and critically discuss television shows and movies that glamorize drugs and violence. Nominally in control of only 8 percent of the first 18 years of students' lives, regular schools in the end may have

to remove incorrigible students in their efforts to fulfill their primary achievement mission.

School Leadership

The behaviors of effective principals cohere well with those of teachers as described in this book. Based on extensive research and field-testing, Goldring, Porter, Murphy, and others developed a conceptual framework and a set of indicators of effective school leadership that principals can employ.[2] According to their research, what distinguishes such leadership is the following:

- *High Standards for Student Learning*, meaning individual, team, and school goals for rigorous student academic and social learning;

- *Rigorous Curriculum* in the form of ambitious content provided to all students in core academic subjects;

- *Quality Instruction*, or effective instructional practices that maximize student academic learning;

- *Culture of Learning and Professional Behavior*, that is, communities of professional practice in the service of student academic and social learning and a healthy school environment in which student learning is the central focus;

- *Connections to External Communities*, or linkages to family and other people and institutions in the community that advance academic learning;

- *Performance Accountability* in the form of leadership holding everyone responsible for realizing high standards of performance for student learning; and

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2. Ellen Goldring, Andrew C. Porter, and Joseph Murphy, *Assessment Learning-Centered Leadership: Connections To Research, On Professional Standards, And Current Practice* (New York: Wallace Foundation, 2007).

- *Individual and Collective Responsibility for Learning* among both students and staff.

The findings in this chapter are less rigorously research-supported than many of the findings discussed in the previous chapters. Still, the leadership findings here cohere well with those in other chapters on the important role of parents in learning, standards and goals, effective teaching practices, and testing. The findings on safe, welcoming schools accord well with common sense; dangerous, unfriendly schools can hardly be expected to be effective in advancing achievement.