

TITLE: Comparison of the Leadership Practices of Principals of Blue Ribbon Schools with Principals of Randomly Selected Schools

RESEARCHER: David K. Knab
College of Arts and Sciences
American University
Doctoral Dissertation: May 1998

OBJECTIVE: To determine if the leadership practices of principals of Blue Ribbon Schools differ from principals of non-Blue Ribbon Schools.

METHODOLOGY: Participants included a stratified, random sample of 200 Blue Ribbon Schools, with a control group of 400 public and private schools that had never received Blue Ribbon (BR) School honors. At each school, the principal and a randomly selected faculty member were asked to complete the LPI and provide demographic information. Response rates for principals were 45% (Blue Ribbon=90) and 38% (non BR=151) and for observers (teachers) the response rates were 41% (BR=82) and 34% (non BR=137). Of all the BR School questionnaires received, one out of every three principals was not employed at the school when BR honors were awarded.

KEY FINDINGS: The leadership practices scores of BR School principals were consistently greater than those for non-BR School principals. Statistically significant differences were found for Challenging, Inspiring, and Enabling for principals who were at the school when it was awarded BR status and principals from non-BR Schools. No statistically significant relationship was found between school type (public versus private) and the gender of the respondent. Some leadership practices were shown to vary as a result of school size, type and location. Few statistically significant differences were found based on the personal or professional characteristics of the principal.

“Thus, the critical differences between Blue Ribbon School and non-Blue Ribbon School principals are threefold. First, Blue Ribbon School principals emphasize the sharing of a common vision to focus the efforts of the entire community, in order to improve their schools and the education of their students. Second, Blue Ribbon School principals are problem-finders, challenging the status quo through a constant search for opportunities. Third, Blue Ribbon School principals are the head cheerleader at their school, seeking opportunities to commend the efforts of their students and staff upon the achievement of significant milestones” (106-107).

“This study indicates that Blue Ribbon and non-Blue Ribbon School principals do not differ in the manner that they set the example or model the values and ideals for their school. The principals do differ in the emphasis they put on communicating the school's vision and attaining the support of others”....in that they “do not accept the status quo”....”effect school improvements and change through the empowerment and involvement of others,”in their consistent “use of symbols, slogans, and stories...and in praising students for their achievements and commending staff upon reaching key

milestones” (108-111).