
Introduction

Mark Carlisle was an elementary school teacher for 11 years when he decided that he wanted to leave the classroom and pursue a career as a school administrator. He knew that by following that path he would be leaving his students and many of the things that he enjoyed about his profession, but he saw administration as a way to help serve more students. He knew he was a good teacher, but he wanted some new challenges. As a result, he began taking graduate courses at Mountain State University with the expectation that he would soon qualify for a state principal's certificate, a necessary first step toward his goal of becoming an elementary school principal.

Mark completed his master's degree in educational administration at Mountain State, and then he passed the state administrator certification examination and received his principal's certificate. He applied for and received his first administrative position in his school district. He was assigned to serve as assistant principal at Baker Middle School where he worked with Frank Thomas, one of the most respected and experienced principals in the county. After three years, Mark and Frank believed that the young assistant was ready to apply for one of the elementary school principalships that were open in the district.

Mark's dream of a principalship became a reality last spring. He was hired as principal of Guilder Green Elementary School, the smallest and oldest building in the school district. It is now October, six weeks into his first school year as a principal. Mark remains convinced that going into administration has been a good career move, but there are times when the excitement and enthusiasm he felt when he was first offered the job begin to fade. Sometimes he wonders whether he would rather be an assistant or even go back to the "good old days" as an elementary school teacher.

Mark has found that life as a principal is quite a bit different from what it was as an assistant. For one thing, at his current school he has no assistant; he's on his own as the sole administrator. Also, he remembers the words of his mentor, Frank Thomas, and now he appreciates that Frank was truly in the "hottest seat" in school. Frank used to tell him that assistants only get the "warm seat." He knows that the "buck" truly does stop on the principal's desk.

He has now discovered that one of the most frustrating things about the principalship is not that he can't handle the job of managing his school. He has an excellent secretary and a very talented and experienced teaching staff, and he feels he learned some very practical skills during his time as an assistant principal and also during the internship that he completed a few years ago as part of his training at Mountain State. What he is really beginning to feel is that life as a principal is emotionally draining. He knew that there would be conflict as an administrator. He learned that lesson during his time as an assistant principal when he quickly appreciated the fact that "administrators are not paid to win popularity contests." As the principal (and sole administrator in the school), he is now truly surprised at the number of personnel issues he has to deal with each day. On top of that, he suddenly has recognized how lonely he is beginning to feel in his office. As an assistant, he met with the principal almost every day for at least a few minutes. Now he is on his own. Dr. Pringle, the superintendent of schools, has dropped in on Mark a couple of times this fall. The other elementary principals with whom Mark meets on the third Thursday of every month are all friendly enough, but they are too busy to do much more than say hello to Mark when they see him. If they get together for lunch before heading back to their campuses, they never want to talk shop.

All of this makes Mark Carlisle feel very much like a real rookie who has no connection to anyone or anything.

National surveys conducted by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), and also research carried out by state administrator associations and state educational agencies, have shown that within the next few years more than half the principals in the United States (and in many other countries around the world) will be able to retire and leave the school principalship if they so desire. Also, there is a steady rise in the school-age population of many areas in this country. As a result of these factors, more and more people will be going into school principalships for the first time.

At the same time that we will see more rookie principals, however, we will also see rapid changes in society. As a result, students are changing drastically, political pressures on schools are increasing, and public expectations for performance by schools are mounting; the business of running schools is different from what it was just a few years ago. The principalship has never been an easy job. The last few years have made the job even more demanding and difficult.

Points to Ponder

On the basis of your experience as a teacher or assistant principal, list some of the ways in which changes in your community, school district, or students have drastically altered your role as a professional educator (for example, perhaps many new students for whom English is not their primary language have been moving into your school district).

If you are not currently a principal, you can imagine how the issues listed above have made the life of a school principal today different from what it was only a few

years ago. If you are a principal, you probably already know that these issues significantly affect your work each day.

The effect that all these changes in society have had on the work of school leaders is profound. As a consequence, traditional patterns of accommodating newcomers to principalships are less acceptable. In the past, it was often possible for the superintendent to hand the school keys to the new principal and simply advise, “You’re the boss now. Try not to foul things up too badly this first year. Learn on the job from those who have more experience.” Such haphazard approaches to supporting educational leaders first coming on board are not consistent with the increased expectations and demands by parents, legislators, and other community members that schools become more productive, accountable, and effective. There is much less wiggle room for new principals than ever before. Rookies must now step aboard and perform with the same skill and effectiveness as colleagues who have been in leadership roles for many years.

The beginning principal today often faces a work environment in which there is little or no tolerance for those who might make mistakes. State mandates and federal legislation such as the No Child Left Behind Act define much of what school principals are supposed to do. Central office administrators and local school board members are much less tolerant of errors and poor performance than ever before. And because school administrators now face the same pressures for “perfect performance,” beginning principals are not always able to have supportive relationships with their more experienced colleagues.

This book does not pretend to offer magic recipes to be followed by beginning principals. There will not be a simple list of 10 or 11 ideas that will always lead you to success. However, I will share insights derived from the experiences of many successful educators and also from extensive research on the needs of beginning school principals. A lot has been learned about the kinds of things that might help Mark Carlisle and you as you proceed through the opening stages of your administrative career in schools. One of the most important things discovered over the years is that from the start of your life as a school leader, you can always look at your new job in two very different, often competing, ways:

- How to survive the principalship
- How to be an educational leader

These two ideas are certainly not mutually exclusive. As many school administrators point out, you cannot become a leader if you do not survive your first few days in the principalship. But there are many people who look to the challenges of the principalship only in terms of making it through from one day to the next. They tend to think only in terms of short-term skills—how to stay out of trouble or how not to get fired.

In the chapters that follow, you will certainly learn some of the kinds of things that will help you keep your job. However, simple survivorship will be only part of what you will learn. The legacy you will share here is that of leadership development—how even the greenest rookie can position himself or herself so that more effective school practice will result. If this stance were not taken, there would be no support here for the best practices of school principals. After all, effective principals will lead effective schools, and effective schools are what all educators are interested in developing and maintaining.

PLAN FOR THE BOOK

Throughout this book, we will review many of the issues and concerns that are faced by beginning principals. These concerns are described through a conceptual framework developed and explained in Chapter 2. A statement of some of the problems faced by beginners and some strategies you might wish to follow in dealing with these problems are included.

Later chapters will explore other aspects of life as a new principal, and each chapter looks at one or more of the major issues faced by beginning school principals. A major addition in this edition is a consideration of the ways in which a beginning principal might be able to face the expectations of state and federal accountability standards. Chapters 11 and 12 consider the ways in which an effective principal, whether a beginner or a more seasoned veteran, can improve a school by involving groups not traditionally viewed as part of the formal educational community as partners in educational improvement. Chapter 4 discusses the value of developing a clear educational platform, or statement of professional values, to guide your work. This is one method of helping you develop greater self-awareness as you assume your new professional role.

An important part of each chapter will be a concluding section in which you are invited to develop a personal plan for improvement and professional development that is consistent with the issues described in that chapter. Through this technique, you will be able to create a professional portfolio and personal growth plan that may help you reflect on your first years as a principal. More and more school systems and states are demanding that administrative personnel create portfolios as a way to guide their personal and professional development. Portfolios assist educators to become more focused on their career needs, but in many cases, they become little more than scrapbooks that include a lot of random, disconnected artifacts. Using your responses in the personal plan sections throughout the book, you can create a portfolio that will lead you through the next important steps in your career.

Some significant changes have taken place in this Fourth Edition. First, modification of several chapters has meant that updated materials are now included concerning such issues as the impact that will be felt by newly appointed principals in the areas of curriculum through the development of the Core Learning Standards now adopted by all but four of the United States, and also the effectiveness of accountability measuring progress in the area of accountability measures across the nation. We have added a new feature, namely the inclusion of "Points to Ponder" in most chapters to stimulate more reflection on the part of readers. Third, we listened to comments made by reviewers of our earlier editions and agreed that, while we have identified challenges faced each day by new administrators, we did not give equal attention to the fact that being a principal is a most powerful learning activity for you and consequently, there are a great many positive features of leading a school that outweigh the frustrations that you will also feel this first year. Over the years, we have heard many comments from experienced principals who have simply stated that being a principal is the best job they could ever imagine having. We sincerely hope that you will consider these sentiments when you experience "one of those days" when you might wonder why in the world you decided to pursue a career in school administration in the first place. Serving as an educational leader is a way to help students, parents, colleague educators, and citizens in general to appreciate the fact that students need to have people who devote their considerable

efforts and limited time to help each student to succeed not only in school, but also in life in general. In all probability, you are either a newly appointed principal, an assistant principal, or someone enrolled in a program designed to prepare you to become a principal at some point in the future. Keep in mind how critical your work is in preparing future generations to continue learning and contributing to society. Your job is important. And it can be fun.

A WORD OF CAUTION

This book has been written to assist you in surviving the first year of a very difficult but important job. But the fact is, schools need good leaders, not simply hard working survivors. The challenges you will face in your new role may be frustrating if you are not careful. We present a view of issues that you are to face over the next stage of your professional life as if there will be a rational and predictable path to follow in your career. But things happen fast for leaders. Just as you may think that you have found a way to address the need to improve student performance on annual achievements, you may discover that the school board has decided to save money for the taxpayers by reducing the amount of money budgeted for afterschool or weekend tutoring programs for students who need assistance with getting ready to take the state tests. You will experience surprises and possible detours as you go through the beginning stages of your life as a school principal. There will be many times when you question yourself as to the wisdom of becoming a principal in the first place. And you will feel boxed in by factors that seem like walls keeping you from breaking out as a leader.

Don't be discouraged. As you go through the process of approaching the challenges of being a principal, keep in mind that you have taken a job where things are very unpredictable. You will need to cope with change on a continuing basis. There will be many days when you "never get anything done." But despite these frustrations, it is critical that you remember that you are the leader and you are the one person in the school who has the role of seeing the broad landscape needed for success for the school, the staff, the community, and most of all, the students. These are the challenges and these are also the opportunities to remember. The frustrations will go away with time. The rewards of the job are the ways in which you can help many achieve their goals.

If you are reading this book as an aspiring principal seeking your first job, start planning by looking at the practices and actions described as helpful throughout each chapter. Start developing a personal entry plan for how you will need to prioritize your learning as you look for a first principalship and begin by asking yourself what you know you will immediately be able to do because of past experience as a teacher, a citizen, a parent, or all the other things that you have accomplished to this point in your life. Then, look at the responsibilities you are likely to encounter for the first time as an administrator and make a list of ways in which you may begin to learn the things that are going to be "firsts" in your life. If you are already on the job as a principal or at least know exactly where you are going to be serving as a campus leader, reflect now on the kinds of skills you will need in your school as soon as you walk through the door of your office for the first time. Make a list of what must be done immediately (for example, start to involve teachers more regularly in the decision making of a school where teachers have traditionally been ignored by

administrators), and what things must be approached sequentially (for example, raising the test scores in reading during this first year that you are serving as the leader). Concert violinists do not typically appear on stage at Carnegie Hall without learning the basics of their chosen musical instrument long before buying a ticket to fly to New York for a first performance. The key to success in any job is to take control of the job (as much as possible) before the job begins to take control of you. It won't be a foolproof solution to your stress and anxiety to think about what you hope to address first, second, and so forth (a sort of triage process used in emergency rooms of hospitals to find out which patient needs the care of a doctor first). But having a potential roadmap to follow will be a comfort to you when you start looking at all the work that awaits anyone becoming a school principal for the first time.

Points to Ponder

The role of the school principal has undergone massive changes in the past few years. If you want evidence of this statement, take a look at the list of duties commonly assigned to principals of public schools in a review of "Demands on School Principals" included in the 1941 textbook on school administration written by Paul Jacobson and William Reavis of the University of Chicago. The list is included in Appendix I. Compare the work of principals in the first half of the 20th century with the responsibilities attached to service of school principals in the opening years of the 21st century.

What generalizations can you make concerning the changes that have occurred in the past 75 years?

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- Alvy, H. B., & Robbins, P. (1998). *If I only knew . . . Success strategies for navigating the principalship*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Belker, H. B. (1993). *The first-time manager* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: American Management Association.
- Blaydes, J. (2004). *Survival skills for the principalship*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Brock, B. L., & Grady, M. L. (2004). *Launching your first principalship: A guide for beginning principals*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Carr, C. (1995). *The new manager's survival manual* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: John Wiley.
- Chapman, E. N. (1992). *The new supervisor* (Rev. ed.). Los Altos, CA: Crisp Publications.
- Dareh, J. C. (2002). *What it means to be a principal*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Dunklee, D. R. (1999). *You sound taller on the telephone: A practitioner's view of the principalship*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Hart, A. W. (1993). *Principal succession: Establishing leadership in schools*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Hill, L. A. (1992). *Becoming a manager: How new managers master the challenges of leadership*. New York, NY: Penguin Press.
- Jacobson, P., & Reavis, W. (1941). *Duties of school principals*. New York, NY: Prentice Hall.
- Pedler, M., & Boydell, T. (1985). *Managing yourself*. London, England: Fontana Press.
- Straub, J. T. (2000). *The rookie manager: A guide to surviving your first year in management*. New York, NY: AMACOM.
- Wilmore, E. L. (2002). *Principal leadership: Applying the new Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) standards*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.