
Typically, each school has a single administrative officer, a principal, who is responsible for the operation of the school. In very small schools, the person may teach part-time as well. In large schools, there may be one or more assistant principals. The administrative hierarchy may consist also of a number of department chairpersons, school counselors, a social worker, school psychologist, diagnostician, and so on. Although functions vary by location and size, the principal is primarily responsible for administering all aspects of a school’s operations. What then do principals actually do? The principal as leader: an overview. Education research shows that most school variables, considered separately, have at most small effects on learning. The real payoff comes when individual variables combine to reach critical mass. Creating the conditions under which that can occur is the job of the principal. For more than a decade, The Wallace Foundation has supported efforts to improve leadership in public schools. Central source of leadership influence. The school principal as leader. Traditionally, the principal resembled the middle manager suggested in William Whyte’s 1950s classic The Organization Man: an overseer of buses, boilers and books. This is a study of the effects of federal education programs on the job of school principals. It asks: (1) how have school principals’ jobs changed in the past five years, (2) how much of the change is due to federal programs, and (3) to what degree...