

# Leading Learning in Schools: Connecting Principals' Leadership to Teachers' Professional Practice

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# Acknowledging Research Collaborators and Some Points about Collaboration

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  - Dan Berebitsky
  - Christine Neumerski
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# The Role of the Principal

- *Principal* Teacher, a misnomer
- Historical origins
  - Teacher - the first principals were sole teachers in one room schoolhouses
  - “*Principal*” Originated in the 1830s (Pierce, 1935)
  - Administrator of routine, Clerk
  - By the Civil War-era, principals worked “to classify students, complete records, care for the furniture and school equipment, hire a janitor, make purchases, distribute supplies, handle the most difficult of the student disciplinary problems, and teach...” (Cuban, 1988, p. 53)
  - Post-Civil War School Reorganization and Expansion
  - Partial Classroom Departure from the Late 1800s – immigration, enrollment growth, teacher training, curriculum implementation
  - Full Classroom Departure by the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Taylorism, increased expectations for instructional supervision and curriculum development, and community access and visibility



# The Work of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Principals

- (1) Ensure high-quality academic assessments, teacher preparation and training, curriculum, and instructional materials aligned with challenging State academic standards;
- (2) Meet the educational needs of low-achieving children in our Nation's highest-poverty schools, limited English proficient children, migratory children, children with disabilities, Indian children, neglected or delinquent children, and young children in need of reading assistance;
- (3) Close achievement gaps between high- and low-performing children;
- (4) Distribute and target resources sufficiently to make a difference where needs are greatest;
- (5) Improve and strengthen accountability, teaching, and learning by using State assessment systems;
- (6) Providing greater decisionmaking authority and flexibility to schools and teachers;



# The Work of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Principals (cont'd)

- (7) Provide children an enriched and accelerated educational program, including through the use of schoolwide programs or additional services that increase the amount and quality of instructional time;
- (8) Promote schoolwide reform and ensure the access of children to effective, scientifically based instructional strategies and challenging academic content;
- (9) Improve the quality of instruction by providing staff with substantial opportunities for professional development;
- (10) coordinating services under all parts of this title with each other, with other educational services, and, to the extent feasible, with other agencies providing services to youth, children, and families; and
- (11) affording parents substantial and meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children.
- (12) Be accountable to local community and state board of education for all of the above.



# Some Important Findings Regarding Principal Leadership

- Strong Leadership ≠ Effective Leadership
- Waters, Marzano, & McNulty (2003) found that some principals rated as strong leaders by teachers are in low achieving schools
- How can this be?
- Given the magnitude and scope of the principal's job description, it isn't clear what leadership initiatives to undertake.
- Leaders should avoid focusing their energies and initiatives – and therefore a school community – on practices that don't lead to student learning.



# McREL's Balanced Leadership Framework™ ©

Meta-analysis linked principal leadership to student achievement and determined the importance of:

- Focus of Leadership
- Management of Change
- Purposeful Community
- Fulfilling Leadership Responsibilities



# Sample Leadership Responsibilities that Support Student Achievement

- Change agency (challenge the status quo)
- Teachers' input
- Focus on, and knowledge of, curriculum, instruction and assessment
- Culture – beliefs in all students' ability to learn, norms of cooperation to achieve learning goals.



## Some Assumptions about Principal Leadership and Student Achievement

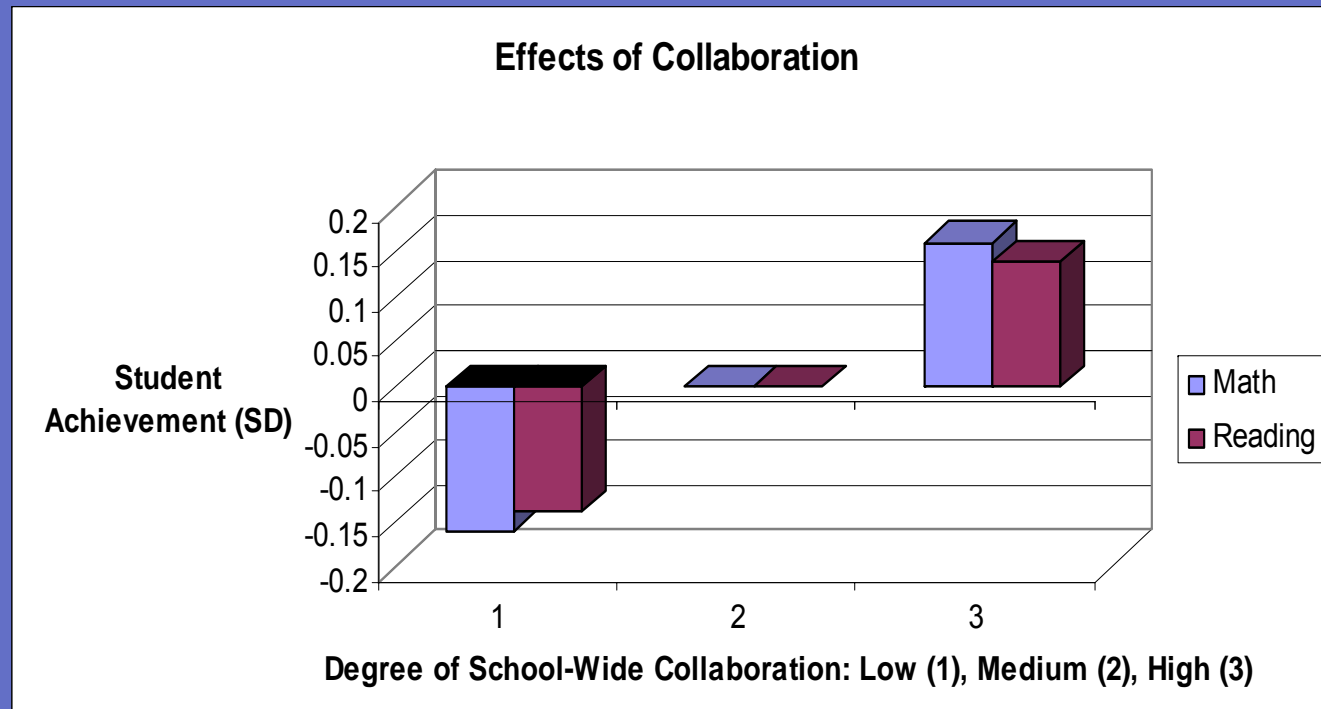
- Principals do not directly cause student achievement.
- Teachers and students cause learning.
- The challenge is to identify school and classroom practices that 1) principals can influence and 2) that are positively linked to learning.
- The above means principals need approaches to changing teachers' professional practice.

# Teacher Collaboration: Does it Really Matter?

- For teaching to improve, teachers must leave the isolation of their classrooms.
- Teacher collaboration has been demonstrated as important in the extant literature
- Teacher effects (self-efficacy, affect, knowledge)
- No documented effects on student achievement

Until now...

# To What Extent Does Collaboration Matter?



Source: Goddard, Y. L., Goddard, R. D., & Tschannen-Moran, M. (2007). A theoretical and empirical investigation of teacher collaboration for school improvement and student achievement in public elementary schools. *Teachers College Record*, 109(4), 877-896



# Measuring Collaboration

- Collaboration matters when teachers work collectively to influence decisions about:
  - school improvement
  - Selecting and evaluating curriculum and instructional methods and activities
  - professional development



## Important Aspects of Effective Collaboration

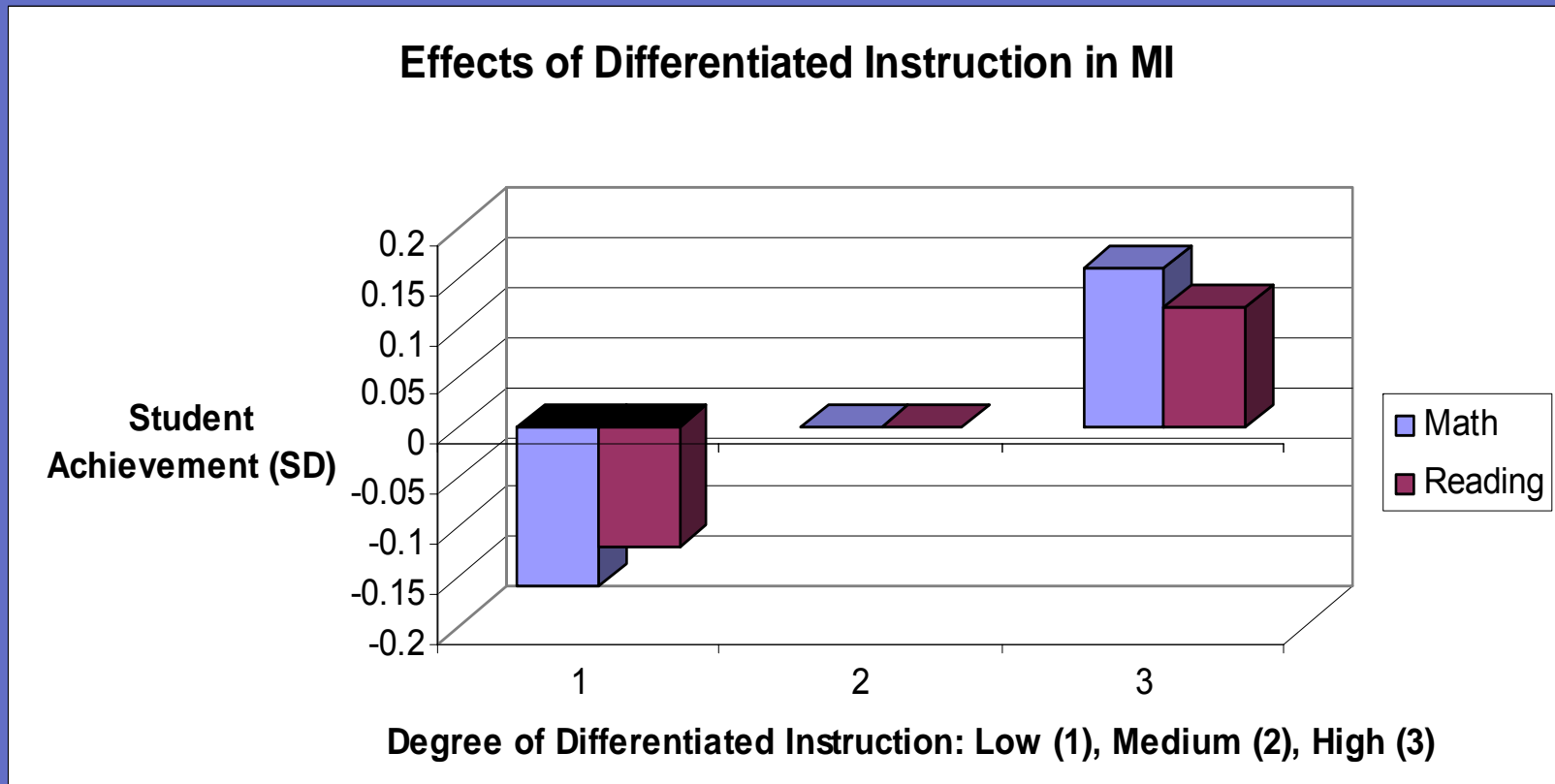
- Emerging evidence that informal collaboration does not produce effects on student achievement
- Need formal collaboration:
  - Enough time – **not enough** without:
  - Structure and
  - Focus on Instructional Decision-making

# Differentiated Instruction: Does It Really Matter?

- Has gained great foothold in literature
- Teachers have a wide diversity of students in their classrooms
  - Students with disabilities
  - Students with English as Second Language
  - Advanced learners
  - Students who struggle to learn
- Differentiated instruction is intended to help teachers meet the learning needs of range of students
- No evidence that it affects student achievement

Until now...

# To What Extent Does Differentiated Instruction Matter?



Source: Goddard, Y. L., & Goddard, R. D. (2007). *A statewide study of the effects of differentiated instruction on fourth grade students' mathematics and reading achievement*. Paper accepted for presentation at the University Council for Educational Administration annual conference, Washington, DC.

# What is Differentiated Instruction?

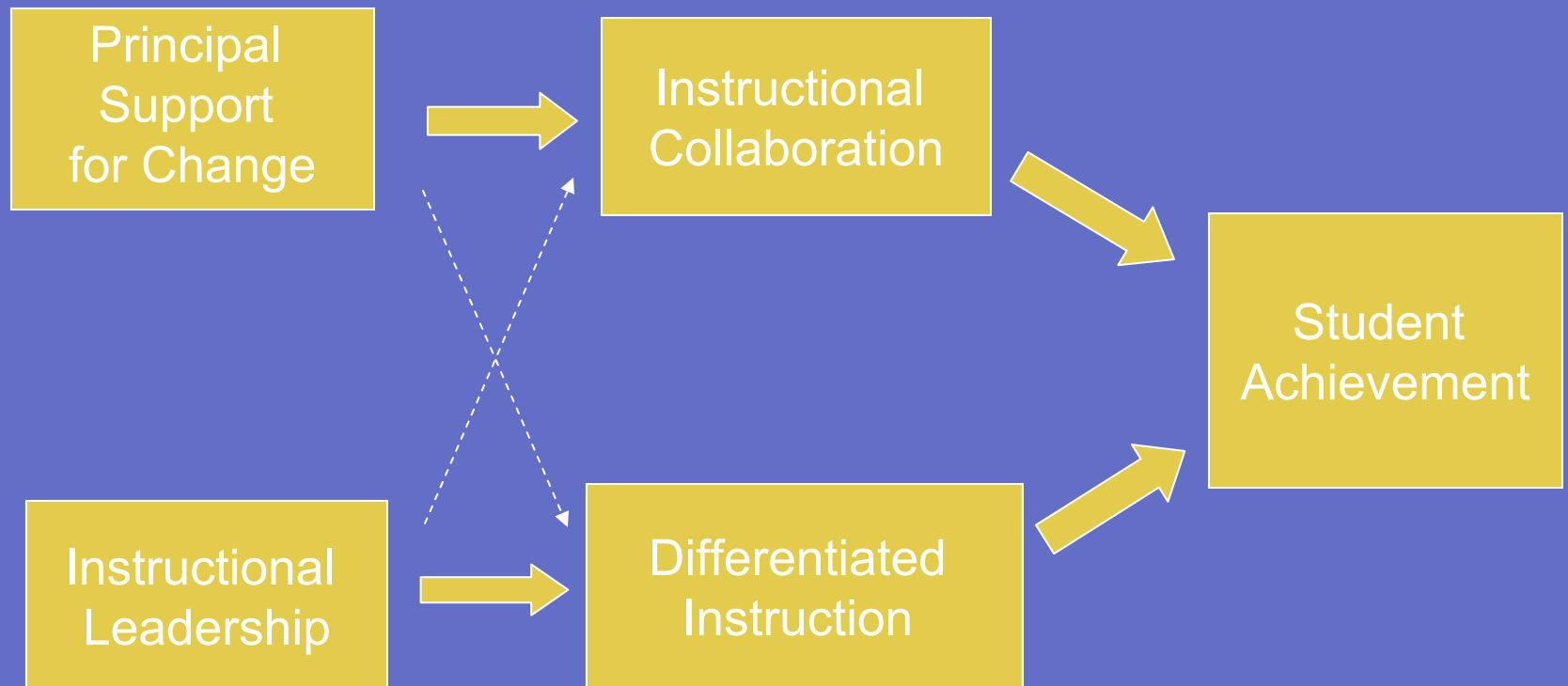
- NOT individualized instruction
- NOT making accommodations for students who struggle
- IS teachers' adjustment of instruction, including
  - Task complexity
  - Level of support
  - Pacing
  - Teaching methods and resources
  - Activities
  - Student products
- to meet students'
  - Readiness levels
  - Interests
  - Preferred learning modes



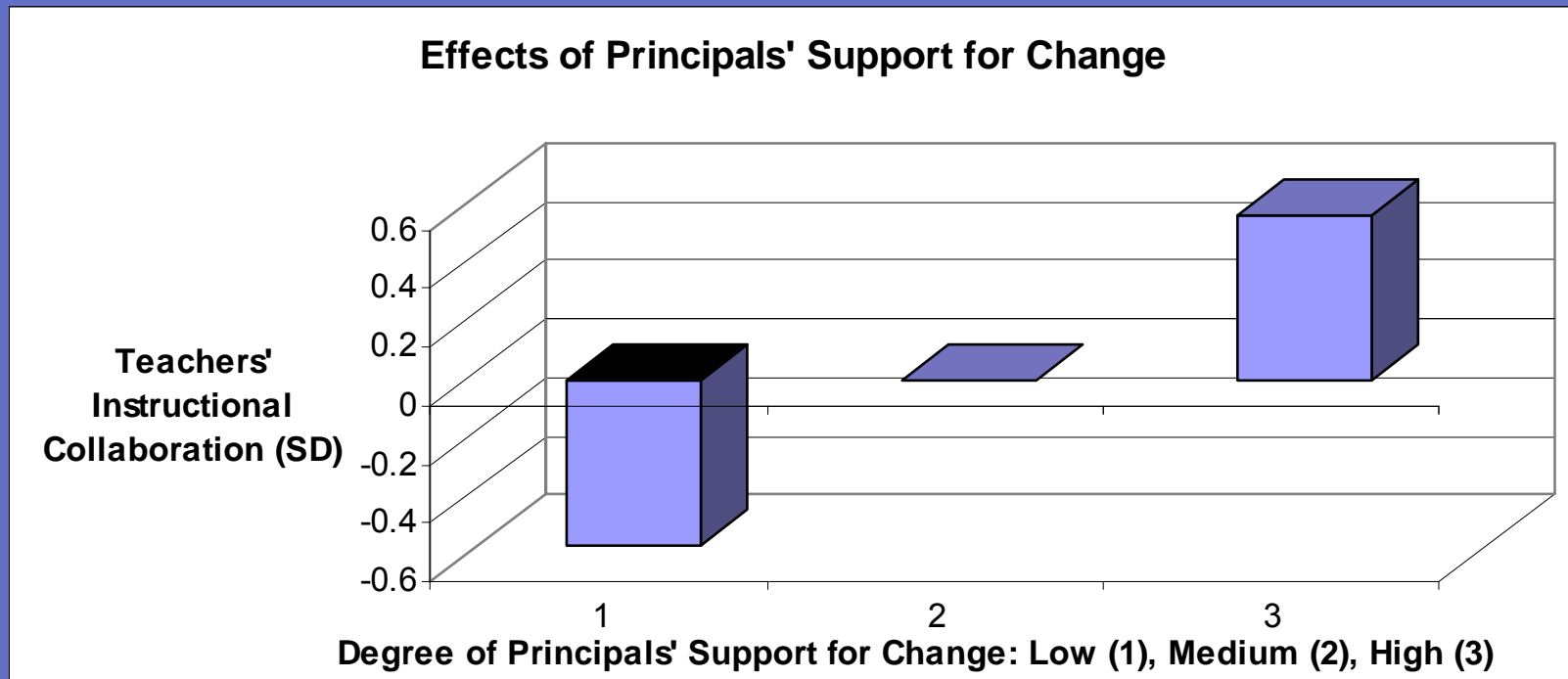
# Important Aspects of Effective Differentiation

- Teachers' willingness to make significant changes to the ways in which they teach
- Attention to ALL students' readiness, interests, learning needs/profiles - respectfully
- Assessment-driven
- Curriculum focused on understanding for ALL students
- Flexible grouping

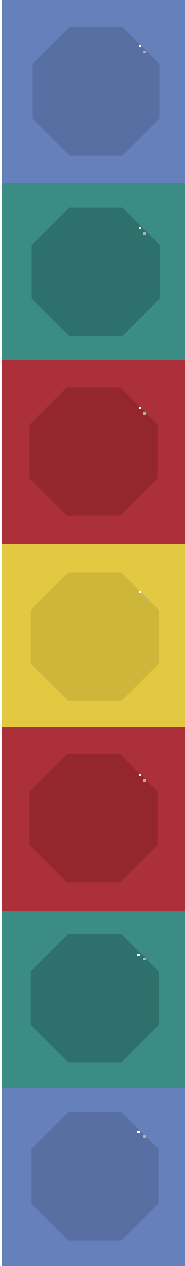
# From Principal Leadership to Student Achievement



# Connecting Principal Support for Change to Teachers' Instructional Collaboration



Source: Carlisle, J., Goddard, R. D., Berebitsky, D., Fung, D. *Does principals' support for change contribute to teachers' ratings of collaboration and communication around literacy in their reading first schools?* Manuscript in preparation.



## The Relationship between Principal Support for Change and Teachers Collaboration

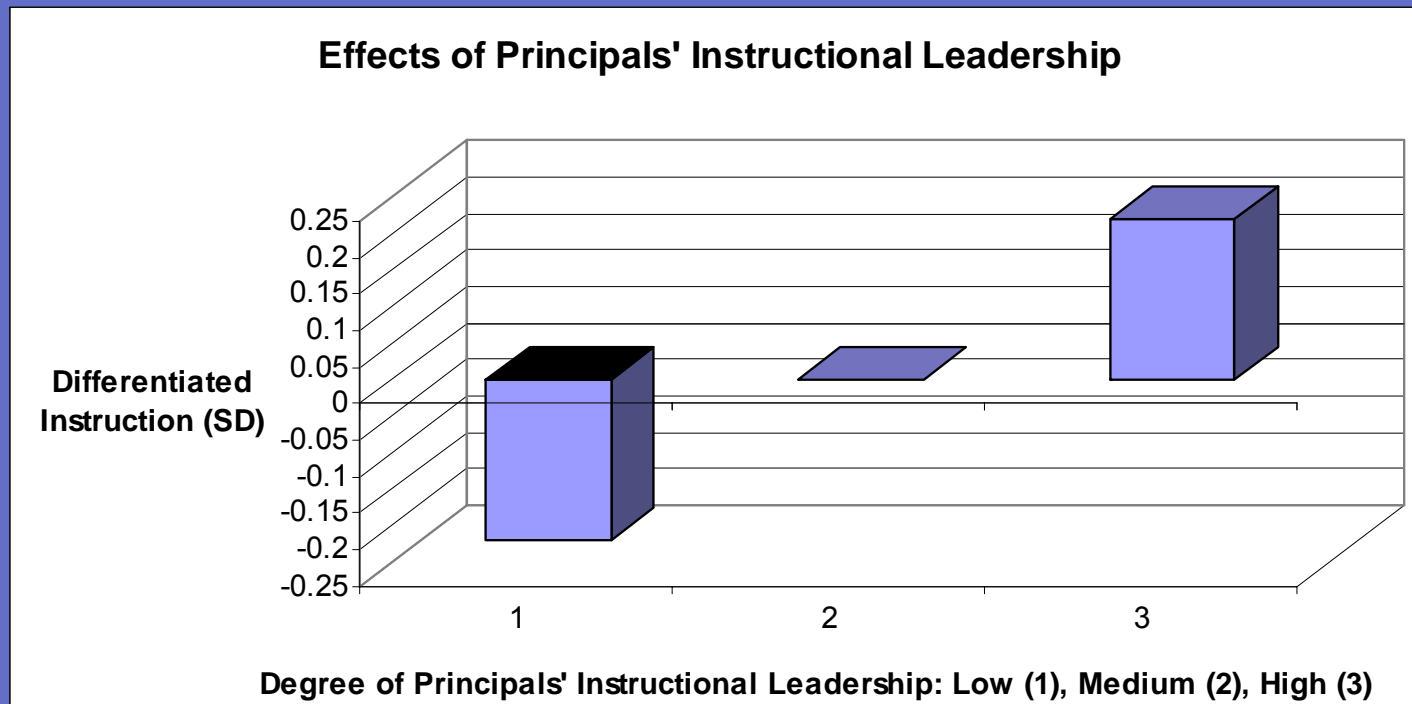
### The more principals

- are willing to make changes in their schools;
- support and encourage teachers to take risks;
- encourage teachers to try new methods of instruction;
- strongly support most changes introduced at the school.

### The more likely are teachers to report

- frequent opportunities to share ideas about how to teach literacy better;
- the literacy coach/specialist provides sufficient assistance in teaching reading;
- weekly grade level meetings are a valuable opportunity to collaborate with colleagues on issues related to literacy;
- the school has a systematic procedure for sharing and reporting student early literacy assessment data;
- good building level communication about children's literacy achievement and about curriculum implementation.

# Connecting Instructional Leadership to Differentiated Instructional Practice



Source: Goddard, Y. L., Goddard, R. D., Neumerski, C, Salloum, S, & Berebitsky, D. (2007). *Effects of principals' instructional leadership on teachers' use of differentiated instruction*. Manuscript in preparation.



## The Relationship between Instructional Leadership and Teachers' Collaborative Practice

### The more principals

- help teachers with instructional practices;
- help teachers feel comfortable discussing instructional issues with the principal;
- empower teachers to make decisions that improve teaching and learning.

### The more likely are teachers to

- make special efforts to recognize all students' individual progress, including the low achievers;
- provide several different activities in class so that students can choose from among them;
- offer a wide range of assignments, matched to students' needs and skill level.

# Conclusions

- Principals can positively influence student achievement by working in specific ways to support change and instructional improvement.
- Instructional leadership is positively linked to greater use of differentiated instruction in classrooms.
- Principal support for change is positively linked to teacher collaboration focused on instructional improvement.
- Principals should put formal processes in place for collaboration and should actively engage in the process with teachers.
- Instructional improvement can occur in the form of increased usage of differentiated instruction.

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