

“So, You Want to Be a Principal?”

***An Essay on the Principalship in all
socioeconomic settings and the choice to
become a Title 1 academic reformist***

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Executive Summary

This essay entitled, ‘*So, you want to be a principal?*’ is intended for aspiring classroom teachers and assistant principals that desire and hope for ascension to the lead instructional principal role. The essay examines and queries the educator on their intrinsic or extrinsic motivations on ‘*why*’ they desire the leadership helm at a low, medium or high socioeconomic school.

When I was an elementary teacher, assistant principal and a graduate student in an educational administration program, I was cognizant of very little of the contents in this document. Even over the first three to four years when I was a lead administrator at an urban Title 1 campus, I was not conscious of the lack of general emphasis on academic turnaround in our most challenging campuses. In this essay, it is my intent to assist others, so when they transition into the leadership helm of their campus that their personal and professional ‘radar’ is much sounder than mine was in a similar time frame.

This document provides an inexperienced educator or aspiring administrator with the intimate knowledge on the salient aspects of campus leadership in both *non*-Title 1 and Title 1 elementary campuses. The principal of a *non*-Title 1 campus has far fewer academic demands than their Title 1 counterpart; however, there remains serious and immediate challenges at a *non*-Title 1 campus. In contrast, a new principal at a typical Title 1 urban or rural elementary school most likely will inherit a challenging academic situation – with student achievement results somewhere between 20 to 70% passing rates on standardized State examinations. These administrators must make a decision between becoming another ‘physical plant’ manager or an academic reformist. Title 1 reformation methodology needed to quickly change the campus academics is no longer in doubt. Those methodologies are expatiated in the essay.

Frankly, as principals, our academic reformation of Title 1 accelerated student outcomes have been unparalleled as far as I am aware. However, dramatic social and academic results are not always viewed favorable in public education. This professional field is different in that regard than any other we had worked in prior to working in the public schools. Rapid and dramatic success in most professions is viewed by colleagues to curiously investigate on the means that high levels of success were accomplished with hopes of replication. Generally, this is not true at any level in public education from the most successful classroom teachers to campus administrators. The level of professional jealousy in public education is rampant. The most accomplished classroom teachers are criticized and excuses are made for their results invariably without careful examination of their methodology or program. Successful campus administrators are faced in a comparable situation. Accomplishment and dramatic student outcomes all too often bring derision and personal accusation without any understanding of the system and processes at play. Unfortunately, it is the historic nature of this professional field, and there is not much that can be done when colleagues and advocates act in that manner. Moreover, the aspiring principal that uses this or other methodologies that produce high end comparative performance should be aware that the likelihood is high that they will not be presented with accolades and appreciation. Regrettably, the opposite is much more probable. Thus, the Title 1 principal or classroom teacher that demands academic betterment for their campus and their students, must resign themselves that the reward for their work must be an intrinsic one.

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About the Author

Blaine Helwig is a locally, state and nationally recognized campus administrator and was the J. Walter Graham Elementary Principal in Austin ISD for 9 years. In that time period, J. Walter Graham Elementary (an urban Title 1 school) experienced dramatic and sustained academic success with typical inner city challenging student demographics. From 2009 to 2016, Graham Elementary School's academic performance earned exemplary accountability ratings and every possible academic distinction by the Texas Education Agency. The school was honored as a 2012 National Blue Ribbon School recipient, and the campus was featured as a National Blue Ribbon Profile School for academic excellence on the United States Department of Education's website - one of only four schools in the country to receive this prestigious honor. The Graham campus has also been recognized annually by Education Non-Profit Organizations for high and sustained academic performance. Finally, the language arts, mathematics and science stop-gap resources implemented at Graham that produced heightened student success are currently used in many other Title 1 campuses and districts with similar high percentages of English Language Learners, minority and low socioeconomic student populations.



After completing a Bachelor of Science degree in Architectural Engineering from the University of Texas at Austin in 1985, he began his professional career as a lead structural engineer designing over 100 state and federal highway bridges in Texas. He also worked as a senior project engineer for the Department of Defense with technical engineering management and oversight on the Parrotts Ferry signature bridge retrofit in California as well as environmental site mitigation at Little Dell Dam in Utah and a hydraulic conduit drainage redesign at Lake Sonoma Dam in California. At present, Mr. Helwig retains his license as a registered professional engineer in Texas with a structural engineering specialization.

In 1992, Mr. Helwig was conferred a Bachelor of Business Administration in Accounting. During this period of business study at the University of Texas, he pursued additional and focused coursework in both economics and finance. Mr. Helwig is extremely appreciative of the financial support from the US military throughout his years of university education and is a proud veteran of both the United States Air Force and Army.

After working as an accounting director for a large library system in central Texas, he was alternatively certified to work as an elementary teacher by the University of Texas. He taught fourth and fifth grade self-contained classrooms in the Round Rock Independent School District for six years. It was during those professional years that extensive language arts, science, social studies and mathematics curriculum were developed. The initial design work on the numeracy and literacy stop-gap resources was completed, implemented and beta-tested in intermediate classrooms. Those stop-gap intervention programs significantly evolved during his Title 1 school experience and are currently used by tens of thousands of elementary students in both traditional public schools as well as charter schools across the State of Texas.

In 2004, he was awarded a Master's degree in Educational Administration from Texas State University and worked for two years as the assistant principal at Charlotte Cox Elementary in the Leander Independent School District, a suburban school district near Austin. He began work in the Austin Independent School District in 2006 as an Elementary Program Supervisor under the direction of the Associate Superintendent's Office. A year later, he started his principal assignment at J. Walter Graham Elementary and maintained that capacity until his retirement in the fall of 2016. In 2012, Mr. Helwig was recognized by the United States Department of Education as one of seven recipients in the country with the prestigious Terrel H. Bell award for school transformation for producing outstanding student achievement for all students regardless of race, language proficiency and socioeconomic status. He was also the 2012 recipient of the Central Texas HEB Principal Excellence in Education Award and a five-time nominee and a two-time finalist for Austin ISD Principal of the Year. Currently, Blaine Helwig is a curriculum writer and a Title 1 education consultant in rural and urban school transformation. He is a cofounder of Celestial Numeracy, a daily numeracy program that presently serves over 80,000 elementary and middle students each day as well as a cofounder of The New 3Rs Education Consulting.

So, You Want to Be a Principal???

By Blaine Helwig

About twenty-five years ago, I was a passenger in a car returning to Austin. I was part of a three-member structural engineering team on a field visit to a highway bridge under construction that was designed a couple years earlier in our office. It was around 6 PM and beginning to get dark, and the outgoing traffic from the city was heavy. Suddenly, I noticed a large four-legged animal up ahead. Initially, I thought it was a horse, but as we drew closer, I realized it was a full-grown adult llama standing in the middle of the grassy median that split the incoming and outgoing traffic lanes.

At first sight, an adult llama may seem out of place in central Texas, but the 4 foot fully mesh wired fences on both sides of the highway was not designed to corral typical Texas' livestock. It was more than apparent that either there was a break in the fence line, or the llama must have jumped the exotic farm fence from either side of the busy highway. Moreover, it was an obvious and immediate safety issue even though outbound Austin traffic had slowed considerably due to typical rush hour traffic; but the inbound traffic remained a problem since it was still moving at or near the posted speed limit. Mark, the senior engineer, pulled our car over to the side of the road and called the Texas Highway Patrol and provided our location. Within 15 minutes, two patrol cars were on the scene with red lights flashing.

From the officers' reaction, it was apparent that they had prior experience handling this type of llama or exotic animal situation. The officers stopped traffic on our side of the road and quickly herded the large animal across the highway up the embankment near the fence. Upon the officers' directions, the five of us formed a large semi-circle around the llama who stood adjacent to the mesh wired fence. Then, suddenly, the two officers began shouting very loudly and rushed the llama from behind driving it toward the three of us.

At first, the llama tried to run down the grassy hill back toward the highway, but with the three of us spread about 10 to 15 feet apart, it deterred the animal. The llama turned back toward the fence line and began running very fast. In one giant leap, it managed to get its front hooves over the top of the fence, and his body's momentum caused him to roll over the top of the wire mesh fence and fall to the ground. It was not a clean jump by any means, but the llama stood up and began running away from us, safely behind the pasture's fence.

The officers thanked us for our help, and we continued our drive into Austin. After driving a couple minutes, Jim – the other engineer in the car – spoke-up and asked, *“Do you think that llama is in the pasture of the person who actually owns him?”*

Simultaneously, both Mark and I turned and looked incredulously at him. I said nothing, but Mark replied, *“Who cares? We just wanted the animal off the highway. Then, he added, “For safety reasons!”*

Later that night, after we had dropped Jim off, Mark, who was much older than me relayed the following tidbit of wisdom: *“When a task or job is to be done, always make sure you know why and what you want to accomplish before beginning.”*



So, WHY Do You Want to be an Elementary Principal?

I recently authored a blog on an assistant principal's "[Grow and Go](#)" professional maturation toward becoming principal ready. Of course, an assistant principal is in the 'listening and learning stage' of their administrator career, and it is expected that they will make small mistakes and learn from them in the first two years on the job. Simply put, it is the very nature of the transitional duties and responsibilities as they evolve from classroom teacher to campus administrator, and it should be expected that a newly hired assistant principal will have varying degrees of struggle in that professional learning process. **Note:** *All page links are provided at the end of the essay.*



However, when an assistant principal applies to become an elementary principal – an instructional leader of their own campus, they must be mentally and pragmatically prepared on what they want and desire to accomplish in the lead role. Oddly enough, it has been my professional experience that the vast majority of newly hired principals are not mentally or pragmatically prepared! They simply are not sure what they are trying to accomplish as the principal of a campus. Of course, they are quite capable in expatiating pedagogical generalities and administrative buzz words to sail through the interview process. I know. I have prepped candidates and observed a sufficient number of principal interviews to know first-hand. Over the last 2 decades, I have observed only a few applicants that possess any type of structured plan of action – regardless

if the new assignment is an academically challenging Title 1 elementary campus or not.

Now, if the new administrative role is principal of a non-Title 1 campus, then the academics are almost never an issue; hence, the majority of times, the new principal's general goal is to survive their first two years without seriously irritating the mass of classroom teachers and/or parents and be preemptively and involuntarily removed from their job. In the non-Title 1 school, maintaining the status quo is essential for survival, again, assuming there are not glaring issues or problems from the previous campus administration. Consequently, the 'why' do I want to be a principal in the non-Title 1 school case is generally not difficult: higher annual salary, more responsibility, retirement benefits, leadership ambitions, pride, ego to provide children with the same high-quality education they were receiving from their predecessor.

Even though academics are generally not an issue at non-Title 1 campuses, there are difficult challenges at many medium and high socioeconomic campuses. Bluntly, many times, parents and teachers can be extremely demanding. A principal, new to the campus or not, must be politically adept and tactful at handling both parent and classroom teacher concerns. They cannot let seemingly small issues mushroom beyond their control if they hope to remain at the helm of such a campus.



But, **IF** the assignment is a Title 1 elementary school, then the question, 'why do you want to be a principal?' becomes much more interesting. A Title 1 administrative candidate has ALL the same reasons for desiring to become an instructional leader as a non-Title 1 principal except possibly one – they must want to provide the children at the school a better academic situation than their predecessor. Title 1 elementary schools' student passing rates on standardized assessments range between 20 to 70 percent in reading, math and science. It is a rare occurrence for a newly hired elementary principal to assume the leadership helm of a

Title 1 campus that is in the same academic condition as a medium to high socioeconomic campus. Consequently, the new principal's *'why'* for becoming a Title 1 principal invariably must be to improve the academics at their campus.

If the typical administrator candidate's *'why'* is to improve campus academics, then, what is the reason that Title 1 elementary schools do not dramatically improve their academic plight in their first, second, third or even their last year at the campus? The long and short answer is: Usually, the new or existing Title 1 principal does **not** know *'HOW'* to improve academics at a challenging campus. Actually, a conservative estimate in the author's experience is that approximately 98 percent of newly hired Title 1 principals become the same type of campus leader as their outgoing predecessor – a physical plant manager.

The Lack of HOW means Another 'Physical Plant Manager' Administrator is Hired

If the newly hired Title 1 elementary principal is ignorant of an effective transformation process, they are bound to become a 'physical plant' administrator. A physical plant campus administrator ensures that the school is open for business each day, the school's lights and water are functionally working, teacher evaluations are completed as scheduled as well as the mountain of paper work required to maintain the physical operations of the campus. The students and teachers show-up each day, and come each spring, there is little to no gain in student achievement from the previous school year.



Thankfully, there is an alternative for newly hired Title 1 principals, but unfortunately, it is definitely the 'Road Less Traveled' in the public school system. In short, if the Title 1 principal does not desire to be another physical plant manager, then they must proceed with a different course of action and priorities at the campus. Generally speaking, when it comes to Title 1 school management, there are only seven (7) to eight (8) things a principal can do consistently well. Any more than 8 actionable priorities, and the new administrator is overwhelmed. Thus, the campus leader ***MUST*** engage their time in the eight (8) things that truly matter, or the school will not and does not perform academically well. Finally, it is of paramount importance that the Title 1 principal understand that all of the systems and

resources (listed below) are **up-front engagements**; consequently, once these tasks and systems are successfully implemented and firmly established, it becomes a maintenance and consistency issue. But the principal must continue to monitor and nurture the work through the school year!

What are the eight (8) most important administrative tasks in Title 1 elementary school academic transformation?

1. **Establish Trustful Relationships with Students, Teachers and Parents** – A campus cannot function well without trust. Full Stop! The most difficult aspect of establishing trust in all human relations is that the engagement process is time dependent. It takes repeated encounters over time to secure and establish a trusting relationship. Hence, the principal of any school socioeconomic setting must consistently act in a manner so all stakeholders feel comfortable and confident that what the campus administration says it will do, there is corresponding follow-through. Consistency, time and integrity are the keys to establishing trustful relationships, and in the short and long-term, they either make or seriously hinder the social and academic success of the school.
2. **Effective and Efficient Classroom and Schoolwide Systems** – Set-up efficient arrival, dismissal, lunch/recess/ essential area schedules, and common lunchroom and hallway school wide behavioral expectations. The principal also needs to clearly communicate to staff the importance of establishing

effective classroom management expectations as well as efficient daily routines. All of these processes preserve instructional minutes throughout the school day. Finally, the campus' administration must provide teachers with on-going support in their classrooms, so teachers do NOT become bogged down incessantly handling discipline issues from a handful of disruptive students. See the "[Effective Daily Classroom Management – Come Rain or Shine](#)" blog for specific information.

3. **Stop-Gap Resources** – Literacy and numeracy *supplemental* resources that are *simple to use* so that every teacher, regardless of experience, can use them with little ramp-up time. These resources need to *target every student in real time* to eradicate the academic gaps and press them to grade level. There are only three resources to implement and use: Numeracy ([Formative Loop](#)) and Literacy (800 Non-negotiable Word Program and 1,000 Word Fluency Program). Formative Loop is inexpensive and the literacy resources are free downloads at "[The New 3Rs Academic Transformation](#)" under the 'stop-gap resources' tab. *If the academic gaps are not strategically targeted for each student, there is little chance for significant academic improvement.* Note: Using Formative Loop and Bridge Resources, mathematics results will be above 90% for all students in the first year of implementation – and maintenance is succeeding years; however, this affords the principal to focus solely on literacy from the primary grades through intermediate grade levels.
4. **Bridge Resources** – These are *supplemental grade level* math, reading and science *problem solving application* resources. There is a listing of typical bridge resources at the following link: [Bridge Resources and their Academic Need](#). The other critical ELA resource is Guided Novel Instruction (GNI) for classrooms. A white paper expatiating on this literacy technique and benefits is also available for free download at "[The New 3Rs Academic Transformation](#)" under the 'expertise resources' tab. As with Stop-Gap Resources, *Bridge Resources must be so simply designed that a teacher of any experience level is efficacious with little to no training.*
5. **Independent Reading** – Reading at school is key using sound balanced literacy practices and GNI. However, there must be an at home *accountable* reading process. Independent reading (at home) provides sufficient practice so students gradually evolve into proficient grade level or above readers. An individualized student reading accountability process should be used by each classroom teacher (2nd grade second semester and higher) at the end of each school day prior to dismissal. That document is available for free download at "[The New 3Rs Academic Transformation](#)" under the 'expertise resources' tab. An excellent online software program that monitors children's reading progress is "[Accelerated Reader.](#)" This digital program monitors students' reading habits each evening as they complete their chapter books and novels. It provides simple, digital comprehension assessments that either prove or disprove their nightly reading habits. The school library possessed leveled chapter books that were clearly marked, and the classroom teacher or librarian could assist in the book selection for each child – as needed.
6. **Phonics and Phonemic Awareness** – Any commercially structured programs will suffice that teachers of all levels of experience can implement and maintain in the primary grades (kindergarten through 2nd grade, minimum). Phonics (print) and Phonemic Awareness (sounds) are *general* decoding word attack methodologies, and it is essential for students to understand the phonetic code during the language acquisition process. It should be noted that professional linguists estimate that 25% of the words in the English language do not follow a phonics rule, and 3% of English words are so irregularly spelled that they must be memorized by rote. However, the 800- and 1,000-word stop-gap literacy programs listed above take into account these phonics word exceptions as well as provide overall word fluency and correct spelling of basic words.
7. **Spaced Repetition Instruction** – This instructional technique is a game changer ensuring all students receive threshold repetition levels of discrete skills, concepts and vocabulary in math, reading, writing

and science. This instruction is conducted prior to or immediately after the daily core content lessons. There are white papers available for free downloads at [“The New 3Rs Academic Transformation”](#) and related blogs on that same website that expatiate on the topic and methodology of spaced repetition instruction.

- 8. Daily Use of Instructional Specialist/Coaches** – External classroom instructional personnel are all too often misused at many Title 1 campuses. These coaches or specialists should not be used as mini-principals in any large capacity via observing teachers and offering relatively minor instructional tips. There are too many students in Title 1 classrooms struggling with academics. Instead, coaches or specialists should be alleviating the burden of classroom teachers by checking and entering the Formative Loop daily numeracy daily assessments and providing any needed student interventions. They should also be assigned small reading groups of academically struggling intermediate students (and primary, if sufficient personnel) for novel studies and teaching bridge reading resources. Finally, they should monitor student data and progress for all intermediate students on the weekly bridge resource literacy skill of the week.

Using these eight (8) actionable priorities, the principal leads the campus of a thousand moving parts toward the faculty’s collective goal: *social and academic student equity*. Overall, the instructional leader’s focus develops a shared culture of success ([School Culture: What Does it Really Mean?](#)). However, there are three (3) obvious areas that that are NOT on the above list, and more explanation is required.

First, under these eight (8) priorities, classroom teachers continue to be afforded the liberty to design and implement their own core lessons via group grade level planning or designed individually lessons to fit their personality and instructional style. Additionally, school and/or district personnel also retain the freedom to choose their own core grade level curriculum adoptions. Then, by using supplemental stop gap resources, academic literacy and numeracy gaps are eradicated for each student, which fortunately is not that difficult to accomplish with focus and effort. Then, the selected or chosen grade level core curriculum that **assumes no** academic gaps, works precisely as it is designed. Students readily make the connections in their daily learning. As a matter of fact, this is a primary reason that novice and/or seasoned teachers are immediately successful with their daily instruction in non-Title 1 classrooms. The vast majority of non-Title 1 teachers are providing grade level instruction to students that are ON grade level, meaning their students do not possess significant prior grade level academic (numeracy and literacy) gaps. Thus, non-Title 1 classroom teachers are not forced to design lessons with intense instructional and resource differentiation because, again, the children do NOT possess prior grade level gaps. In summary, supplemental stop-gap and bridge resources create the same pedagogical atmosphere with the same social and academic successes of a non-Title 1 classroom for an academically challenging Title 1 classroom. And, academic equity in America’s public school system is not only possible, it is inevitable since the same classroom pedagogical conditions exist for both settings.



Second, teachers are also not listed above as one of the eight (8) administrative priority actions. Of course, teachers are vitally important, but we are fixated on transformative academic reform. The reformation focus must be on the students and their academic gaps. Focusing predominately on teacher training is historically

and currently the most egregious error in Title 1 academic reform. It is a primary reason that Title 1 elementary schools have not dramatically improved for the last seven (7) decades.



In typical Title 1 classrooms, teachers (of all experience levels) are attempting grade level instruction when a majority of their students are NOT on grade level, and their students' prior grade level academic (numeracy and literacy) gaps are content scattered. It is a pedagogical challenge. Pragmatically, it is next to impossible to design an effective and efficient teacher training system with existing and newly hired teachers in the typical Title 1 elementary school to eradicate the diverse content nature of their students' academic gaps. Furthermore, it would be even a more difficult task to standardize that system as a

general model for school reformation. However, if we focus on the children's prior and current grade level academic gaps in a systematic and structured manner, classroom teachers can be trained in a more normalized and practical professional development (PD) of instructional techniques. For example, an afterschool or grade level PD session can focus solely on an effective manner to teach the numeric mechanics and physical meaning for two- and three-digit multiplication. In the stop-gap model, all students possess the required prerequisite background knowledge for the grade level multi-digit multiplication lesson, such as: fluid, automaticity of single digit multiplication facts as well as their physical meaning as either a group, array and/or area model. Consequently, students readily connect with the multi-digit multiplication core lesson without dependent numeracy skill gaps.

Additionally, although the academic reformation is student-academic gap focused, teacher salaries must be commensurately increased to be more aligned with those of the campus administrators. Classroom teachers' retirement benefits are markedly lower than any school or district level administrator primarily due to their lower annual income. This financial inequity increases teacher attrition and does not attract many college graduates that opt for other careers than public school teaching. It also necessitates campus administrators to constantly hire and train newly hired teachers – repeating the same PD in systems, resources and instruction each school year.

Finally, in Title 1 elementary schools, bilingual education such as dual language or late-exit models are also not listed in the eight (8) priorities. This type of language arts model can be included in a normal Title 1 setting if the school day is extended by at least 90 minutes, minimum, to include ample time to teach both the child's native and targeted languages to mastery. Otherwise, a significant percentage of children classified as general education emergent bilingual/LEP will enter the intermediate and middle school grades academically behind in one or both languages. Educational 'research' written over 30 years ago categorically states that students catch-up academically in the intermediate grades and middle school; however, this claim is NOT empirically supported by data. Thus, if the school day is not extended, a Title 1 elementary school has two options. One, implement an early-exit bilingual program and focus only on the targeted language. Two, use an



early exit bilingual program in the targeted language, and implement a native language enrichment program for 15 to 30 minutes per day. A schoolwide curriculum program **must** heighten student outcomes, or it should be appropriately modified to do so. If that is not possible, the curricular model should be discontinued.

What Criteria is Used to Hire Public School Principals?



I was enrolled for two years and graduated with a perfect 4.0 grade point average from a respected brick and mortar educational administrative graduate program, and unfortunately, I did not learn a single item that I can recount that assisted me in generating local, state and national recognition in dramatic academic reformation as a Title 1 campus administrator. My graduate school professors were all good intentioned, and they taught what they understood about academic reformation. However, not one of my professors had dramatically improved student outcomes in a Title 1 elementary school; thus, my graduate school experience provides irrefutable, empirical evidence that a person cannot teach what they do not understand. It was also my professional experience that the same situation is valid for central offices in large urban school districts. I worked as an administrative elementary program supervisor in the Associate Superintendents’ Office, and I attended scores of meetings on academic improvement. It became abundantly clear during my district tenure that graduate school was not an accidental occurrence in the general understanding of effective academic reformation in the public school system.

After years of working in the public schools and decades of chronic student outcomes, I firmly believe that superintendents and their representatives have long realized the current pedagogical and resource methodologies will not produce desired results and Title 1 campuses will not experience dramatic improvement. There is ample evidence supporting that supposition in Title 1 performance since the 1960’s.

Consequently, specific questions on future reformation actions and/or expected academic improvement are not asked during the principal interview process since no one in the interview room knows the answer to those types of questions. Furthermore, newly hired Title 1 administrators are presented with no fixed markers or expectations at their campuses for future academic gains. Similarly, there exists little to no program evaluation on any proposed district curricular programming. The districts are hiring principals and implementing curriculum not for any planned or marked improvement – but to maintain the status quo and safely run with a philosophical ‘herd mentality’ of the public school system.



It is paramount to remember that school districts are large governmental organizations with multi-million or multi-billion dollar annual operating budgets. They are a big business! Thus, elementary and secondary school principals must be hired as if for nothing else, a managerial point of contact on a school district’s personnel organizational chart. Moreover, campus principals play pivotal functions in managing essential revenue centers that provide monies to offset a district’s financial operating expenditures. For example, in Texas, every one thousand (1,000) matriculated students at a campus yields approximately 7.5 million dollars in State revenue. If students at that same campus are also receiving free and reduced lunch, additional and significant federal monies are also received. However, the hundreds of millions of State and Federal dollars



received from student enrollment in rural, urban and suburban school districts is guaranteed the succeeding year *independent* of actualized student achievement results. Therefore, academic improvement is not necessary to continue to receive taxpayer revenue streams in succeeding school years. Of course, all Title 1 elementary principals desire higher academic achievement, but if it does not occur, there is not a revenue penalty in not producing higher outcomes. The lack of student achievement improvement does have a significant impact on the hiring process of campus leaders for challenging Title 1 campuses since

future revenue streams are not in jeopardy.

As stated above, if improving campus academics is NOT the primary expectation for hiring campus administrators, what qualities or criteria are currently used to hire elementary principals? If pertinent academic reformation strategies and actions cannot be found in graduate school or central office, under what qualifications are principals hired for any socioeconomic setting in a school district?

Generally speaking, principals are hired based on a number of conditions that have little to do with a school's current academic condition, or seriously improving it either in the short or long term. First, a principal may be hired if it appears that they will be accepted by the school's community and the campus' faculty. Newly hired principals must be able to adeptly work with all stakeholders as well as sufficient organizational skills to effectively manage the school's physical plant. A campus administrator cannot be an outspoken and controversial educator and survive long-term. Second, the principal hire must agree to implement district curricular programs regardless of their effectiveness. A Superintendent does not want a rogue campus administrator that challenges the philosophical curricular direction of the district. If so, the superintendent or associate superintendents may have the Board of Trustees involved in a public ordeal, and that is not a good situation that any central office administrator desires to publicly address. Third, a principal is always a good candidate if they possess high levels of emotional and intellectual abilities. A principal must not embarrass the district from either their written and oral statements. Principals cannot be careless or reckless as a public spokesman representing the organization. Hence, a superintendent and his or her central office representatives are always conducting a mental risk assessment of a lead campus administrator prior to campus placement.



These are the general attributes and considerations when hiring a campus principal, and a final criterion that provides much more security is to hire internally where the administrative candidate is well known and predictable. If hiring externally, a candidate with a proven track record of physical plant management at either an elementary or secondary campus also provides comfort and security in the hiring process. Or, in llama terms, a campus principal is hired in any socioeconomic campus setting to ensure the llama is always in the pasture, does not jump the fence line and cause harm to either slow or fast traffic commuters. Translation: Competent physical plant llamas are invariably hired in the public schools to safely maintain the status quo.

Closing Thoughts

After leaving engineering and finance careers, I was fortunate to work in both *non*-Title 1 and Title 1 elementary schools as both a teacher and a campus administrator. There are advantages and disadvantages

working in each socioeconomic setting as either a teacher or an administrator, but in hindsight, I preferred the Title 1 campus environment. I believe it was the place where I made a substantial impact and a real difference in children's educational opportunities and lives. Of course, each educator has their own calling, and they must choose their own path.



In my years as a Title 1 principal, my campus experienced dramatic and sustained student performance; but we had advantages other elementary principals may not have had. I had worked at central office and knew the internal and external workings of the various departments, and I was cognizant that they did not possess the band width to monitor what I planned to do in the social and academic programming at the campus. Furthermore, my campus assignment was a continuation under the same direct supervisor as when I worked at central office. She was one of the few central office administrators I have ever

met that truly valued academic performance and educational equality.

I was also fortunate with the personnel I inherited at the campus. I inherited an experienced assistant principal who the staff and community trusted, and she was a loyal, consummate professional. I also inherited two and hired two more experienced instructional specialists in both reading and mathematics that had long accepted the fact that the conventional curricular programming and its philosophy represented nothing more than continued at-risk student academic failure. Another bonus was the art teacher. He was a technology guru, and he ably handled all computer, printer and software demands in-house. Finally, when I arrived, the campus' academic state was very close to a Texas Education Agency (TEA) rating of 'low performing.' This fact was recognized and accepted by the faculty, and they were exhausted from long hours of work with little improvement in student outcomes. Consequently, the majority of classroom teachers were ready for an immediate philosophical change.

I met with identified key teachers on campus and all four (4) instructional specialists over the summer, and we began the eight (8) priority changes listed above. The assistant principal was so experienced that she ran the office and physical school operations, and I was freed to assist on classroom management, instruction and stop-gap and bridge resource implementation unencumbered. In the first year, we experienced dramatic student achievement results, and those results were sustained for 14 years – including two principals after I retired that maintained the same eight (8) attributes. Unfortunately, the last of those two principals left, and a physical plant manager was hired. He dismantled the key elements of the stop-gap programs, and ninety (90) percent of the staff left at the end of his first year. Poor student academic performance at this Title 1 campus is all but guaranteed to a quick return to pre-2007 school year levels.

So, you want to be a principal? – Now, is that the correct question to be asked?

An academic instructional leader must press for data driven results and not the ideologically and repackaged ideas that have failed repeatedly over the last 70 years. However, that factor should not matter – that student outcomes have been chronic and expectations are low. All administrators desire to provide their students the best educational experience possible regardless of the expectations of the current philosophical climate in American public schools.

The question, “So, you want to be a principal?” is not the right one to be asked.
The more fitting self-reflecting query is, “What Kind of Principal do I want to be?”

Thus, the real question a Title 1 principal candidate must ask themselves before ascending to the principalship is, “*What kind of Title 1 administrative leader do I aspire to become?*” Am I to become another physical plant manager or a lead campus administrator that provides children educational opportunities upon graduation from high school? If it is the latter, then the above eight (8) steps must be consistently pressed throughout the school year – every year thereafter. The resources and methodologies are available and ready which translates into student equity/success versus continued inequity/failure. It is only a matter of leadership choice at that point between a physical plant manager or an academic reformist.

Essay Web Links:

- 1.) “Grow and Go” – An Assistant Principal’s Goal
<https://www.thenew3rseducationconsulting.com/post/an-assistant-principal-s-goal-grow-and-go>
- 2.) “Effective Daily Classroom Management” – Come Rain or Shine”
<https://www.thenew3rseducationconsulting.com/post/effective-daily-classroom-management-come-rain-or-shine>
- 3.) Formative Loop - Numeracy: www.Formativeloop.com
- 4.) The New 3Rs Academic Transformation: www.thenew3rseducationconsulting.com
- 5.) “Bridge Resources and their Academic Need”
<https://www.thenew3rseducationconsulting.com/post/2018/10/25/bridge-resources-and-their-academic-need>
- 6.) Accelerated Reader – Renaissance - www.renaissance.com/products/accelerated-reader/
- 7.) “Spaced Repetition – Game Changer”:
<https://www.thenew3rseducationconsulting.com/post/2017/07/09/spaced-repetition-a-game-changer-in-student-retention>
- 8.) “Student Math Skill Mastery – Spaced Repetition”
<https://www.thenew3rseducationconsulting.com/post/2017/07/13/student-math-skill-mastery-spaced-repetition-system>
- 9.) “School Culture – What does it Really Mean?”
<https://www.thenew3rseducationconsulting.com/post/2018/02/22/school-culture-what-does-it-really-mean>
- 10.) White Papers available for **free download** at www.thenew3rseducationconsulting.com
 - 800 Non-Negotiable Word Program
 - 1,000 Word Fluency Program
 - 1st Grade Word Non-Negotiable Word Program
 - Spaced Repetition Skill Mastery Instruction
 - 1st grade through 5th grade Mathematics Guides – Spaced Repetition Skills
 - Literacy and Numeracy Resources under “Expertise Resources” and “Stop-Gap Resources”
 - Blogs on Equity, Administration, Pedagogy, Math and Literacy