

How Important Are School Principals in the Production of Student Achievement?*

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December 2011

Abstract

As school leaders, principals can influence student achievement in a number of ways, such as: hiring and firing teachers, monitoring instruction, and maintaining student discipline, among others. We measure the effect of individual principals on gains in student math and reading achievement between grades four and seven. We estimate that a one standard deviation improvement in principal quality can boost student performance by approximately 0.2 standard deviations in both math and reading. We also show that principal experience does not exert a significant influence on student performance. Our results imply that isolating the most effective principals and allocating them accordingly between schools can have a significant positive effect on reducing achievement gaps.

JEL Code: I20, I21

Keywords: Economics of education, principals, education

*We thank Kelly Bedard, Mati Dubrovinsky, David Johnson, Harry Krashinsky, Abigail Payne, Simon Woodcock, and various seminar participants for helpful comments.