# WHAT ADMINISTRATORS ARE SAYING ABOUT INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

*by Robert Crowe*



In this article, you will learn:

- How a principal can utilize the actions of instructional leadership to support their teachers to provide and the students to attain—at the highest levels of achievement each and every day.
- The planning and decision-making process other administrators used when utilizing the actions of instructional leadership.
- That you are not alone in this endeavor and can find additional support for developing instructional leadership from us. (elevatedachievement.com).

**Categories:** feature, Teaching

**Tags:** instructional leadership, learnership, roles in learning, teacher ownership

We all know that the purpose of education is to make sure that each and every student attains the highest level of achievement each and every day. We also know that the most crucial adult to support this is the teacher. However, you are next. **The research from Edutopia's "Teacher Development Research Review" shows the power of you, the principal.**

> *"Leadership is second only to teaching among school-related factors that can improve student achievement, and it tends to show greatest impact in traditionally underserved schools."*

**But the research isn't about the power of your role as the principal but in the power of your actions as the principal.** The research describes the actions effective principals take to support their teachers.

You are probably asking, what are those actions principals can utilize? It's the actions of instructional leadership—they define how you can determine the goals of an initiative focused on student achievement and how you can lead its implementation with all stakeholders.

But, this takes planning. **If all stakeholders are to own their role in the implementation of an initiative, principals must be intentional in their decision-making. They must model the thinking behind the initiative and continuously, purposefully, and intentionally share information about implementation. They must be strategic in the actions they use to support their staff.**

In other words, you lead by utilizing the actions of instructional leadership. And, by doing so, you will ensure your staff understands the goals of the initiative. You will ensure your staff can articulate how they will be supported. You will ensure your staff can explain what success looks like. You will ensure your staff knows how to work together.

# Here are some examples of the thinking and planning of other administrators who are effectively utilizing the actions of instructional leadership.

*What an assistant principal said, when utilizing the actions of instructional leadership, to implement a new math textbook...*

> *"Our district adopted new math textbooks. I knew from my experiences as a teacher that this*

*could be overwhelming. I knew that I needed to get ahead of the adoption and make certain my teachers realized that our goal was not the new textbooks. Our goal of teaching the standards remained our top priority. These new materials would just complement the work we were already doing, not replace it. I also knew that my message could conflict with what they may hear during district training sessions on the materials. So, I had to be sure to share our message over and over. It was also important that I gave them chances to state our goals as well. It could not just be me saying it. They needed to say it in their own words as well. This made such a difference as we implemented the new materials."*

### What a CEO of a K–8 charter school said, when utilizing the actions of instructional leadership, to implement the reciprocal teaching reading strategy…

*"We implemented reciprocal teaching to help strengthen our students' comprehension and engagement with text. Before we decided to focus on this initiative, we looked at the research and saw how beneficial it could be for our students. As we began the work, I started to hear some grumblings from teachers along the lines of 'this is just one more thing we need to do.' I realized that all our focus, rightly so, was on how this would support our students. I forgot to focus on how this would benefit the teachers. I had to backtrack and make certain that they all saw and believed that this would be as beneficial to them as it was to our children."*

### What a first-year principal said, when utilizing the actions of instructional leadership, to implement a new data protocol…

*"Our school's initiative was to implement a data protocol process. We clearly laid out the purpose of this initiative and why we believed our school was ready for it. I felt that most everyone was on board. But I knew that for this to really work we needed everyone to understand their role in the initiative. There were expectations for leadership, coaches, and teachers. There was some confusion and it felt like some folks were just going through the motions. We decided to write down what was expected from each role: what they needed to do before our data analysis meetings, what their role was during them, and what they were expected to do after each one. This took a lot of back-and-forth conversations, but the process strengthened our understanding and buy-in. I will use this process for each initiative we implement from now on."*

### What an elementary school principal said, when utilizing the actions of instructional leadership,

***to develop student ownership...***

> *"Our school initiative is to develop greater student ownership. This initiative is comprehensive and impacts all teachers. We first developed our end goal of what student ownership should look and sound like at every grade level, K–5. We then developed our benchmark goals and a year-long plan designed to reach our benchmarks and end goal. Having this plan at the onset allowed me to do two very important things. First, it allowed me to make certain I had a budget in place to support the plan. Second, it allowed us all to see and understand the plan from day 1. There have been times in the past when I started with our first step and then planned along the way. I figured I would see how we were doing and then just decide the next step. This was not successful. Sometimes, I ran out of money. But more importantly, the teachers, the ones implementing the initiative, didn't even know what the plan was. This approach of an upfront, transparent plan allows us all to know exactly where we are headed and our plan to get there. We are in it together from day 1."*

***What a middle school principal said, when utilizing the actions of instructional leadership, to implement distance learning...***

> *"Our initiative is to implement a distance learning program for ELA and mathematics. Like many schools, we have a wide range of ability levels when it comes to technology and distance learning strategies. At the onset of our initiative, we conducted a survey to assess where each teacher was. We looked at their competencies in all areas of our initiative. We found that we had teachers who were either weak or strong in all areas. But then we also had teachers with mixed levels of skills. We decided that our plan to support the initiative had to allow for differentiation. We decided that we would create modules for each part of the initiative. From there we used the data we gathered from the survey and developed individual learning plans for each teacher. Teachers have access to all modules if they want to go outside of their individual plan, but each was assured that they would receive the specific supports they needed."*

***What a high school principal said, when utilizing the actions of instructional leadership, to implement a learning management system...***

> *"Our school is implementing a learning management system (LMS) that will allow us to build and manage instruction online and for our students that are learning from home. When we*

spoke to the company of the LMS, they offered us training on the system. But the training included a couple of sessions that all teachers would receive. As I observed and spoke with teachers, it was clear that some required additional support. We had to negotiate to get a more differentiated plan. This could not be a one-size-fits-all solution. I have some quite tech-savvy teachers who would acclimate quickly, and I have others who are somewhat tech-phobic. I knew we had to have a plan that considered our varying needs and that allowed everyone to be successful. If the teachers cannot effectively utilize the LMS, our students would suffer."

**What a high school assistant principal said, when utilizing the actions of instructional leadership, to implement a writing initiative...**

"We are implementing a school-wide writing initiative. It is requiring all of us to plan and work together toward our determined outcomes to improve student learning by increasing their writing skills and ability to communicate their learning daily. I knew this was going to be a huge lift for us as a school. Our teachers are used to working and planning in departments, but not as an entire faculty. But our students don't work in departments, so why do we? I have a quote by Robert Eaker pinned up in my office. It says, "The traditional school often functions as a collection of independent contractors united by a common parking lot." Although the quote can be seen as humorous, it is unfortunately often true. We have done a lot of work to make certain this wasn't true in our school. But until this initiative, our school was a collection of department contractors. Now that we have laid the foundation of cooperation and collaboration in departments, we are utilizing this initiative as our opportunity to expand that to the entire staff. I know we will hit a few barriers, but we are moving in the right direction."
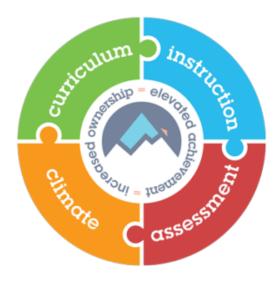
**What an elementary school principal said, when utilizing the actions of instructional leadership, to implement a data analysis protocol...**

"There were parts of the initiative that I shared with the staff and parts that I needed them to determine. Even when I shared a part—for example, the goal and success criteria of the data analysis protocol—I made certain they had time to discuss it and then articulate it in their own words. An example of the part I needed them to determine was what their role would be in a PLC meeting. We outlined the purpose and value of the meetings. I then had the teachers come up with what would be their role, what was expected of each individual, and what was expected of the group.

"We also use each staff meeting as a time to remind ourselves about our initiative and then to

> *check in on our progress. I have found that this level of consistent communication and articulation has helped us become what we wanted: a school of 'we' rather than a school of individual 'I's."*

## Our Support for You

We, at Elevated Achievement, want to support you in building your dream school. That's why **this article is part of a series of articles** that show current principals, assistant principals, and future administrators how to turn your dream into your reality by **developing the actions of instructional leadership in curriculum, instruction, assessment, and climate** and **empowering your teachers to elevate student achievement.**

So, keep reading. See what teachers are saying about instructional leadership. Keep learning. Discover how one administrator used instructional leadership to implement an initiative to elevate student achievement. Together, we can increase our impact in ways that benefits each and every student.

Continue the Learning

Check out these articles and resources to continue your learning about this topic...

- Our Article, "One Principal's Review of Developing Instructional Leadership"

- [A Sample Chapter from Our Book, Developing Instructional Leadership](#)
- *[Our Book, Developing Instructional Leadership: Creating a Culture of Ownership through the Use of Strategic Learning Practices](#)*

The Learning Brief

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