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From the Playroom

The Role of the School Principal

Principals of elementary schools where Primary Project is implemented are a special breed. As instructional leaders, they are ambassadors of the program, realizing how important early school adjustment is for engagement in the academic environment. Additionally, principals who support Primary Project understand that there is a direct link between emotions and learning.

Having experienced the implementation of a variety of social and emotional programs in schools, we have found that in most cases, the role of the principal is crucial in the planning, development, implementation, evaluation, and sustainability of a successful program. With that in mind, we focus in this edition of *From the Playroom* on the important role of the school principal.

We have collected the thoughts of several principals as they reflect on the support they show and the observations they notice regarding children's growth. If you are currently sharing *From the Playroom* with your principal, good for you! If not, then this edition is a great one to share!

"Principals must live with paradox: They must have a sense of urgency about improving their schools, balanced by the patience to sustain them for the long haul. They must focus on the future, but remain grounded in today. They must see the big picture, while maintaining a close focus on details. They must be strong leaders who give away power to others."

—Richard DuFour

Primary Project and Your School Administrator

Administrators are the most influential stakeholders affecting our roles and effectiveness in delivering services to students in Primary Project. Not only do they hold the purse strings on increasingly tight budgets, they also can be essential to attaining buy-in for programs or initiatives from staff in a school building. School leaders can certainly “make or break” a program with their support. Additionally, building principals represent their schools in the community, at parent meetings, and at district meetings where programs are frequently discussed and student progress is often analyzed to determine the benefits.

Knowing that the principal is such a key player at schools, I encourage Primary Project teams to periodically meet with their principal to inform him/her about the progress of students and the impact of the program. We need to do a better job of communicating with administrators about Primary Project so they are in a better position to support our efforts.

As a former elementary principal, I recognize the incredible importance of having the social and emotional pieces in place before students can truly meet success academically. Effective social and emotional learning that is integrated with academic instruction and coordinated with mental health promotion certainly impacts student success.

I truly appreciated having my Primary Project team take time to communicate with me about the program. I needed to know the impact that Primary Project was having at my school. Leadership is about learning together, and constructing meaning and knowledge collectively and collaboratively. Even though Primary Project was housed in my school, I needed the team to walk me through the student data to determine our progress and what I could do to support their efforts. The meetings that I had with my Primary Project team allowed me to gain a greater perspective on Primary Project and helped me to become a stronger advocate for such important early intervention services to students.

Naturally, if there is an expectation that school leaders will achieve more, then there should also be an expectation that the leaders will be fully equipped to do so. In organizations, energy is generated through relationships and the capacities to form them. As a Primary Project team, build that relationship with your principal. It will be beneficial to you, the principal, and most importantly, the students.

—Mark Turner, Primary Project Consultant

“Leadership is action, not position.”

—Donald H. McGannon



The Cardinal Sings

Mr. Ellis

I met Mr. Ellis in 1985. He was the principal of Paradise Elementary School where I was the young school psychologist. I had been in the field for five years, so was humbled and knew there was so much left to learn (and there still is!).

Within three months of starting at Paradise Elementary School, I was told that I would be able to implement Primary Project, something I had wanted to do for several years! With his guidance and support, we worked our way through the first year learning the ins and outs of the program and what each of us brought to the process.

During the two years that we worked together, Mr. Ellis and I taught each other many things. We laughed together, we listened to each other, and we took time to discover and explore the importance of Primary Project. Together we built on one another’s strengths and to trust the process of Primary Project. I brought him to the playroom and asked his advice, shared our successes, and sought help as we faced challenges. He taught me to include him in the process. When visitors stopped by, we also had a meet and greet with Mr. Ellis, and at the end of a visit, stopped back to say goodbye and share some good news.

Invite your principal to stop by today!

*—Deborah Johnson
Primary Project, National Director*

Principal's Perspectives

We asked a few principals to share their perspectives of having Primary Project in their schools and how the program fits into the overall goals of the school. They share how they stay involved, what their teachers report, and how their students respond...



We are currently in our third year of Primary Project at Nassau School and our students are thriving with the support of this program. Primary Project has been part of our school culture and totally supported by staff, parents, and students. We are using Primary Project as a Tier 2 intervention in our Response to Intervention initiative. All children in Kindergarten, first, and second grade are benchmarked and then a small number of children are selected, based on assessments, observations, and recommendations, for inclusion in the program.

Our success has been measured by the decreasing numbers of students in first and second grade who fit the profile of a student being recommended.

As part of our Open House in September, our Primary Project Child Associate is introduced to the families of Kindergarten, first, and second grade students and an overview of the program is provided. Later in October, we schedule a parent informational meeting for our recommended students and invite a former parent and teacher to speak to the benefits of the program. It has worked well in alleviating some fears parents have expressed about their child being singled out or identified in some way. Through word of mouth as well as hard data that we've made public, our district is supportive of this initiative and will likely fiscally support the continuation, even though these are challenging budgetary times! Our Social Worker continues to meet regularly with our Child Associate as a way in which to keep communication flowing; they meet with me at regular intervals as well so that I am informed. We have appreciated the support of Children's Institute and have found their newsletters to be quite informative.

—Barbara Craft-Reiss

Nassau Elementary School - Poughkeepsie, New York

Primary Project has enhanced the learning environment and strengthened the educational process at Seminole Trails Elementary School. The program has demonstrated positive outcomes on the Teacher-Child Rating Scale. But the real results are seen in the classroom. Students who participate are more motivated and seem happier. Teachers report improvement in the children's behavior. Students learn social skills, how to cope better with personal issues, and how to deal with conflict. Students who are withdrawn come out of their shells. We appreciate Primary Project's involvement in addressing the needs of the whole child. By continuing our efforts together, we prepare today's students to become tomorrow's responsible, accomplished, and self-confident leaders.

—Judith Garrand, Principal

Seminole Trails Elementary School - West Palm Beach, Florida



Primary Project provides a nurturing, safe haven for children to interact with a supportive adult and blossom into more confident, better adjusted learners. Our Primary Project staff, Betsy Frarey and Connie Turner, are thoughtful, student-centered masters of play. Most students yearn for that one-to-one time with a caring role model in the playroom. I have observed shy, aloof students come out of their shells and take charge of their surroundings during their time in the playroom. Primary Project is a transformational experience for our children.

—Jay B. Piper, Principal

The Children's School of Rochester (No. 15) - Rochester, New York



Bringing the Lessons Home

Setting the tone...

"Principals in elementary school have the task of guiding our children into learning. The Principal sets the tone, to help find that educational yearning."

—UNKNOWN

The above words remind us of the critical role that every elementary school principal plays in the emotional tone of the school experience. As the building leader, they influence the tone for teachers, parents, and children.

As adults in the lives of children, we each influence and model desirable behavior that we want to see in our children. Two desirable behaviors that we can model and teach are appreciation for others and showing kindness.

As this edition focuses on appreciation for principals, below are a few ideas that you might discuss with your child to show both appreciation and kindness towards their elementary school principal.

1. Encourage your child to seek out opportunities to interact with their principal. Simple gestures could be: Saying "have a great day," giving a hug, a high five, or occasionally sitting by the principal during lunch.
2. Create something that the principal can keep and reflect upon. For example: Write a short "thank you" note, draw a picture of how the principal makes a difference, or make a handmade gift.
3. Involve the teacher and the other children in the class by inviting the principal to your classroom to read a book or include a message of "thank you" during morning announcements.

Whether you use this list or come up with other ideas, the important lesson is to take the time to model and teach kindness and appreciation towards others.

Please feel free to copy this page and share it with Primary Project parents.

As the building leader, principals influence the tone for teachers, parents, and children.

Trayendo las Lecciones al Hogar

Marcando las pautas...

“Es la tarea de los principales en la escuela elemental guiar a los niños hacia el aprendizaje. El/La Principal marca las pautas para ayudar a encontrar aquella ansia educativa.”

—LO DESCONOCIDO

Las palabras arriba mencionadas nos recuerdan el papel crítico que cada principal de escuela elemental tiene en las pautas emocionales de la experiencia de la escuela. Como el/la líder de la escuela, ellos influyen las pautas para los maestros, los padres y los niños.

Como adultos en las vidas de los niños, cada uno de nosotros influye y modela la conducta deseable que queremos ver en nuestros niños. Dos conductas deseables que podemos modelar y enseñar son el apreciar a los demás y demostrar amabilidad.

Ya que esta edición enfoca la apreciación de principales, a continuación hay unas pocas ideas que usted puede discutir con su niño/a para demostrar apreciación y amabilidad hacia el/la principal de su escuela elemental.

1. Estimule a su niño/a a buscar oportunidades para interactuar con su principal. Gestos sencillos podrían ser: Decir “Tenga un buen día,” abrazarle, darle la mano (dame cinco) u ocasionalmente sentarse con el/la principal durante el almuerzo.
2. Crear algo para que el/la principal tenga y sobre lo cual puede reflexionar. Por ejemplo: Escribir una nota breve para darle las gracias, hacer un dibujo de cómo el/la principal hace una diferencia o hacer un regalo hecho a mano.
3. Involucre al/a la maestro/a y los demás niños en el salón de clases invitando al/a la principal a tu salón de clases para que lea un libro o decir un mensaje de “gracias” durante los anuncios de la mañana.

Si usted usa esta lista o tiene otras ideas, la lección importante es tomar el tiempo para modelar y enseñar amabilidad y apreciación hacia los demás.

Siéntase en libertad de copiar esta página y compartirla con los padres del Primary Project.



Como el/la líder de la escuela, principales influyen las pautas para los maestros, los padres y los niños.

Help Reinstate Primary Project in the New York State Budget

Primary Project has been eliminated from the 2011-2012 New York State budget. If you live in New York State, please write to your local legislators today and to the key elected officials listed to the right.

- Ask them to make Primary Mental Health Project and early intervention at Children's Institute a legislative restoration priority in the New York State budget.
- Explain that the elimination of the Education-Aid to Localities line item in the amount of \$894,000 will not only hurt New York State children, but will result in costly remediation services that will likely increase government spending over the long term.
- Describe Primary Project as a nationally recognized and evidence-based program that identifies young children who show emerging school adjustment difficulties and provides them with interventions that help improve their behavioral and learning skills.
- Thank your elected officials for their support.

Not sure who represents you? Go to: <http://nymap.elections.state.ny.us/nysboe>

If you want to help, but don't live in New York State, you can still write letters, e-mail, or call. Send your letters to the elected officials to the right.

Thank you for your support!

children's
institute

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