

# Preface

## **T**op 10 Reasons to Become an Assistant Principal

10. It's not a job, it's an adventure!
9. Get "invited" to all dances, club meetings, home games, etc., etc.
8. Discipline . . . what a concept!
7. You get to be in charge when the principal is away.
6. Interesting collection of confiscated items.
5. Daily visits from the "BEST" students in the building.
4. You can interpret unusual hand signals.
3. Good practice for professional wrestling career.
2. Bus duty, lunchroom duty, hall duty . . . all yours.
1. Finally, join the ranks of the administration.

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The first nationwide research study of the assistant principalship was conducted by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP, 1970). The research study surveyed 1,270 assistant principals (APs) and simply developed a composite of the "average" AP. Data were collected on various characteristics of APs as well as information about their experience, training, functions, financial status, and working conditions. The purpose of the study was not a critical analysis of the assistant principalship, but rather a descriptive overview. The major contribution of the study was that it highlighted the importance of the assistant principalship.

In an attempt to uncover more information about the role and function of the AP, I conducted a survey some time ago. Parenthetically, the results of this survey have been confirmed numerous times since. My sense was that APs were

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**Form P.1** Respond

<b>Article I. RESPOND</b>		
<p style="text-align: center;">What are the roles and responsibilities of assistant principals (APs)?</p> <p>Take a look at the list of duties below.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Rank them in terms of what you think APs actually do in schools (i.e., award a #1 to the duty you think APs do most frequently, #2 for the next most frequent duty, etc.).</li> <li>2. Rank them, in your view, in terms of their degree of importance (i.e., #1 to the duty APs should be engaged in, #2 to the next most important duty, etc.).</li> </ol> <p>Compare your responses to the results of my study explained in the Preface.</p>		
<i>Duties</i>	<i>What APs Actually Do</i>	<i>What APs Should Do</i>
Student discipline Lunch duty School scheduling (coverages*) Ordering textbooks Parental conferences Assemblies Administrative duties Articulation** Evaluation of teachers Student attendance Emergency arrangements Instructional media services Counseling pupils School clubs, etc. Assisting PTA Formulating goals Staff development (inservice) Faculty meetings Teacher training Instructional leadership Public relations Curriculum development Innovations and research School budgeting Teacher selection		

\*Coverages refers to scheduling substitute teachers to cover for absent regular classroom teachers.

\*\*Articulation refers to the administrative and logistical duties required to prepare for graduation (e.g., preparing and sending cumulative record cards for graduating fifth graders to the middle school).

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not usually charged with leadership responsibilities including curriculum and staff development, teacher supervision, classroom observation, and creation of new instructional programs, research, and evaluation. Rather, they were burdened by routine administrative tasks, custodial duties, and discipline matters.

Although my study (Glanz, 1994b) was limited to almost 200 New York City APs, many of my colleagues around the country confirmed that my results reflected their perceptions and experiences of the roles and responsibilities of APs in schools (also see Weller & Weller, 2002).

The primary research questions that this study attempted to answer were

1. What are your current responsibilities as an AP?
2. In your view, what duties should APs be performing?
3. What aspects of your job give you the greatest satisfaction?

See if the findings below match your responses to the Respond (Form P. 1). Data gleaned from the study revealed the following:

1. Table P.1 lists various duties respondents indicated that they performed. Rankings, not of importance but of major responsibilities, are noted, as well as percentages of APs who performed the duties. More than 90% of the respondents indicated that their chief duties included handling disruptive students, dealing with parental complaints, supervising lunch duty, scheduling coverages, and completing surveys, forms, book orders, and other kinds of administrative paperwork. Curiously, APs in this survey were significantly underinvolved in staff development, teacher training, and curriculum development.

2. Nearly all the respondents reported dissatisfaction with the practices noted in Table P.1. They indicated that their job was “thankless” and that morale was low, although 55% of the APs explained that working with selected teachers and students brought them much satisfaction. Note some of the comments offered:

The mindless tasks I perform daily really disturb me. In college I trained to do staff and curriculum development. Here on the job I’m responsible for paperwork, lunch duty, and discipline. . . . I derive little satisfaction from these duties.

Endless paperwork, hall patrol, and especially guarding a gate really inspire me to do my best. [sarcasm]

I feel underutilized. My expertise seems to be wasted with inane matters. This job is thankless, with little satisfaction.

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Working with the children and teachers gives me the greatest satisfaction. Helping a child or teacher succeed is really nice. When I can resolve a troublesome instructional problem I enjoy my job.

3. More than 90% of the APs stated that they preferred working on the following responsibilities: teacher training, curriculum development, and staff development. These APs lamented the fact that they have little time to devote to these important duties given the exigencies of the assistant principalship (see Table P.2). It appears that although APs maintained that certain duties should remain in the purview of the principal (e.g., teacher selection, budgeting, and public relations), a majority of those surveyed indicated that APs should be involved in more “professional and fulfilling” responsibilities.

**Table P.1** Actual Duties of Assistant Principals: Rankings and Percentages

<i>Duties</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>%</i>
Student discipline	1	94
Lunch duty	2	95
School scheduling (coverages*)	3	91
Ordering textbooks	4	93
Parental conferences	5	91
Assemblies	6	91
Administrative duties	7	91
Articulation**	8	90
Evaluation of teachers	9	83
Student attendance	10	71
Emergency arrangements	11	63
Instructional media services	12	54
Counseling pupils	13	46
School clubs, etc.	14	41
Assisting PTA	15	35
Formulating goals	16	32
Staff development (in-service)	17	27
Faculty meetings	18	24
Teacher training	19	24
Instructional leadership	20	23
Public relations	21	9
Curriculum development	22	7
Innovations and research	23	5
School budgeting	24	3
Teacher selection	25	1

\**Coverages* refers to scheduling substitute teachers to cover for absent regular classroom teachers.

\*\**Articulation* refers to the administrative and logistical duties required to prepare for graduation (e.g., preparing and sending cumulative record cards for graduating fifth graders to the middle school).

**Table P.2** Assistant Principals' Rankings of Their Duties for Degree of Importance

<i>Duties</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>%</i>
Teacher training	1	93
Staff development (inservice)	2	92
Curriculum development	3	91
Evaluation of teachers	4	90
Instructional leadership	5	90
Formulating goals	6	86
Innovations and research	7	83
Parental conferences	8	82
Articulation	9	82
School scheduling (coverages)	10	81
Emergency arrangements	11	80
Assemblies	12	80
Administrative duties (paperwork)	13	76
Instructional media services	14	68
Counseling pupils	15	61
Faculty meetings	16	55
Ordering textbooks	17	51
School clubs, etc.	18	45
Assisting PTA	19	39
Student attendance	20	34
Student discipline	21	31
Lunch duty	22	25
Public relations	23	21
School budgeting	24	11
Teacher selection	25	9

4. 99% of the respondents stressed the importance of the assistant principalship. At the same time, they complained that they rarely engaged in professional activities such as instructional supervision, program development, and evaluation procedures. As one AP noted: "I went to graduate school to complete certification by focusing on theories and research about instructional supervision, yet most, if not all, of my time is spent on mundane and mindless administrative routines, like lunch duty." Interestingly, approximately 70% of the respondents reported that student discipline and supervision of lunch duty should not be the foci of APs.

Based on this and similar studies, I would like to raise a major point about the role and responsibility of APs that sets the tone for *The Assistant Principal's Handbook*. The nature of public schooling is too complex today to expect one person to single-handedly administer, supervise, and reform schools. There must be instructional leaders, other than the principal. Our first task, then, is to redefine the AP's role with an emphasis on more significant involvement in

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instructional and curricular improvement. This, of course, entails relieving the AP of, for example, lunch duty and serving as chief disciplinarian. As Ann Hassenpflug (1991), in an article published in *Education Week* titled "A Wasted Reform Resource: The Assistant Principal," stated,

If the assistant principal doesn't prowl the hallways looking for rule-breakers, who will? Certainly, the responsibility for student attendance and discipline needs to be assigned to school personnel, but just because these tasks have always been assigned to assistant principals doesn't mean that is the way it always has to be. The tasks could be divided among other types of staff members who might actually be more appropriately trained to handle the social and emotional aspects of students' behavior. (p. 23)

The question of who will be responsible for supervising discipline is an important one and should be addressed. Perhaps, as in many middle, junior, and senior high schools, a dean of discipline specially trained to manage the social and emotional aspects of students' behavior can be instituted in elementary schools. Delegating responsibility to specially trained personnel will not relieve the AP of all disciplinary matters. It will, however, extricate the AP so that he or she can be involved in more instructional matters.

Similarly, additional personnel can be assigned to cover lunch duty responsibilities. A teacher-in-charge can deal with the day-to-day operations of lunch duty, and the AP can supervise the program by making spot checks, conferring with assigned personnel, and establishing regulations.

Partially relieving APs from these duties will have a threefold effect: (1) It will allow more time for staff development planning or simply assisting teachers in the classroom; (2) morale will improve by allowing APs to engage in more creative and intellectually stimulating instructional/curricular activities; and (3) academic and social objectives will have a greater chance of being achieved because more time will be allotted for instructional improvement.

Although I believe that APs must be given greater opportunities for instructional leadership and curriculum development, I have devoted sufficient attention in *The Assistant Principal's Handbook* to some of the more mundane duties of APs, such as school discipline and administrative concerns, simply because change is difficult, and many APs are still involved in these noninstructional duties. Still, I have included important instructional and curricular skills that more and more APs are engaging in thanks to insightful principals, school boards, and other concerned policymakers.

You've purchased this book because you are an educator who understands the importance of the assistant principalship. Perhaps you are a teacher

considering becoming an AP in the near future, or maybe you've just begun your first year or two in the position. Perhaps you're a longtime AP who wants to learn more about your role as instructional leader. Maybe you're a principal who wants to utilize your AP in the best way possible to promote instructional leadership. Other readers may include professors who prepare future school administrators and supervisors. Other readers might include staff developers, superintendents and their assistants, school board members, board of education officials, and other interested educators.

Many books on becoming a principal flood the market. Rarely does someone become a principal, however, before serving as a vice or assistant principal. Yet few if any books address the unique needs of prospective and practicing assistant principals. Few books exist that actually address the very *practical* issues an assistant principal faces or will face. There are some books that study the assistant principalship from a theoretical viewpoint, and a few of them even attempt to give the reader a glimpse into the "life world" of an assistant principal. But again, few, if any, specifically address the day-to-day responsibilities of the role. *The Assistant Principal's Handbook* is a book that presents and describes the very practical issues of assistant or vice principals. The book culls the essential principles and ideas about the assistant principalship in an easy-to-read, concise manner.

*The Assistant Principal's Handbook* includes the following features:

- Each chapter begins with *Focus Questions* that encourage thoughtful attention to key elements within the chapter.
- Several chapters include a questionnaire or some self-assessment instrument to stimulate thought on the particular issue or topic.
- Scattered throughout the text are activities to challenge you to reflect or to respond to a particular idea or set of ideas (as in the Respond earlier).
- Also scattered throughout the text are what I call "In-Basket Simulations." It is a study technique I derived from an approach used when I studied for licensure as an assistant principal and principal in New York City. The approach was developed by the Institute for Research and Professional Development (<http://www.nycenet.edu/opm/opm/profservices/rfp1b723.html>). Scenarios that you as an AP are likely to encounter are presented for your reaction. For instance, "A letter from an irate parent complaining that a teacher hit her child is sent to your attention. What would you do?" Challenging you to confront real-life phenomena under controlled conditions, these simulated in-basket items will prompt critical inquiry.
- Vignettes that provide a realistic glimpse into the life of an assistant principal.

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- Resources include the following components:
  - *Annotated Bibliographies* highlight “must reads” for assistant principals
  - *Best Web Sites for Assistant Principals*

*The Assistant Principal's Handbook* includes the following chapters:

1. Past and Present Challenges to Assistant Principals as Instructional Leaders. A look into the origins of the assistant principalship and a discussion of an intractable problem faced by APs as instructional leaders.
2. Essential Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions. Drawing from the vast literature on leadership in general, and supervision and curriculum specifically, this chapter identifies some essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions that form the basis for work as an assistant principal.
3. Clinical Supervision. Basic primer on using the clinical supervision cycle, including teacher observation.
4. Instructional Improvement. Basic primer on promoting instructional improvement by working with teachers on teaching strategies that promote student achievement.
5. Curriculum. Basic primer on curriculum development.
6. Program Development and Evaluation. Practical strategies for establishing and conducting an evaluation of any school program.
7. Why Didn't They Teach Me This Stuff in Graduate School? Assistant principals may have taken courses in supervision and curriculum in graduate school, but the realities of the job require assistant principals to serve as chief disciplinarians and lunchroom/bus duty coordinators. This chapter describes the skills necessary to deal with schoolwide discipline and administrative exigencies. This chapter will also provide some concrete suggestions for the following items: developing a master schedule, the AP's role in special education, strategies for running effective meetings, and methods for involving parents.
8. Do I Want to Remain an Assistant Principal? Brief discussion of the assistant principalship as a career or as a path to the principalship.