

The Secrets of a Principal Who Makes Things Work: *One columnist's idea of a good principal* **By MICHAEL WINERIP (New York Times)**

A good principal has been a teacher.

While Ivy Leaguers in their 20s can now become principals, Jacqui Getz, 51, the new principal of Public School 126, a high-poverty school in Chinatown, came up the old way. This is her third principal position, but before that, she was a teacher for nine years and an assistant principal for four. It's hard for principals to win over teachers if they haven't been one.

"You're the principal," Ms. Getz said, "but you have to know how a teacher feels and how a teacher thinks."

A good principal feels at home in a cafeteria filled with 800 children eating rubbery scrambled eggs for breakfast.

At Table 510, Ms. Getz discussed "Maniac McGee" with Beckie Zheng; at Table 500, Hula-Hoops with Annika Dalland. At Table 220, Ms. Getz spotted a second grader, eyes closed, resting his head on his arms, and brought him a box of Raisin Bran with a carton of milk. "You need to eat," she whispered.

A good principal has her own style.

"He wants to meet you," said a third-grade girl, who was holding her little brother's hand. From where the children stood, Ms. Getz must have looked like the Eiffel Tower. She wears heels because she believes tall principals have an edge. As she walks, her bracelets clink, her heels click. Before they see her, students know Ms. Getz is coming around the corner.

A good principal protects her teachers from the nonsense.

"I want my people to feel I have their backs," she said.

Last year, the city's Education Department put into effect its 32-variable equation that looks like a chemical configuration for rocket fuel but is actually a formula concocted to rate teachers based on student test scores.

It was degrading for teachers, and Ms. Getz has signaled she is not a believer. "How can this formula tell me about the teacher in front of me?" she said. Under state regulations, test scores can count for up to 40 percent of a teacher's evaluation. "These tests are so unreliable; I wouldn't count them 10 percent, 8 percent, 1 percent," she said. "You don't want teachers feeling belittled; you want them to keep their dignity so they can be at their best."

A good principal sets her own high standards.

Many are the ways Ms. Getz evaluates teachers. She regularly visits classrooms. She looks at the written materials they send to families and the administration. She watches them during group planning sessions with other teachers. She studies their lesson plans and notices how they maintain their rooms, when they show up for meetings and whether they take notes. She looks to see how they organize themselves for the day and the records they keep. She listens to parents.

Ms. Getz wants to know whether teachers continually challenge themselves, have the power of reflection, make intellectual connections and are curious about the art of teaching. Some of what she's hunting for, she can describe only vaguely: "There's something at the core of a good teacher that kids get, and makes them feel safe and relaxed."

A good principal works with union leaders to carry out her educational agenda, and if she can't, takes them on.

At four of the five schools where Ms. Getz has been a supervisor, relations have been good. At the other, union members had taken over school advisory committees, undercutting her. She worked around them until they quit in frustration.

Still, she believes teachers need unions, saying, "Some schools are very hard on teachers." Said Barry Greenberg, the P.S. 126 chapter leader, "We're glad she's here."

A good principal knows teachers are only part of what make a school run.

Her first week on the job, Ms. Getz was invited by Aixa Torres, president of the tenants' association of the 2,000-unit housing project across the street, to come to one of its meetings. "The same day, she came," Ms. Torres said. "She's on the mark."

Ms. Getz brings in Diet Cokes for Margaret Javor, the longtime school secretary, but that's not what won her over. "I like that she compliments my work ethic," Ms. Javor said.

A good principal takes money out of her pocket for the school.

Against all odds, Ms. Getz was determined to make the principal's office an inviting place for children. She bought bookcases from Ikea and stacked them with hundreds of books from her home that children and teachers could borrow.

Recently, Ms. Getz interrupted a meeting she was having with department managers, and in marched three little girls looking for books. The girls got the books, and the managers got the point.

A good principal loves and trusts the public schools where she works.

Ms. Getz's husband is also a principal, at East Side Middle School. Her mother is still teaching at the Center School, and all three of her children have attended New York City public schools.

A good principal worries in private, ignores the surreal and finds a way to get things done.

The department judges them by student test scores and school progress report grades. Many nights, Ms. Getz wakes at 3 a.m. full of worries. "And then I say, I am not going to let them do this to me," she said.

A few weeks before, the Education Department had sent principals a packet explaining the progress report grading system. It was titled, "New Templates Clarify Scoring and Metrics." An example of template clarification: "The percent of range is the share of the comparison range covered by the school's result, used to determine the share of points earned."

Because of budget cuts, P.S. 126's sixth grades have gone to 30 students per class from 20 last year, but Ms. Getz does not dwell on it. "I think of how to do," she said, "with what I have."

A good principal has a **To Do list** several feet long.

Excerpts from Ms. Getz's list from last weekend: Start to plan Performance Assessment Tasks. Rough draft of Principal Performance Review. Plan out first-grade social studies School Study. Review fifth-grade first unit of social studies. Read and respond to GOAL sheets of all staff. Make new templates for Danielson observations. Write weekly family letter. Review professional text math book. Analyze Progress Report. Do feedback Post-its for teachers from informal visits this week.

A good principal leads by example.

School ended at 2:50 that day, but at 5, when Sabrina Bassett, a special-education teacher, came into the office with a question about a mapping lesson, Ms. Getz was there. And at 5:30, when Ian Lambert, a fourth-grade teacher, poked his head in to discuss a spelling curriculum he was putting together, Ms. Getz was still there.

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