

It is difficult to define the 'ideal' head for all schools. In fact, you could say that there is no such thing. Each school has its own unique milieu of individuals with problems and capacities entirely their own. The best principal for one school may be the worst fit for another one. Essentially since different schools have different needs and require different 'ideal' principals. Numerous factors contribute to the way a school is run and one of these is the principal. Although economic status and other capacities and limitations such as the availability of teachers play major roles in the nature of the school, the head of the institution is an integral element.

This said, I'll admit that there are some general attributes that the most desirable principals for a wide range of schools should share. The head of an institution should genuinely care about the students and should be **approachable**. There is no point in having an unapproachable principal as students and teachers alike will hesitate to bring up issues that concern them. The principal should make time for having open discussions students when needed and should seriously consider his or her opinions. She should constantly work towards improvement and should be open to suggestions from a variety of sources, including unlikely ones.

One of my principals was very inspiring in the way that she taught by example. She followed what she said and wasn't afraid to get her hands dirty. After the school 'mela' she would start cleaning up the litter before asking anyone else to do it. This helped inculcate an understanding that no job (cleaning toilets included) is too dirty or 'low' for you to do. I felt free to go up to her and ask her a question or voice my concerns about something going on at school. A principal should be a friend and confidant to teachers and students if possible, but this should be balanced with her responsibilities. She should be able to keep things going without becoming autocratic. To keep things in order, a principal has to be deeply involved in the day to day running of the school as well as student-teacher and teacher-student dynamics. With involvement, she can develop an understanding of the context of problems that may arise. I believe that it is essential for the principal to take at least one class.

Experience in teaching will help her understand other teachers' difficulties if and when they arise. Some of my fondest memories of school are of innovative biology,

chemistry, physics and mathematics classes (to name a few) all taught by the principal! Each teacher had her own personality and teaching style and my perception of a principal when I was younger was

simply a teacher with that title who worked in the office a bit. She inspired me in so many ways over the eight or nine years I spent at that school. It was through her that I discovered and rediscovered bird watching, nature walks and tree climbing. She had a great sense of fun and although she sometimes scolded I suspect that she really wasn't as stern as she wanted us to believe.



A principal should be a friend and confidant to teachers and students if possible, but this should be balanced with her responsibilities. She should be able to keep things going without becoming autocratic.



The students, teachers and principal of any school should share mutual respect and be on relatively equal footing. Smaller classes will make this more probable. Equality or at least a sense of it is vital. If individuals feel that they have a say in what affects them, they will probably feel less threatened by any change put into practice. This 'power' should be tangible and if someone, be it a student or a teacher, is unhappy with the way something is happening she should be free to express this concern to the head of the institution and should be able to actually DO something about it.

There should be a certain amount accountability and transparency in any school. This should start with the principal. Schools could be more democratic, this would not only expose the students to the democratic process and its importance, but would also help things run more smoothly and it would probably be better for everyone in the

long run. Rules can be discussed and decided upon by the student body and teachers. If the students are used to this process and have sufficient maturity, they will understand the importance of rules and may not even require very many! But the existing boundaries should be made clear. Democracy can ease the tension that is known to build up between faculty members, students and other individuals involved. Although it comes with its own share of problems, democracy can do wonders for an institution provided individuals remain fair and unbiased. We must not let corruption settle in. As I mentioned earlier, there should be some degree of transparency and petty personal differences shouldn't get in the way. Straightforwardness, maturity and honesty are integral.

Finally, the principal and financial administration should have integrity and should most definitely put the good of the student, school and society before monetary gain. She

should seek admissions from those who share the school's vision and should avoid favoring anyone unfairly. The idea of a school running for profit seems misguided. The main purpose of a school and its principal should be to make the best possible education available to its students. Student and teacher development should be a principal's foremost concerns. The focus should be on what is best for the students.

In conclusion, the ideal principal is embodied by different ideals and individuals for each school and she should be intimately involved in the school's proceedings as well as in the interpersonal dynamics of the community. The head of an institution should be a true member of the school community and should give all other members equal respect. The needs of schools can be extremely different and usually change continuously. This simple fact makes defining the perfect or ideal principal a slippery task, to say the least.

Jayanthi Joseph is in eleventh grade and studies at Mallya Aditi International School. She studied at Poorna Learning Centre from fourth to tenth standard. She discovered her love for teaching while assisting with Biology classes at Poorna. A passionate musician, she plays the violin and piano and is part of the Bangalore School of Music's junior and chamber orchestras. She has taken part in several concert tours with the BSM chamber orchestra, including trips to Goa and Chennai. She hopes to pursue a career in music, biological research and education. She may be reached at jj.iris.oregon@gmail.com.

