Dr. Larry Lezotte was one of the pioneers of the Effective Schools movement, which began in 1966 in response to a controversial report written by sociologist James Coleman. Coleman’s report stated that schools could do little to support students’ academic achievement, because achievement was predominantly related to the demographics and socioeconomic class of the surrounding community.

Lezotte’s Effective Schools research, articulated in his 2010 book *What Effective Schools Do*, aimed to prove that schools could have a significant positive impact on their students’ achievement regardless of other circumstances. At its heart, Lezotte’s research stressed the seven “Correlates of Effective Schools.” These factors were characteristics of effective schools across the racial and socioeconomic spectrum. To be an effective school, a school must:

**Be a Safe and Organized Place**

An effective school must first be a place where students can feel safe, physically and emotionally. It must be a supportive community where kids—and teachers—of all backgrounds can focus on learning. To create a climate of safety, halls and classrooms must be free of behavior like fighting, bullying, and harassment. That said, a safe environment is not created merely through punishment.

A 2011 study by Michael Thompson, researcher and director of the Justice Center at the Council of State Governments, shows that suspension and expulsion as discipline for “discretionary violations” actually do more harm than good for the individual student. They also damage the sense of community within the school. Students who receive suspensions and expulsions for discretionary violations are three times more likely to end up in a juvenile detention center the following year, and an authoritarian system creates an oppressive atmosphere where learning and school effectiveness are impaired.

To achieve a safe environment where kids are free to reach their potential academically, Thompson advocates for schools to focus on preventing misbehavior by implementing school-wide “positive behavior interventions.” According to Thompson, these interventions should stress social skills and emotional learning, to teach students conflict resolution and cultural understanding.

Lezotte advocates similar methods of positivity. According to Lezotte, teachers, parents, and other mentors need to encourage a learning environment in school-age kids by treating schools as “sacred places.” How society values school as a whole culture has everything to do with how
students will engage with their own education. When students regard school as an institution with higher respect, they will enter the school with attitudes more conducive to learning, Lezotte says.

**Set High Expectations for Students**

Effective schools expect students to succeed. Because of that, students at these schools learn more. Psychology researcher Robert Rosenthal conducted an experiment in the 1960s where teachers were given a class of randomly selected students, and were told that these students’ IQ test scores indicated that they had a high potential for growth that school year. When they took the IQ test again at the end of the year, the results showed that “the kids actually got smarter when they were expected to get smarter by their teachers,” says Rosenthal. Students in classes where the researchers didn’t plant these expectations did not show the same dramatic improvement. This happened because teachers gave more praise, remedial instruction, and opportunity for classroom participation to the students who were perceived as more capable. Students in turn found the lessons more interesting and approachable.

Teachers at effective schools genuinely believe that every kid has the raw materials to be a successful student, according to Lezotte’s research. In a practical sense, this means that effective teachers make a conscious effort to give equal opportunity for all students to respond during class, provide thoughtful feedback to every student, and are willing to re-teach concepts that students have not mastered.

**Have a Relatable Leader**

In an effective school, the principal is a “leader of leaders.” He or she is not just an authority figure, but also a “coach, partner, and cheerleader,” says Lezotte. A leader of leaders does not operate in a top-down authority structure, but realizes that the best solutions come from a collaborative effort.

According to Lezotte, to show the kind of leadership that inspires and creates an enriching community in the school, the principal must be visible. She must be accessible not only to teachers but also to the student body—walking the halls, cheering at games, and supporting extra-curricular events. It is also the principal’s responsibility to assess data about school effectiveness and implement strategies to address areas that need improvement.

Principal Robert Mastruzzi from John F. Kennedy High School in the Bronx, New York, was an example of a principal who motivated staff and students to achieve their potential, writes Sara Lawrence in her 1983 book *The Good High School*. While teachers praised his contagious energy and students were comfortable around him because of his warm personality, these weren’t the only reasons he was a great leader. Mastruzzi’s greatest strength was his vision for the school. His passionate belief that the students “are all winners” fueled his educational philosophy. “Each year I tell the faculty to increase their expectations of students. You ask for more and you get more,” Mastruzzi says. Lawrence writes that his willingness to innovate was moderated by a sense for what wasn’t working, and he met challenges by listening to his colleagues’ perspectives before making changes.
**State a Clear Mission**

“Vision animates, inspires, transforms purpose into action,” says Warren Bennis, a pioneer in the field of leadership studies. An effective principal must uphold a vision for the school and clearly articulate it to so teachers, administration, and parents can be united in striving for higher achievement.

In *What Effective Schools Do*, Lezotte points to principals' vague goals or interest in maintaining the status quo as common pitfalls of less effective schools. He says administrations are often unwilling to dedicate the resources and effort it takes to follow through on vision-driven change.

An effective mission emphasizes innovation and improvement in providing learning for all—students and educators of all backgrounds. The principal can make a mission effective by being persistent and energetic in sharing her vision with faculty, students, and parents to unite their goals. All of these members of the community must commit to this mission and take responsibility for its impact on the curriculum and learning environment.

Teachers especially should translate this mission so that it’s pertinent to how they teach their classes, Lezotte writes. When the curriculum is designed with the mission in mind, it becomes easier to identify gaps in students’ education and address the deficiencies. The school begins operating as one effective organism instead of a loose network of individuals with their own agendas. The mission becomes an ideal that guides everyone’s efforts on a daily basis.

**Monitor Students’ Progress**

Lezotte’s research into the values of effective schools found that students who were regularly tested on their academic progress were more successful than those who weren’t. Frequent teacher-written evaluations give teachers the information they needed to make changes if some or all students weren’t mastering class material.

While effective schools use assessments, Lezotte believes teachers can and should assess the students’ learning more holistically and less formally than standardized exams—relying less on multiple-choice tests and giving more attention to portfolios and presentations. Students should also be encouraged to monitor themselves by keeping progress charts and revisiting graded assignments.

**Provide the Opportunity to Learn**

Students tend to learn the things they spend the most time on. Teachers at effective schools are aware of limited instruction time and create a syllabus with that in mind. Keeping the mission at the forefront, teachers must create a syllabus that allows for not just all material to be covered, but also for it to be mastered, within the time constraints of the class. The syllabus must be flexible enough to allow re-teaching when the students are having trouble with certain key concepts.
In effective schools, teachers must sometimes practice “organized abandonment” when approaching their lesson plans. If students aren’t mastering fundamental skills like reading, then teachers and schools may have to abandon lower-priority learning experiences until students are caught up to the appropriate standards. While organized abandonment is essential for true learning in limited timeframes, Lezotte and others advocate for more time spent in school in general, starting that schools could be more effective with shorter vacations and longer school days.

**Build a True Partnership Between Home and School**

The most effective schools have what Lezotte calls an authentic partnership with parents. At the most basic level, Lezotte says, teachers and staff must be able to rely on parents to get their children to school on time and regularly, and parents must be assured “that their children are entering a safe and caring place.”

But a true home and school partnership goes much further. Teachers and parents work together to help kids get the most out of their assignments. Parents devote time to tutor their children, and teachers provide clear directions for how parents can help in a productive way. This strategy is most effective when teachers and parents have an open line of communication and can share notes on the student’s progress.

According to Lezotte, effective schools go beyond purely academic matters when it comes to bridging home and school. In the most effective relationship between home and school, parents and other community agencies work together to address problems that are not uniquely school-based, says Lezotte. Drug use, bullying, and gang activity “are all serious problems where the school can contribute to the solution, but the school can’t solve them alone.” In an ideal situation, the community as a whole works as a team to tackle these issues and create a better environment for learning, and a better society.