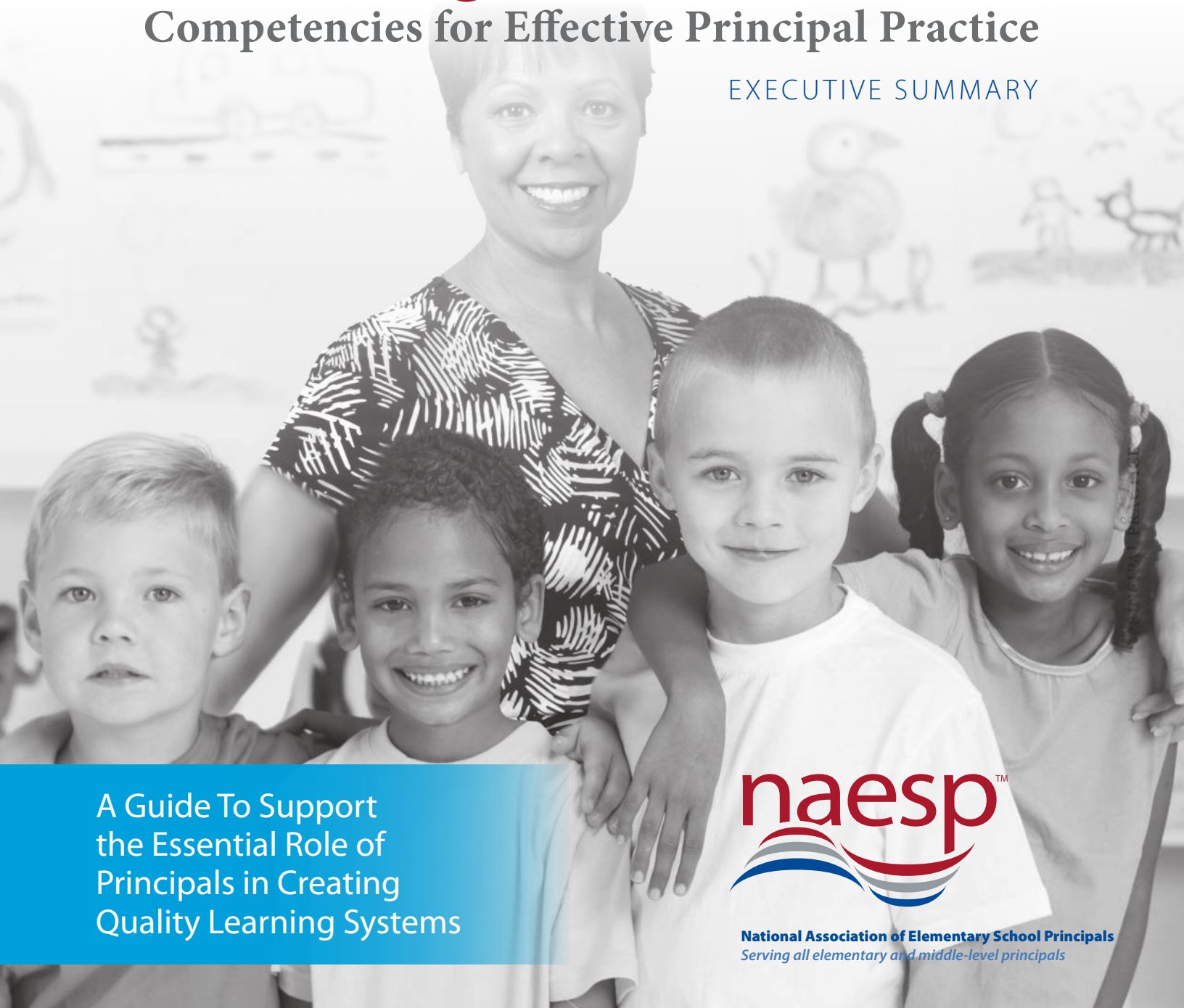




# Leading Pre-K-3 Learning Communities

Competencies for Effective Principal Practice

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



A Guide To Support  
the Essential Role of  
Principals in Creating  
Quality Learning Systems



**National Association of Elementary School Principals**  
*Serving all elementary and middle-level principals*

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# Foreword by Gail Connelly

Leading Pre-K-3 Learning Communities embraces a vibrant vision that imagines a quality early childhood education for each and every child that is filled with play, creativity, early literacy and numeracy, music and art, physical activity and time to nurture, support and enhance each child's social and emotional growth. This approach is critical to lay the foundation that fosters intellectual curiosity, personal responsibility and critical life skills. Creating an aligned continuum of research-based, age-appropriate standards and practices for the education of young children from prekindergarten through third grade, or age three to grade three, is the basis of the competencies developed by principals for principals as presented in this publication.

This guide provides a framework to help principals create and support connections between the worlds of birth to five and K-12 and to help them implement developmentally-appropriate teaching and learning practices to ensure successful Pre-K-3 continuums in their schools. This Pre-K-3 continuum encompasses so much of what principals already believe, such as:

- Learning starts early and family engagement matters
- Supporting children to be prepared when they start school is essential to helping them get on the right track
- Developing early skills is fundamental to ensuring their future success
- Making sure children can read and do math by the time they leave third grade is essential to ensuring that they graduate from high school ready for college, careers and life
- Integrating the arts into learning and developing the social, emotional and physical well-being of children enhances their academic achievement

For the policy maker, this guide provides a research base that demonstrates the enormous dividends children gain through investments in early education from age 3 to grade three. Children who have high-quality early learning opportunities are less likely to encounter the juvenile justice system and more likely to graduate from high school. Further, research on early childhood brain development clearly demonstrates that a child's learning through age eight relies on an array of educational experiences that educators must support through developmentally-appropriate practice, which will help close achievement gaps as children progress in school.

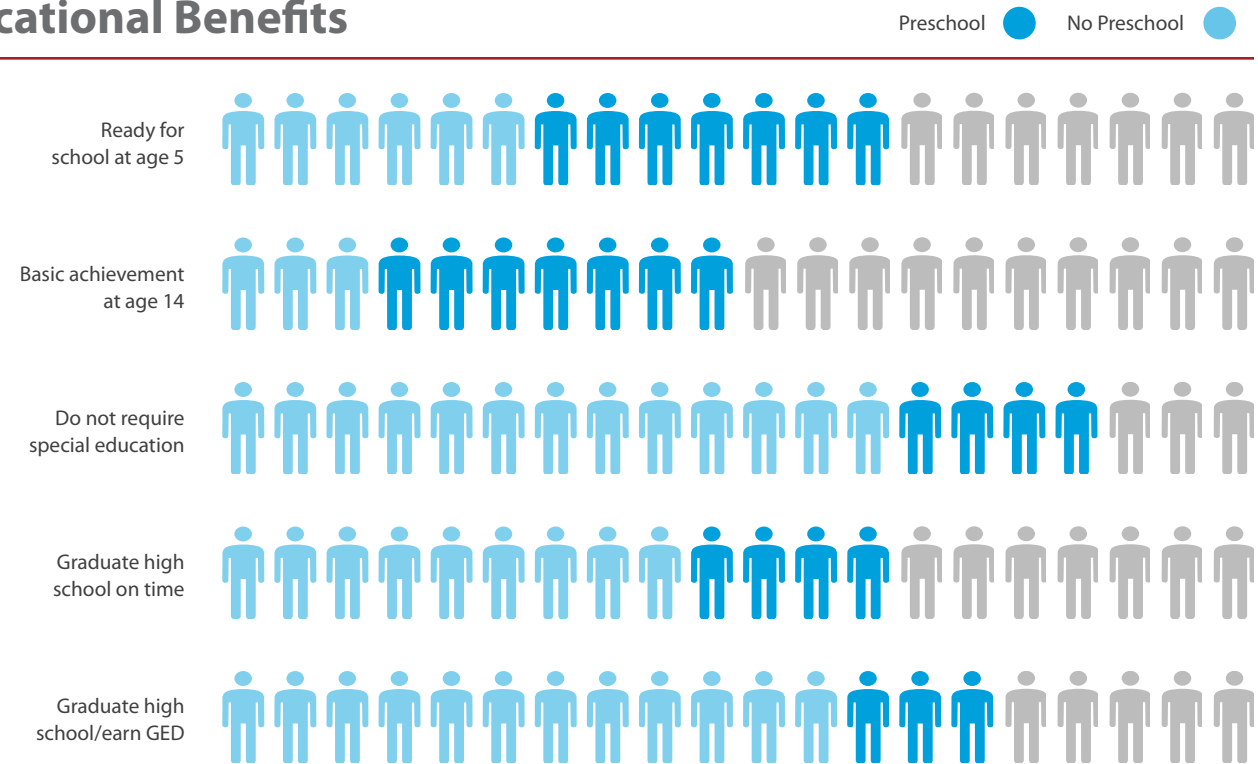
Closing the academic and opportunity gaps for children requires improving the knowledge and practice of principals and fully engaging families. Despite the importance of leadership development in ensuring Pre-K-3 success, the preparation and professional development of principals in particular has not been a key focus of the Pre-K-3 continuum. Indeed, as of the time of this writing, most principal knowledge of child development and the Pre-K-3 learning continuum remains largely self-taught. The case studies provided throughout this guide are intended to provide practical insights for principals to draw upon to augment their knowledge about developmentally-appropriate early learning and meaningful ways to engage families.

By bringing Pre-K expectations in line with those in kindergarten and the early school years, principals provide a coherent, related set of developmentally-appropriate experiences during the first critical years of schooling. There can be no greater foundation for ensuring the later success of our children in school and in life.

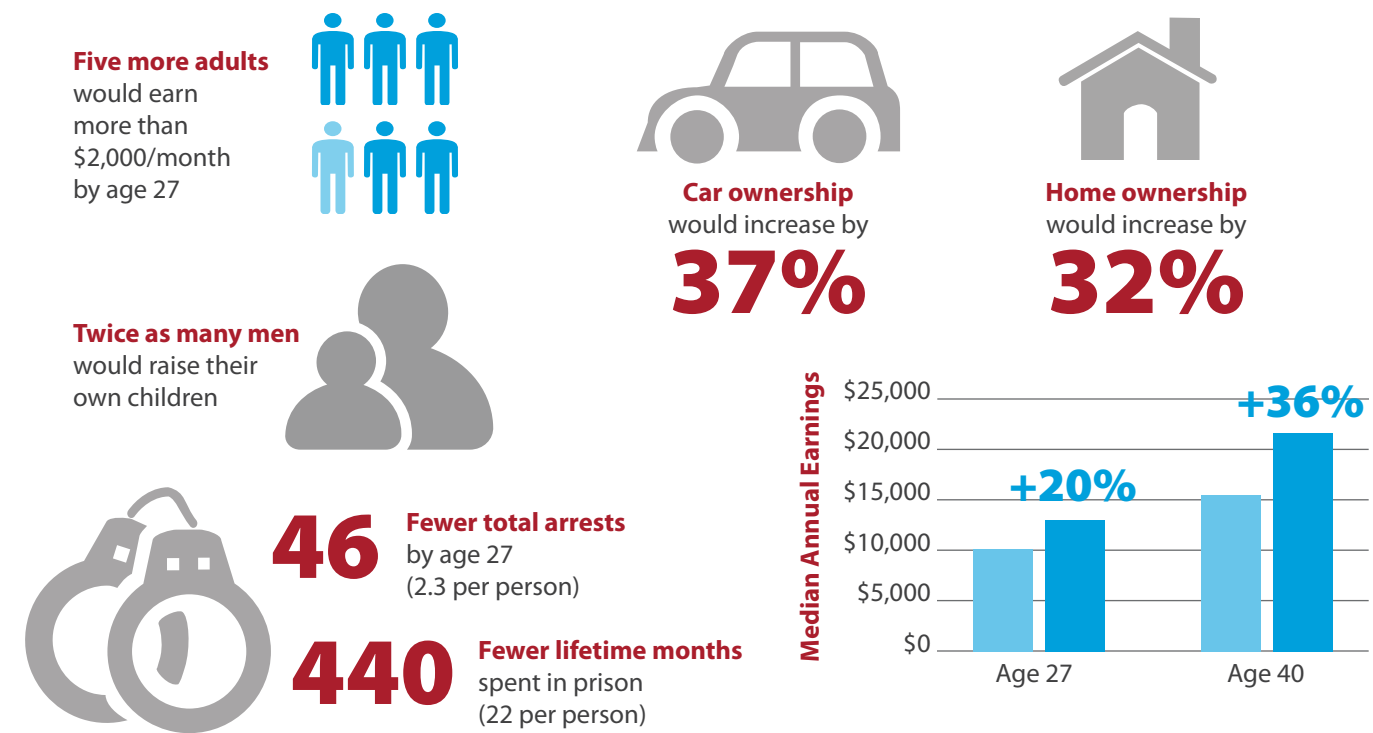
*Gail Connelly is executive director of the National Association of Elementary School Principals.*

## How would early childhood education change the lives of 20 children living in poverty?

### Educational Benefits



### Lifelong Benefits



# Age Three to Grade Three:

## Rethinking the Early Learning Continuum

The effects of high-quality preschool and prekindergarten (Pre-K) education have been well studied and documented. Since the initial publication of seminal research reports discussing the results of the Perry Preschool Program and the Abecedarian Project in the 1970s, volumes have been written about the cognitive, social, emotional and economic impact of preschool and Pre-K.

Even so, in a time when a child's brain is developing the most, the attention to early learning has lagged far behind that of education reforms in secondary education. Recent federal policy—such as reforms enacted as part of Head Start reauthorization, the implementation of the Early Race to the Top program, and the introduction of the bipartisan Strong Start for America's Children Act in November 2013—have brought renewed attention to the promise of high-quality Pre-K-3 education as a strategy for closing the achievement gap. This publication draws from more than 100 resources, including research reports, meta-analyses, policy briefs, toolkits, issue briefs and websites published since NAESP introduced *Leading Early Childhood Learning Communities: What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do* in 2005.

Many of the resources included here offer advice and recommendations regarding the design and implementation of Pre-K-3 programs. In addition, we have looked deeply at additional resources that outline the elements of effective principal leadership of Pre-K-3 learning environments.

Principals know the importance of high-quality, effective early learning in creating the foundation for learning that happens in later grades. They also know the ramifications that occur if children are not fully prepared for kindergarten or are not on reading grade level by grade three. Research findings positioned throughout this publication make a powerful case for the importance of early learning, school readiness and early success in literacy and numeracy.



In the decade that NAESP has been working with the principals to implement the strategies included in *Leading Early Childhood Learning Communities*, elementary principals have worked diligently to ensure that students begin their learning journeys on the right track. Now more than ever, elementary-level principals are actively engaged in early childhood learning and development by leading developmentally-appropriate learning programs in their schools and communities. Principals are becoming more attuned to effective early childhood programs and how to best align systems at the community and school building levels—in their own learning communities and throughout districts.

Elementary school principals must be actively involved in the implementation of prekindergarten programs, not only those that are community-based but school-connected, to ensure effective, high-quality programs and a seamless learning continuum from age three to grade three. Further, principals must create the conditions that ensure high-quality, developmentally-appropriate learning for children continues as they progress from Pre-K to kindergarten and from first grade through third grade.

# State of Art: Pre-K-3

## Research and Practice



More than 60 percent of practicing elementary principals today report that their schools include prekindergarten, or that they are currently leading programs serving three and four year olds. Principals have also shared that little has been developed in the Pre-K-3 leadership space specifically for principals, and that they need additional resources and practical knowledge to improve their leadership practice. Similarly, over half of all elementary principals report they would like to receive additional professional development and resources to address K-3 developmentally-appropriate practice specifically for principals in elementary schools.

This guide is provided to fill the void in literature and practical resources in the Pre-K-3 leadership space, and presents a robust base of knowledge that principals can reliably draw upon to understand developmentally-appropriate practice, and to enhance instructional leadership capacity to align Pre-K programs with K-3 learning.

NAESP's research, and our synthesis of the research of others, shows that successful principals who ensure that these systems work together can help create learning environments where young children come to school ready to learn, can read and do math by grade three, can achieve in later grades, and are far more likely to graduate from high school. From the research, it's also clear that the benefits students receive from high-quality Pre-K programs must be sustained throughout the early grades through grade three and beyond for them to continue to be successful.

To reframe the discussion from NAESP's *Leading Early Childhood Learning Communities* publication developed in 2005 and expanding on our special task force work *Leading Pre-K-3 Communities* in 2010, this updated and expanded body of knowledge is provided to help the profession address the critical need to align high-quality, developmentally-appropriate practices from prekindergarten through the third grade.

The guide draws from more than 100 resources, including research reports, meta-analyses, policy briefs, toolkits and websites published over the past decade. In addition, NAESP has worked with principals to increase their awareness of the positive impact of high-quality early learning experiences for young children and to implement strategies that can help to ensure effective early learning. As a result, prekindergarten programs have become increasingly more connected to K-12 systems and schools.

Principals are indeed important, but they cannot do this work alone. Throughout the competencies and strategies outlined in this guide, we acknowledge the essential communications and collaboration that must occur between principals and teachers, as well as among parents, families, and external partners within the community. Continual engagement and shared responsibility among all of these stakeholders is essential to delivering effective, developmentally-appropriate learning for all children.

# Elements of Effective Pre-K-3 Programs



Key elements of effective Pre-K-3 programs include:

- High-quality, voluntary universal Pre-K for all children three and four years old
- Full-day kindergarten
- Qualified teachers who have both a bachelor's degree and specialized training in how young people learn
- Opportunities for teachers to share data, planning and professional development across grade levels
- Strong leadership committed to providing to children a seamless educational experience
- Quality, developmentally-appropriate curriculum and standards aligned from Pre-K through third grade
- Shared accountability, between preschools, public schools, parents and communities, for ensuring that all children read and do math on grade level by the end of third grade



*Source:* Foundation for Child Development. (2008). *America's Vanishing Potential: The Case for Pre-K-3rd Education*. New York, NY: Foundation for Child Development.

# Call to Action

As states and districts expand early childhood education programs, particularly connected to local elementary schools, it is imperative that policies are developed at the federal, state and districts levels to create systems that recognize and build the capacity of elementary principal leadership within a Pre-K-3 continuum. Following are eight areas requiring policy action:

1

Provide universal access to high-quality Pre-K programs and full-day kindergarten. All states must provide access to early childhood education programs connected to schools and operate in a continuous system with K-12 education.

2

Recognize the authority of principals serving children from Pre-K through the elementary years. State and district leaders must recognize the important leadership role of principals as they work to create intentional focus on alignment of Pre-K-3 programmatic and instructional activities.

3

Adopt standards of practice for principals working in Pre-K-3 learning systems. States and districts must incorporate and align existing leadership standards, such as ISLLC, to the competencies that principals must demonstrate to lead effective Pre-K-3 learning communities.

4

Invest in principal preparation programs that help principals enter the profession understanding how to create a seamless continuum of learning from Pre-K-3. Preparation programs are needed to build principals' understanding of effective teaching practices Pre-K-3, appropriate assessment, and use of data to improve teaching and learning.

5

Allocate resources to provide opportunities to principals for job-embedded professional learning and growth. In-service principals must increase their knowledge of developmentally-appropriate practices and related instructional leadership competencies needed to support and sustain effective Pre-K-3 learning environments.

6

Provide job-embedded professional learning to teachers, along the K-3 continuum. Greater investment is needed in programs to increase knowledge of educators in early childhood development in all domains—academic, social, emotional, and physical—and utilizing practices that are proven to enhance early learning including play-based instruction and integration of the arts.

7

State technology plans must address the unique needs of students in a Pre-K-3 continuum. As schools continue to transition to blended learning environments, consideration must be given to what is developmentally-appropriate and the technology needs to support learning. Standards for the use of technology in the early years are also needed, as is support for effective use of technology by educators.

8

Provide support for principals and teachers to build parent understanding and capacity to participate more effectively in their child's learning from age three to grade three. Teachers and principals must have expanded resources and tools to engage parents in productive discussions regarding their child's progress from Pre-K to the third grade.

# Embrace the Pre-K-3 Early Learning Continuum

Leaders of effective Pre-K-3 communities know that a strong foundation in early learning sets the stage for future academic and personal achievement. Operating within a patchwork of early learning programs, funding streams, goals, standards and levels of quality, effective principals help their learning communities define a Pre-K-3 continuum that transcends the boundaries of preschool and elementary school to create a seamless learning experience for children from age three to grade three. This learning continuum includes prekindergarten, kindergarten and the primary grades—regardless of whether each of those grades exists within a school’s specific physical structure.

## Strategies/indicators of the competency in practice

- Engage your learning community in understanding the importance of the early learning continuum and the transitions along it.
- Set expectations that the continuum of learning from age three to grade three is fundamental to your school’s mission.
- Expand the concept of “learning community” to include collaboration among external, as well as internal stakeholders.
- Articulate the long-term value of early learning and the benefit of inclusive early learning to parents and all learning community stakeholders.
- Align funding, resources and governance to support the Pre-K-3 framework.

## Spotlight on Effective Practice

**Nathan Hale Elementary School**, Enfield, CT

Although Nathan Hale is a K-2 elementary school, Principal LeAnn Beaulieu works within her community to align curriculum, standards and assessments across Pre-K through grade three classrooms in Enfield, Connecticut.

To support these efforts, Principal Beaulieu and her staff have made it their mission to develop strong relationships with local Pre-K programs and receiving grade three through six elementary schools, often meeting throughout the year to examine best practices and areas for improvement. In particular, they aim to ensure that students are properly supported in their transitions from Pre-K to kindergarten and from grade three to grade three.

Each year, Principal Beaulieu meets with community Pre-K program directors to discuss the students who will be entering Nathan Hale’s kindergarten class and to develop strategies around their individual education plans. These plans are based on the district-required school readiness checklists completed by all Pre-K teachers.

While the physical Pre-K and grade three classrooms are not housed under the same roof, Principal Beaulieu and the Nathan Hale staff recognize the importance of viewing education through the Pre-K-3 lens and supporting community and statewide efforts to align early education.

Connecticut has also taken a state approach to aligning the Birth to Five Early Learning and Developmental Domains with K-3 Standards, providing professional development opportunities for principals and public school leaders around the continuum.

# Ensure Developmentally-Appropriate Teaching

Quality instruction has particular significance during the Pre-K-3 years, when children master foundational skills and concepts, develop attitudes toward school and form ideas about themselves as learners. Learning gaps emerge early, particularly among disadvantaged students. If not addressed early, these gaps can widen over the elementary grades.

Researchers argue that nothing is more important than ensuring that every child experiences quality teaching—grade by grade, year after year—over the entire Pre-K-3 continuum. Ensuring effective instruction for every student often means that effective leaders must help to create and implement inclusive practices—those that serve the needs of all students, with and without disabilities—such as flexible curricula, adaptive technologies, early childhood interventions and prevention strategies.

## Strategies/indicators of the competency in practice

- Align ambitious standards, curriculum, instruction and age-appropriate assessments so they create a consistent framework for learning from age three to grade three.
- Provide a comprehensive curriculum inclusive of, but not limited to, language arts and math.
- Work with teachers and teacher leaders to develop an interactive, relevant and engaging early learning curriculum.
- Create professional communities of practice to empower teachers to learn from each other and to improve instruction.

## Spotlight on Effective Practice

**Wayne Township Preschool**, Indianapolis, IN

Ensuring developmentally-appropriate teaching practices is important in the early grades, and even more so when working with students with special needs. Wayne Township Preschool in Indianapolis, Indiana, is home to a diverse student body where 62 percent of students receive special education services. Principal Kathryn Raasch and her staff strive to provide a quality early education to all of the school’s students.

Wayne Township Preschool serves children ages three to five and offers both childcare classrooms as well as a comprehensive Pre-K program. Students are placed in one of two types of Pre-K classroom settings dependent upon the level of support needed to be successful learners. Students needing a higher level of support participate in development classes while students able to learn more independently participate in community classes. Following the concept of least restrictive environments, the learning environment changes along with a child’s learning needs.

In the development classes, the abilities of the students range. Some require limited special education services while others require significant supports. Higher functioning special education students are directed to the community classes, as they may just need speech and language supports or the assistance of an aide.

Principal Raasch sees her role at the school as an “advocate for high-quality early education” and a “champion for children three to five.” She feels that remediation is not always the answer but that early intervention services and parental engagement programs can best help to identify the ways that a child needs to be supported.

# Provide Personalized Learning Environments

The most supportive and effective learning environments create a welcoming physical and emotional climate that is safe, nurturing and developmentally-appropriate. Children in such environments are regarded as learners with individual needs, each with different skills and interests, working at their own pace, practicing and refining as much as they like, and moving to mastery of different competencies at different rates. This individualized learning is also known as personalized learning. Active learning in personalized environments requires effective utilization of a variety of learning tools, including the effective application of technology to the curriculum, in ways that add relevance and sense-making to children's learning. Research indicates that technology can enhance student engagement, persistence and the development of a variety of emergent literacy skills.

## Strategies/indicators of the competency in practice

- Promote environments that blend face-to-face and technology enhanced learning and that are rigorous, developmentally-appropriate and support individual learning.
- Facilitate the use of technology tools for learning and provide instructional leadership in schools on how to use technology effectively.
- Support instructional use of appropriate technology and interactive media to support learning and development—through work and play—in school, at home and in community settings.
- Integrate technology directly into curriculum, student learning and outcomes.
- Help teachers develop their understanding and ability to use technology effectively to individualize and differentiate instruction for each student.

## Spotlight on Effective Practice

**Cumberland Trace Elementary School,**  
Bowling Green, KY

Principal Mary Evans and the Pre-K-6 Cumberland Trace Elementary School work hard to improve supportive and creative learning opportunities for all students through the use of technology and digital learning opportunities. Principal Evans and her staff see blended learning as a way to help empower students to become responsible for their own academic and personal learning.

At Cumberland Trace, blended learning is a combination of teacher instruction and supplemental technology that is meant to “reach and teach all students effectively.” Digital opportunities allow students to be their own “leader of lessons” and provide differentiated and adaptive learning structures to meet individual needs.

Younger students utilize technology in the development of their basic skills, while the older grades focus on creating, researching and developing projects. Students also use classroom iPads and laptops to share assignments via Google Drive and receive instant feedback from their teachers and colleagues.

Principal Evans sees blended learning as a necessity for Cumberland Trace, as it “is the way children learn today,” and she works to model the use of technology in the school by setting expectations and celebrating the successes of the students.

# Use Multiple Measures of Assessment To Guide Student Learning Growth

Effective principals know that the goal of assessment must be to improve teaching and learning.

Research shows that teachers spend one-quarter to one-third of their professional time on assessment-related activities. Still, most do so without the know-how and understanding of how to assess students effectively. Thus, the assessment literacy of educators, defined as understanding the purposes and use of various kinds of assessments for learning and growth, is an area of interest and a professional development need for educators and all members of a Pre-K-3 learning community.

Perhaps most illusive in Pre-K-3 learning communities is assessment literacy, an understanding of how to use assessment effectively for our earliest learners.

## Strategies/indicators of the competency in practice

- Build understanding throughout the learning community of the various purposes and appropriate uses of different student assessments to improve teaching and learning.
- Support teachers in using multiple forms of assessments, along with observation, portfolios and anecdotal records, to guide student learning and growth all along the Pre-K-3 continuum.
- Support open and collaborative discussions about assessment data with parents and community.
- Share information about program effectiveness among schools and other providers.

## Spotlight on Effective Practice

**Henry L. Cottrell Elementary School,** Monmouth, ME

A proficiency-based approach to demonstrating learning is at the center of the learning environment here. Teachers and students work collaboratively to learn concepts and processes laid out in a continuum of learning targets across subject areas and grades. Students let teachers know when they are ready to demonstrate proficiency in a learning target. This collaborative approach to learning “takes the secrecy out of student grades and progress” and celebrates everyday learning, according to third grade teacher Jana Armstrong.

Assessment is an ongoing process at Henry L. Cottrell. Teachers introduce a new learning target through direct instruction. Students work in small groups, individually, with technology or with the teacher to build understanding and proficiency in a particular learning target. Regular formative assessments indicate the student's level of proficiency—the goal being to demonstrating complex understanding of targeted ideas and concepts. When a student has demonstrated this level of proficiency he takes a summative assessment.

Through the process, students have voice and choice in how they learn a target, and how the target is assessed. Teacher and student share ownership in the strategies they adopt to learn and assess each learning target. Teachers note that they feel differently about student success, or lack of success, in their classrooms. “We became so responsible for their learning,” said one teacher.

# Build Professional Capacity Across the Learning Community

Effective principals build collaborative working environments that support the professional growth of all who work in them. They know that in order to improve the learning of children, every member of the learning community must be continually learning, including all teachers—and principals themselves.

In order to ensure that every child receives a high-quality Pre-K-3 education, principals and the entire learning community must have the will and capability to implement it. While many principals across the country want to add and align Pre-K programs, their districts or schools often don't have the resources or capacity. Many communities are faced with budget cuts, disjointed early education systems and lack of knowledge about how to make Pre-K-3 work.

Most principal knowledge of child development and the Pre-K-3 learning continuum remains largely self-taught.

## Strategies/indicators of the competency in practice

- Build principal professional knowledge about what is age- and developmentally-appropriate across the continuum.
- Support ongoing, job-embedded professional learning opportunities for teachers all along the continuum.
- Support professional learning communities that focus on authentic work.

# Make Schools a Hub of Pre-K-3 Learning for Families and Communities

Effective principals work with families, prekindergarten programs and community organizations to build strong Pre-K-3 linkages. Linking early learning and elementary learning can help children and families experience smooth transitions and continuity of practice across early care and elementary schools settings so that children thrive all through the early elementary years. To achieve this goal, effective principals engage a number of partners in meeting the social, emotional, academic and physical needs of their students and their families. Such connections are not all that common, but effective principals see them as a natural extension of a school's work.

By recognizing the important role of these multiple players, effective principals redefine a child's readiness for kindergarten as an issue of child, family and school readiness. This requires that principals help their learning communities shift their thinking, dialogue and practice to support all three components. Foremost, principals must create a school culture in which parents and community members feel a sense of belonging and know that they help to form a child's learning network.

## Strategies/indicators of the competency in practice

- Develop a welcoming environment and sense of belonging and cultivate a shared responsibility for children's learning from age three to grade three.
- Provide meaningful transitions between preschool and elementary school.
- Develop out-of-school and summer learning opportunities for children from age three to grade three.
- Blend and braid funding to maximize resource opportunities.

## Spotlight on Effective Practice

### Build Professional Capacity Across the Learning Community

Hawaii P-3 Initiative, Honolulu, HI

The statewide Hawaii P-3 Initiative is dedicated to establishing and supporting local partnerships that promote a cohesive and aligned continuum of services for children birth through age eight. The Initiative is a specific program of the Hawaii P-20 Partnerships for Education, which is led by the Executive Office of Early Learning, the Hawaii State Department of Education and the University of Hawaii System.

Through funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Harold K.L. Castle Foundation, the Samuel N. and Mary Castle Foundation and the Kamehameha Schools, the Hawaii P-3 Initiative supports five demonstration sites across the islands. These sites develop a "spider web" of early childhood and elementary school partnerships focused on the goal of improving access to quality educational experiences and supporting students to read on grade level by third grade.

All demonstration sites focus on seven areas of improvement: leadership in literacy; standards, curriculum and assessment; instruction; teacher professional development; comprehensive early learning services; family and school partnerships; and data.

The Hawaii P-3 Initiative also supports a PK-3 Post-Graduate Certificate Program that was developed in collaboration with the University of Hawaii Manoa College of Education's Department of Curriculum in response to the ongoing professional development needs of educators. To receive the certificate, participating educators must complete 15 credits of early childhood coursework and a professional portfolio.

## Spotlight on Effective Practice

### Make Your School a Hub of Pre-K-3 Learning for Families and Communities

Ericka Guynes, Earl Boyles Elementary School, Portland, OR

As principal of the Pre-K-5 Earl Boyles Elementary School, Ericka Guynes has continued to build relevancy around the importance of integrating early learning into K-12 education and developing meaningful opportunities of collaboration for both families and the broader community. In partnership with the Children's Institute and the Early Works Initiative, Principal Guynes and her staff have created a clear vision for what they call a "seamless system" between the early learning program and the K-5 classrooms.

In the early stages of planning, Principal Guynes conducted a community needs assessment with Portland State University to determine gaps in services, identify parental priority areas and develop short- and long-term strategies for implementation. The assessment helped the Earl Boyles staff to establish a common vision around what early learning looks like in a K-12 system and to engage early childhood experts throughout the process.

With the help of a parents group, Earl Boyles is now in the process of creating an Early Learning Wing/ Neighborhood Center at the school, which will serve as a community-centered hub of supports, resources and information focused on helping children to arrive better prepared for kindergarten.



# About This Guide



Leading Pre-K-3 Learning Communities is aimed primarily at principals, but it can be a resource for anyone who cares about supporting quality teaching and learning for Pre-K-3 learners, including childcare providers, directors of preschool programs, coaches, mentors, professional developers, teachers, superintendents, school board members, policymakers and parents. Beyond its use for active practitioners, this guide can also be used to support the pre-service professional learning of teachers and principals serving children from age three to grade three.

Backed by relevant and recent research findings, the guide first outlines the characteristics of what constitutes quality in Pre-K-3 programs, whether these programs are set in schools or connected to schools. We have defined six competencies that we believe are required for principals to lead effective, high-quality learning environments—both for children age three to grade three and for the adults who serve them—and the strategies it will take to meet these competencies. The competencies are related and interdependent. They must be integrated to create an effective learning system; implementing just a few of them will not lead to success.

The guide is a tool in itself, but is written in a way that serves to connect principals to additional tools, including resources and ideas that can be used in faculty and parent meetings and other meetings of the learning community. This includes:

**Stories of effective practice.** We believe that understanding lessons learned from principals who are leading efforts to align Pre-K-3 and improve results for children across the country can help other principals build similar systems in their schools. Two stories of effective practice are presented for each competency throughout this guide to provide a variety of strategies for readers, regardless of the conditions in which they work. These stories are intended to demonstrate effective attitudes and daily practices of people across the country who are making a difference in Pre-K-3 learning and who themselves are continually learning and growing.

**Questions for reflection.** To encourage practitioners to engage and reflect on their own practices, a series of reflection questions are outlined for each competency, providing a support for principals to reflect on their own efforts and to encourage discussion and inquiry among others in their learning community.

**Self-assessment.** Each competency contains a self-assessment tool, which principals can use three times a year to look at the progress of their efforts. These self-assessments are aligned to the reflection questions for each competency and are intended not as an evaluation tool but as a tool for principals to reflect on their own and their learning communities' current practices and ongoing progress at the beginning, middle and end of each school year.

**Links to additional tools.** Each competency contains references to online organizational links and resources, so principals and others can go deeper to learn more about things that interest them.

**Bibliography.** Each competency lists an abbreviated bibliography, and a complete bibliography is listed at the back of the publication.

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Farmington, MN

*Director, Zone 8*

**Duane Dorshorst**

Principal  
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Elementary School  
Oberlin, KS

*Director, Zone 9*

**Dwight Cooper**

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**David Wick**

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Junior High School  
Columbia Falls, MT

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# Methodology

NAESP and Collaborative first teamed up in 2001 to produce the landmark publication *Leading Learning Communities: Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able To Do*. NAESP and Collaborative updated that guide in 2008. The two organizations partnered to create additional publications in the series, including *Leading Afterschool Learning Communities*, published in 2004, and *Leading Early Childhood Learning Communities*, published in 2005. The organizations also worked together to convene and capture findings from the Task Force on P-3 Alignment, in 2005.

NAESP and Collaborative teamed up again to create *Leading Pre-K-3 Learning Communities*, to update and refresh of the 2005 publication. Over 14 months, this process included:

**Literature review.** A review of more than 100 relevant research documents was conducted to provide the basis for the competencies and strategies outlined in this guide. The research included studies and reports on the fundamental rationale for the Pre-K-3 approach, and the economic, social and educational benefits of that approach. We looked at federal, university, state, philanthropic and district- and organizationdriven research on all aspects of Pre-K-3 learning environments, including teaching and learning, physical structures and environments, standards and assessments, the changing nature of technology and its influence on early learning, community-based supports for early learning and childcare, the role of parents, family and community, and advocacy recommendations at all levels.

**Focus groups.** Principals at NAESP's National Leadership Conference in Arlington, Virginia, in February 2014, participated in two focus groups and provided insights on their efforts to align standards, curriculum, assessment and learning environments for young learners, including the significant need for improved engagement with families and community-based organizations. The focus groups identified gaps in principal and learning community knowledge about child development and identified key opportunities and challenges in improving teaching and learning for children from age three to grade three.

**Discovery interviews.** Thought leaders in policy, research, associations and practice provided significant perspective with regard to recent federal and state policy efforts for children from age three to grade three and context of where early learning fits in the current discussions of implementing new standards assessments. These interviews also provided important leads with regard to key organizations, research and practical examples of effective practice. Each interview was audio-recorded.

**Pre-K-3 Committee.** Committee members were principals, nominated from individual geographic zones within the NAESP governance structure for their experience and leadership in early learning, Pre-K-8. The Committee met four times, including a two-day meeting in Arlington, Virginia, in March 2014, where they helped to create the competencies and shape the guide. Committee members reviewed various drafts of the guide and contributed ideas on research and examples of effective practice.

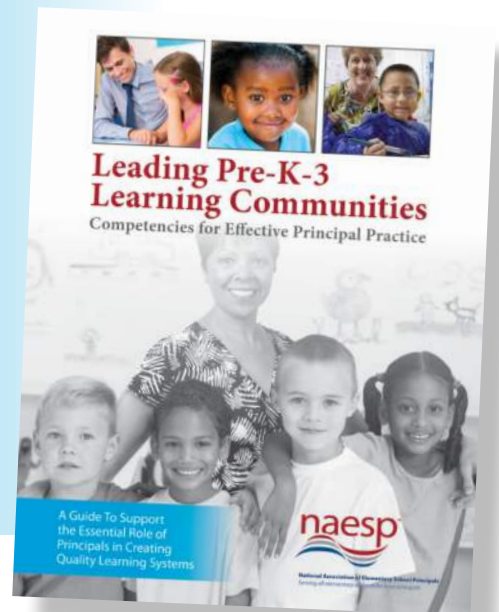
**Interviews with principals and school teams.** Each of the short case studies, or vignettes, that appears in this publication was developed from a separate telephone interview with the principal of that school, who was often accompanied by additional members of his or her school staff. Interview protocols were created, and interviews were audio-recorded.

**Peer review of drafts.** External peers from professional organizations provided candid feedback that helped to ensure currency, relevance, accuracy, credibility and meaning. Their input was invaluable to this process.

# Six Competencies That Characterize Leadership of Pre-K-3 Learning Communities

Effective leaders of Pre-K-3 learning communities:

- 1 Embrace the Pre-K-3 early learning continuum
- 2 Ensure developmentally-appropriate teaching
- 3 Provide personalized, blended learning environments
- 4 Use multiple measures to guide student learning growth
- 5 Build professional capacity across the learning community
- 6 Make schools the hub of Pre-K-3 learning for families and communities



To pre-order an advance copy of the complete guide, please reserve by sending an e-mail to the National Principals Resource Center.



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