



Strengthen

Professional learning at every career stage

A Principal's Guide to Early Learning

Great schools are places where communities of learners grow and flourish at every level; where all children and adults feel included and valued; where the organizational culture is defined by care, trust, and high expectations of every participant. Great schools are places that make an investment in early learning.

That's why NAESP, in partnership with the National P-3 Center at University of Colorado Denver's School of Education and Human Development, has released "A Principal's Guide to Early Learning and the Early Grades."

The publication provides a structure and a set of six competencies that can guide principals in creating and supporting connections from birth to age 5 and K-12 systems in order to build successful pre-K-3rd-grade continuums in their schools. Briefly, they are as follows:

1. Understand Child Development and Its Implications for High-Quality Instruction and Interactions, Pre-K-3rd Grade

- Deepen knowledge of, and stay current with, research on child development.
- Emphasize and prioritize relationships among students, teachers, staff, and families.
- Establish learning environments and instructional practices that promote student engagement and voice.

2. Develop and Foster Partnerships With Families and Communities

- Engage intentionally with families, especially those who have been traditionally marginalized.
- Establish relationships and support collaboration with early care and education (ECE) programs in the community.
- Ensure smooth transitions for students and families across the full pre-K-3rd-grade continuum.
- Facilitate linkages with community supports and services.

3. Embrace and Enact a Pre-K-3rd-Grade Vision

- Establish a schoolwide culture that pre-K is a fundamental anchor to the school's mission and student success.
- Align curriculum and instructional practices across the pre-K-3rd-grade continuum to accommodate students throughout the developmental spectrum.
- Ensure that instruction, interactions, and learning environments in the primary grades reflect child development and are designed to build on the gains made in pre-K.



4. Ensure Equitable Opportunities

- Develop critical self-awareness and knowledge of oppression, privilege, and cultural competence.
- Establish a school climate that is open, inclusive, and affirming of differences.
- Examine school data and stakeholder feedback to identify disparities.

5. Share Leadership and Build Professional Capacity

- Share leadership for pre-K-3rd grade with individual teachers and teacher teams based on their expertise.
- Provide supportive, rigorous, aligned, and ongoing professional learning opportunities that reflect current knowledge of child development and of effective, high-quality instructional practices.
- Foster the health and well-being of teachers and staff to support students and families in times of stress.

6. Promote a Culture of Continuous Improvement

- Develop an understanding of appropriate uses of student assessments in pre-K-3rd grade.
- Use multiple sources of data to inform improvement efforts.
- Engage families and community members in reviewing data and planning continuous improvement.

In addition to the six competencies, "A Principal's Guide to Early Learning and the Early Grades" offers overviews of the initiatives that might benefit from being addressed through a pre-K-3rd-grade-lens, including accountability assessments, science-based reading initiatives, 3rd grade retention policies, early absenteeism, teacher evaluations, school improvement plans, and other issues.

An Equity-Aligned Agenda

NAESP is focused on strengthening principals as leaders of equity and pushing for an equity-aligned policy and advocacy agenda. Our National Task Force on Race and Equity was created to advise the association on issues related to racial equity and dismantling systemic racism in school communities.

The task force has identified the following guiding priorities to support principals in this crucial aspect of their leadership roles:

1. Strengthening Principals as Leaders of Equity

Professional learning for principals positions them as equity leaders and enhances key skill sets, such as:

- Personal reflection on race and implicit bias: Explore implicit biases and how they impact safe and culturally responsive learning communities.
- Listening skills and courageous conversations: Develop critical facilitation skills to address race and equity with students, staff, and the school community.

2. School Assessment and Action Planning

Curated tools and customized resources for school leaders include:

- A schoolwide equity audit and screener tool: Review building and district-level student achievement data, staff hiring and retention practices, discipline policies, and digital access.



- Curriculum and access review: Assess text selection, instruction, assignments, standards, and assessments with an eye toward equity. Also review gifted and special education programs.
- Schoolwide equity training: Vetted training resources on various aspects of culturally responsive leadership.

3. Equity-Aligned Policy and Advocacy Agenda

- Data collection: Gain insights about principals' experiences and professional learning needs from a survey of unconscious biases.
- Policy review: Use insights from principals' unconscious bias survey to inform an advocacy agenda, including identification of federal funding opportunities to support principals in their race and equity work. Examples might include

targeted principal professional funding and grant programs to support principals in leading equity efforts in their schools.

Resources and supports for these guiding priorities will be announced in the coming months. But immediate next steps include:

- An implicit bias study: NAESP has entered into a custom research services agreement with Project Implicit to develop and host an online research study. This study will consist of an Implicit Association Test/web study for NAESP members focused on identifying biases related to race.
- An equity audit: NAESP is in discussions with organizations regarding the potential collaboration for an equity audit/screener tool for school leaders.



Fast Fact

States enrolled almost 1.58 million children in state-funded preschool in 2018, including more than 1.3 million 4-year-olds—about one-third of all 4-year-olds in the U.S. Enrollment of 3-year-olds was just over 227,000, however, or 5.7 percent.

—National Institute for Early Education Research at Rutgers University