

LEADING LESSONS

USE THIS GUIDE WITH YOUR STAFF

Shared Vision, Shared Success

Building culture, empowering people, and optimizing systems

Great schools do more than promote academic achievement. They are places where communities of learners grow and flourish. Effective principals—and their support system of faculty and staff—play an essential role in helping students succeed.


As leaders of learning communities, principals often spend hours working to improve their schools. Collectively, principals across the country and around the world are shaping how schools prepare students to thrive academically, personally, and, later in life, professionally.

NAESP's new *Leading Learning Communities: Pillars, Practices, and Priorities for Effective Principals* publication has been designed to help principals structure their practice to focus on aspects of school leadership that will have long-lasting impact on student success. Pulled from that publication, the contents of this *Leading Lessons* guide serve as a starting point for principals to work with their faculty and staff as they increase educational equity, foster diversity, close achievement gaps, and care for the well-being of students.

Defining Leading Learning Communities

Leading learning communities is about more than managing a school building; principals are leaders of cultures and people. The learning communities they lead are characterized by these core attributes:

- ◆ **Shared Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals:** This vision is consistently articulated and provides a steady guide in making decisions about teaching and learning.
- ◆ **Commitment to Results:** Learning communities assess their effectiveness on the basis of results. By examining data, members of learning communities refuse to ignore or excuse poor performance, and they confront situations directly to improve learner outcomes.
- ◆ **Continual Improvement:** Learning community members are engaged in an ongoing cycle of continual improvement, committed to and persistently reaching toward the school’s vision.
- ◆ **Culture of Collaboration:** Educators in effective learning communities recognize that they must work together to achieve a shared vision of learning.
- ◆ **Collective Inquiry:** Educators in learning communities challenge and question each other’s practices in spirited but optimistic ways, and they apply new ideas and information to address learner needs.
- ◆ **Supportive and Shared Leadership:** Learning communities are environments in which relationships between administrators and teachers co-create collaborative leadership in the school. Everyone contributes. Everyone learns. Everyone leads.

 **REFLECTION:** Using a scale of 1-5, have yourself and each of your team members rate their perception of how your school is doing on each of these attributes. Then compare results.


Core Attribute	Your Rating	Team Rating
Shared Mission, Vision, Values, & Goals		
Commitment to Results		
Continual Improvement		
Culture of Collaboration		
Collective Inquiry		
Supportive & Shared Leadership		

1. Build Culture

School culture informs what teachers, students, families, and the community believe about the school and its purpose. Culture influences how teachers relate to and interact with students and each other—and what they imagine is possible when it comes to their professional growth.

The following key practices will help build a positive school culture:

- ◆ Establish shared values and vision for the school.
- ◆ Engage and communicate with families and the community.
- ◆ Emphasize personal and professional well-being and development.

 **REFLECTION:** Which practices do we excel in? Which practices can we improve?



 REFLECTIONS

How can we move the needle on developing teacher leaders?

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How can we systematically support teachers' health and well-being?

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2. Empower People

Effective principals bring out the best in teachers, students, and themselves. "The best," in this instance, includes additional dimensions of individual and collective experience at school like personal and professional growth, social and emotional well-being, mental and physical health, and high expectations for peers, colleagues, and self.

The following key practices will help empower people in the school community:

- ◆ Lead personalized and collaborative teaching and learning.
- ◆ Distribute leadership among a community,
- ◆ Support the academic, social and emotional, and physical needs of children and adults.

According to a recent survey of more than 3,000 teachers, teachers believe that professional development is most effective when it's:

- ◆ **Relevant**—is personalized to align with a teacher's needs and specific context;
- ◆ **Interactive**—provides action-oriented, participatory learning opportunities;
- ◆ **Teacher-driven and -delivered**—is led by other teachers and peers, and supported by principals and other school leaders;
- ◆ **Sustained**—recurs throughout the semester and the year, allowing teachers to build their capacities over time; and
- ◆ **Professional in its treatment of teachers**—is not patronizing, but instead respects teachers as the professional educators they are.

3. Optimize Systems

Instruction and interpersonal relationships are essential to a school's success. Just as important are the internal and external systems that enable culture and people to flourish. From the procedures and criteria used to hire teachers and other school personnel to scheduling decisions, resource allocation, and how the school operates in relation to the district, systems and processes play a vital role in creating the conditions that get the best from people and promote positive school culture.

Systems and processes can also interfere with school culture and restrain the growth of teachers and students, making schoolwide improvement difficult, if not impossible, to realize. With this in mind, effective principals are not just visionary leaders; they are also adept managers who ensure that school operations and processes are structured intentionally to support teaching and learning and to align with the values and vision of the school.

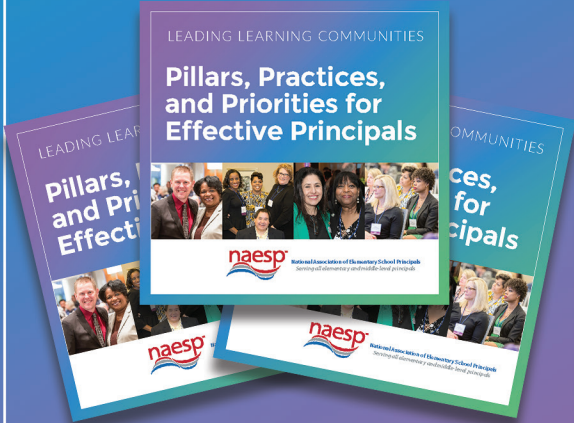
To optimize systems, start with these three key practices:

- ◆ Manage talent and resources to maximize teaching and learning.
- ◆ Cultivate support in the district and community.
- ◆ Focus on what matters most.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

How do management and leadership considerations overlap? In what ways are they distinct?

How can principals be effective leaders and managers at the same time?



LEADING LEARNING COMMUNITIES
Pillars, Practices, and Priorities for Effective Principals

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