LEADING LESSONS

USE THIS GUIDE WITH YOUR STAFF

Managing People, Data, and Processes

ALSO INSIDE

Leveraging Outside Forces
Doing More With Data
Process Makes Perfect
LEADING LESSONS

Managing People, Data, and Processes

02 Introduction

04 Discussion Guide: Leveraging Outside Forces
   How to successfully manage people outside the school

08 Discussion Guide: Doing More With Data
   Using assessment data to enhance teaching and learning

12 Discussion Guide: Process Makes Perfect
   Why a principal should be a taskmaster at heart

17 Resources

As you read this supplement, be on the lookout for the following:

Key Considerations: Keep these factors in mind to better manage people, data, and processes.

Reflection Questions: Ask yourself these questions when looking to improve the management of people, data, and processes for your particular school and circumstances.

Related Topics: For each section in this guide, we offer additional topics for consideration.

This special supplement is brought to you in partnership with The Wallace Foundation. For more school leadership resources, visit www.wallacefoundation.org.
Masters of People, Data, and Processes

Experienced principals share management wisdom for achieving meaningful gains in their schools.
An effective principal is a coach, guiding team members toward the accomplishment of shared goals. An effective principal is a psychologist, intuiting diverse motives among people and instilling a unified vision.

An effective principal wrings maximum gains from data, while retaining the ability to set priorities minute by minute.

In short, an effective principal is a master of managing people, data, and processes. This management triad makes up The Wallace Foundation’s fifth key practice of effective principals, as articulated in The School Principal as a Leader: Guiding Schools to Better Teaching and Learning.

The 21st century’s education system demands miracles from elementary school principals, and miracles take time. As The Wallace Foundation notes, it’s believed that principals “should be in place about five to seven years in order to have a beneficial impact on a school.”

And yet, the average principal’s posting is 3.6 years—not enough time to effect meaningful change. Amid the churn of frequent turnovers, student reading and math achievement suffers.

Veteran principals can help rookies crest that five-year mark. This guide shares the wisdom and best practices of 10 experienced principals, whose talents for managing people, data, and processes have sparked meaningful gains in young learners. These principals represent The Wallace Foundation’s Principal Pipeline Initiative school districts, which are six urban school districts on a mission to develop a large number of strong principal candidates. Their thoughts supplement research on effective practices regarding managing people, data, and processes from leading studies and reports.

Prepare to explore:

- Managing people: External stakeholders are always welcome—or are they? The best principals capitalize only on offers of help that align with school goals and respect inclusion.

- Managing data: Data pinpoints barriers and measures progress, but people aren’t computers that can be programmed to respond. Effective principals rally students, families, and teachers to embrace the power of data.

- Managing processes: It’s been said that teaching elementary school is like keeping 30 apples under water at the same time. The effective principal builds a culture that uses the power of processes to minimize distractions and create a climate of learning.

Getting perspectives from colleagues can be an invaluable resource. Use this collection of best practices in your quest to achieve greater gains at your school.
No school is an island. Schools are community centers—focal points for happy celebrations and civic pride. They are also lightning rods for adults who are deeply and emotionally invested in the future of their children.

The effective principal steers the school on a steady course between these two poles. Keeping an eye on the school’s mission and vision, while respecting diverse viewpoints, helps principals keep all stakeholders focused on students’ best interests, especially in a learning-centered manner.

This section explores the ins and outs of cultivating external stakeholders, leveraging their resources, warding off disenchantment, and saying no to offered assistance that’s well-intentioned but doesn’t contribute to learning.
BUILDING A STAKEHOLDER COMMUNITY
Many principals think of the school community in tiers or circles, assigning students, families, and school staff to the closest level and working from there. Though external stakeholders don’t merit top priority at every moment, they can be valuable players in promoting and strengthening a culture of learning.

Choose Key Stakeholders
Principals agree: Everyone is a potential stakeholder, but not all bring equal value to learners. Applying an objective approach to critiquing and cultivating key partners ensures alliances that enhance the learning atmosphere.

■ Cast a wide net when considering external stakeholders. Parents and local businesses might be most obvious, but consider grandparents and extended family, neighborhood residents, law enforcement, business groups, lawmakers, alumni, media, social services, adult fraternities and sororities, STEM organizations, children’s clubs, and district officials and school board members.
■ Stick closest to those who understand the school’s vision and mission and those who see an asset-based institution devoted to great learning. Be crystal clear about expectations and be sure that all offers of help fit with school systems and structures.
■ Consider aligning with people and organizations who offer fresh insights and new perspectives on education, such as researchers and institutions of higher education.
■ Leverage the resources and experience of stakeholders to enrich classroom units and school programs. Align their contributions with school goals and curricula, and be sure that visits don’t disrupt academic schedules.

NOTES
Which student populations are being served by partners?
Which student populations are not currently being served?
Make Transparency Work for Students
Build an understanding of the school’s goals and purpose by sharing the ups—and even the downs—of school life.

■ Invite stakeholders to school events. Showcase students as achievers with talents, while also encouraging stakeholders to align their plans with school goals.
■ Invite business partners to an annual breakfast to remind them of the school’s mission, vision, goals, and focus on learning.
■ Because stakeholders have busy schedules, consider replacing or augmenting formal programs with informal “chat and chews” or seizing opportunities for conversations and information-sharing in all settings.

PROMOTING DIVERSITY, AVOIDING CONFLICT
Today’s principals strive to deliver excellence for every child in every class, but that doesn’t always align with the interests of stakeholders focused on distinct students or groups. Principals promote a culture of respect for diversity and access to high-quality education for all students of all abilities.

Maintain Unequivocal Messaging
Inclusion starts with carefully crafted messaging. Your communications should be both clearly articulated and in line with your strategy.

■ Be succinct to ward off misinterpretation of your intent.
■ Be transparent about the school’s standing and its goals. Share data and clear messaging about the vision in order to help stakeholders see their support within the context of boosting achievement and benefiting all students.
■ Institutionalize structures that reinforce the belief in school inclusion and diversity. Create and communicate rules to prevent situations that violate any student’s sense of belonging.
■ Carefully weigh any drawbacks before approving fundraising requests from external stakeholders that would benefit only certain subgroups of students.

One new principal at a distressed school scaled back nearly all school events organized by outsiders, calling them well-intentioned but exhausting. The shift helped teachers refocus on teaching, while conversations about the change alerted partners to the school’s true purpose. A church and a women’s club with longtime ties to the school continued their supportive activities without staff help because its members believed in the clearly articulated vision.

NOTES
What are some events to which we could invite stakeholders?

Key Considerations:
If you can help children lead better lives outside of school, they’ll do better academically inside the school.

■ Know when and how to say no. Accept only the offers of help that make a positive difference in learning.
■ Share good or bad news in a straightforward and timely manner, before stakeholders hear it from the media or a gossipy neighbor who distorts the facts.

Reflection Questions:
■ Does an offer of help benefit and respect all students?
■ Have our community partnerships helped us meet our goals for the year?
■ What were some successes?
■ What were the challenges?
■ What stakeholder efforts are worth stopping, starting, or continuing?
Deflect Opposition
Confrontation is almost inevitable in a principal’s career. Veteran principals have learned that even the angriest parent or community member has the concerns of children at heart.

- Maintain a consistent procedure for dealing with oppositional voices. Start with transparency about the school’s needs and goals, and conclude with a listening ear that shows understanding of opponents’ valid concerns.
- Establish tight structures and communicate the purpose behind all activities clearly to ward off potential disgruntlement. Constantly remind participants that teaching and learning are the primary goals.
- Talk to people at every opportunity. Building relationships from the start helps smooth the bumps when opposition does arise.

DELIVERING EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS
Communications that build relationships are staked on concise messaging and effective delivery. Sharing the goal of raising good citizens and strong scholars helps convince stakeholders that the work benefits everyone, including themselves.

- Communicate uniform messaging in as many formats as possible, reaching stakeholders where they are.
- Thank-you letters, invitations, and tokens of appreciation go a long way. Offer student artwork for a pizza shop to display, for example, and model the effort to shape students into contributing members of the community.
- Use regular newsletters to communicate the school’s belief system. When necessary, address the school’s response to moments that might have raised concerns in the community.
- Share good news and photos with the district communications office to amplify the message.
- Enlist the power of visuals. A Facebook post showing a teacher holding an umbrella to keep students dry during a rainy dismissal projects a message of caring.

Related Topics:
In addition to the ideas addressed in this section, here are some other topics for consideration related to managing people:

- Keeping small tussles from ballooning into major incidents;
- Building alliances that keep the focus on students;
- Balancing openness with school safety;
- Saying no but keeping the door open; and
- Building a consistent social media presence.

NEXT STEPS

Content for this section was contributed by:

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Prince George’s County Public Schools, Maryland: Dr. Judith Haughton-Williams, Principal, Bladensburg Elementary School; Dallas Lee, Principal, Drew–Freeman Middle School; Dr. Taryn Savoy, Principal, Yorktown Elementary School; and LaTonya Williams, Principal, Rose Valley Elementary School.
Doing More With Data

Using assessment data to enhance teaching and learning

Data reveals realities and dispels misperceptions. Education data offers insights into the performance of students, schools, and teachers. Academic rigor, parental involvement, and school culture can all be strengthened through the use of data. How? By giving principals the leverage to conduct powerful conversations that spark meaningful change.

What follows are best practices in collecting, organizing, and analyzing data that lead to measurable results in student achievement and school climate.
COLLECTING: CORRALLING THE DATA HERD
By employing leadership lessons, well-designed processes and protocols, and creativity, principals can find and use a range of data sources to tell a story of school standing and student achievement.

Set Priorities
In the world of data mining, principals and their teams must choose the “gems” that can be polished for true insight.

■ Prioritize data selection around the year’s primary focus areas.
■ Gather a data team and use a collaborative process to choose useful data.
■ Apply results from curriculum-based measurements to reveal academic areas where deeper data dives can fuel improvement.
■ Think outside the spreadsheet. Student work—collected through item skills analyses or in student notebooks—yields formative data for insights into students’ progress and grasp of material.

Develop Processes
Data is only as good as the methods deployed for its analysis.

■ Impose a uniform analysis procedure for all transactions and purposes.
■ Keep responses to data findings timely by embedding weekly assessments in every lesson.
■ Design the school’s electronic data system to show gaps among previous-year, baseline, and current data.
■ A little sleuthing can keep goals from missing their targets when the data supplied doesn’t seem to match reality. If demographic data seems off, for example, survey families on the racial and ethnic heritages with which they identify.

ORGANIZING AND LOGISTICS PLANNING
Managing the constant flow of data requires strict discipline and attention to detail. While principals monitor, administrators and teachers make changes in a continuous loop.

Plan for New Data
Maximize each delivery of fresh data with thorough preparation.

■ Develop an assessment calendar of all data expected to benchmark student achievement throughout the school year.
■ Build in half-days for benchmarking and other big assessments. Use the time to analyze data with grade teams and develop instructional plans informed by the data.
■ Encourage teachers to use the electronic data system to share their successes.

Teacher Hiring and Evaluations
Teachers are the ultimate agents of change. If they’re comfortable with data, growth is evident.

■ Scrutinize the data skills and comfort levels of potential teacher hires. Does their growth data show the ability to drive student improvement?
■ Make data analysis a continuous learning process. Even veteran teachers can learn new things, and those with little data experience can start building their skills by hopping on the learning carousel.
■ Back up data findings with the resources teachers need to achieve improvements, such as planning time, professional development, and access to experts.
■ Reassign teachers who are unable to leverage data to promote student growth, moving them away from the front of the classroom. Those unable to adapt to a fact-based, data-driven culture should be encouraged to seek assignments elsewhere.

NOTES
What does our data reveal about our school's areas of need?
Review academic data points such as student growth compared to peers, and ask three questions of each teacher: Are students safe? Are they learning? Can you prove it?

Administrative Duties
Well-run buildings facilitate learning. Fact-based foundations prompt wise administrative decisions.

- Use data to justify classroom assignments, placing students with the teachers most likely to move them forward.
- Spread students of even abilities among classrooms, helping teachers form groups of similarly able students to tackle challenges.
- Formative data can reveal a need for specialist positions, such as reading or math coaches.
- Use adult attendance as a data point for direct correlation to student attendance and achievement.

PERFORMING AN ANALYSIS FOR CHANGE
Craft approaches that extract maximum value. The data will propel student, school, and teacher progress.

Take a Close Look
Data demands more than a quick glance. Thoughtful, deliberative analysis must be followed by action steps and then by another round of analysis.

- Create baselines attached to national standards at least three times per year in every grade. Review students in that context for insights into what each grade level looks like and which students are and aren’t achieving it.
- Assign the data team to create one-page data snapshots at key intervals. Share them with teachers, so that everyone has access to information on grade-level standing by class and grade.

Generate Change
Data puts the power to drive growth in the hands of teachers. Principals can employ data to implement lasting change.

- Use the “I notice” phenomenon to change systems, structures, and procedures. One school noticed that students would swarm the media center just before the bell rang. Creating scheduled checkout times led to calmer hallways and a predictable schedule that freed media specialists for more productive uses.
- Direct teacher teams to enter their meeting findings into the data system. Review this data regularly and provide the team leader with comments.

Monitor Behavior
More than just academics are at stake. Data can pinpoint the context behind behaviors that disrupt learning.

- Task a behavior team with regular analyses of behavior data, capturing which interventions are and aren’t working. Determine triggers by scrutinizing time of day, the lesson underway, and instructor responses.
- Review the lesson plans of teachers who frequently make negative referrals. As educators know, excellent instruction can remedy poor behavior.
- Use incident reports in parent meetings to show behavior trends and patterns.
- Monitor students on and above grade level. Enrichments can prevent them from becoming bored and disruptive.

NOTES
Practice the “I notice” phenomenon. What are some observable patterns? How can change be facilitated in those areas?
Use Data With Students and Parents

Data can be a powerful tool in the campaign to recruit parents as allies in learning.

■ Bring out data for parent-teacher meetings—even those led by students—to guide discussions about strengths and areas needing improvement. Be selective by using data that’s relevant and understandable.
■ Teach parents to apply data to in-home learning.
■ Share data with students, encouraging them to take responsibility for their own growth. Allow teachers to share classroom data, using charts and symbols to avoid breaching confidentiality.

Related Topics:
In addition to the ideas addressed in this section, here are some other topics for consideration related to managing data:

■ Happier teachers for improved teacher attendance;
■ Building a strong data team;
■ Applying data to the development of the master schedule;
■ Methods for disseminating data to students, teachers, and parents; and
■ Empowering teachers to make data-driven changes.

Key Considerations:
There is plenty of data available, but its value lies in the ways you are able to organize and present it.

■ Keep things simple with two-step action plans that teachers can implement and that students and parents can follow.
■ Avoid surprises by creating a yearly assessment calendar. Know at the start of the school year what the staff should be talking about, and when.
■ Capture and apply data while it’s fresh. Review and respond within 24 to 48 hours.
■ Strong structure facilitates data-driven results. If a handful of students need to catch up on a lesson, classes should already be equipped for small-group sessions.
■ Teachers take initiative to identify areas of improvement when they’re given free rein to utilize data findings.

Reflection Questions:
■ What did we see, what have we heard, and what makes us wonder?
■ What could have caused an undesirable result, and how do we remedy it?
■ How can data be employed to motivate students?
■ How can the school build its own assessment systems?
■ How do we extract salient data from student work and experiences?

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Successful principals make it a priority to set priorities. Strategic thinking informs every task. Logic shapes procedures. It all spirals back to classrooms, where learning is paramount. As The Wallace Foundation notes, effective principals incorporate six processes into their regular practices: planning, implementing, supporting, advocating, communicating, and monitoring.

Of course, no principal can plan for every curveball heading to the plate. They must set priorities and plan for routines and contingencies, project leadership behaviors, and sculpt a cohesive school climate. This section examines tactics and techniques for maximizing effectiveness through time management, while retaining the agility needed to rank issues on the spot and devise action plans. In addition, teacher evaluations get an in-depth look for their power to spark student growth.
SETTING PRIORITIES, PLANNING THOROUGHLY
Veteran principals recommend a strategic approach to setting priorities, followed by meticulous planning.

Set Priorities
Screening all potential priorities with equal objectivity means discarding those offering fewer returns and zeroing in on those that move the needle on academic performance.

■ When determining areas of concentration for the coming year, choose no more than three and create only one system or initiative to manage each. Some principals select a single priority and make it sacrosanct.
■ Debate the benefits and drawbacks of every proposed priority. Those with the greatest value will rise to the surface.
■ On the daily to-do list, prioritize the must-do items that affect student achievement. One principal highlights them with green stars. Her assistant principals used to laugh at her for doing this, but they have now adopted the habit.
■ An open-door policy doesn’t mean letting anyone with a concern disrupt the calendar. Delegate problem-solving responsibilities to the experts on your team, so that only the thorniest issues come to your desk. Train staff members to direct calls toward those delegated authorities with an explanation that the principal is focusing on teaching and learning.

Plan Everything
Principals and staff members who plan for every conceivable occurrence—the routine and the possible—manage to maintain a steady stride and keep the focus on reaching academic targets.

■ Leverage the summer months and preplanning to finalize systems, structures, and processes for the year. Practice procedures such as lunchtime routines and school dismissal. Create consistent schoolwide procedures that students recognize and follow from year to year.
■ Calendar everything. Empower an administrative assistant to hold you and others to the schedule.
■ Issue a bulletin every Monday morning that identifies the week’s priorities.
■ When true emergencies arise, jettison the schedule and delegate nothing. Anything involving student safety, police intervention, health emergencies, or media incidents belongs solely to the principal.
■ Eliminate all unproductive activities. For instance, teachers in well-run schools are in regular communication regarding student progress. That makes frequent faculty meetings redundant.

IMPLEMENTING LIKE A PRO
Decisive leadership practices set examples for the entire school community to follow.

■ Model everything. That could mean demonstrating how to deliver timely evaluation results to assistant
principals or showing teachers how to implement classroom techniques that drive student growth.

- Create two teams: one for instructional leadership and one for school management. Spend more time on instructional leadership, but keep school management running smoothly in order to prevent facility and logistical snags that dilute the focus on learning.

- Direct the instructional leadership team to plan for the week, aligning all steps with school priorities. Start the next week’s meeting with those “next steps” as the accountability map.

- Avoid top-down decision-making. Discuss ideas with assistant principals, teacher leaders, and others. Solicit input from peer principals.

- Model behaviors for students and parents to emulate, too. When one principal whose top priority is reading sees her students around town, they repeat her tagline, “Reading makes you smarter!”

- Use your calendar to self-assess performance. Determine how much time was spent on learning-focused issues and adjust if it’s too little.

SUPPORTING YOUR PEOPLE

People thrive in climates that are orderly and predictable. When students, parents, teachers, and staff experience consistency, they feel comfortable taking the chances needed to grow and learn.

- Build consistency into the curriculum across grade levels, allowing students to make progress through the same lesson structures and components in each grade. This also saves teachers’ time.

- Direct teachers who attend conferences to share their findings with colleagues. It’s a way to capture new information and research as it comes into the building.

- Include classroom staff such as paraprofessionals and coaches in the school vision. Listen to their concerns, especially when similar observations indicate that trends are brewing.

- For every new duty assigned to the faculty, remove an old one. Give teachers the precious and productivity-enhancing commodity of time.

ADVOCATING FOR IMPROVEMENT

Kids love superheroes, but they don’t always know that the flesh-and-blood champions in their lives include their principal. In an age of tight budgets and distrust of institutions, students, families, teachers, and the school staff need a champion.

- When children are in the building, put them and the people who teach and care for them first. Save emails for later.

- Use data to reveal areas of need and target community resources toward improvement goals. That includes segments needing additional funding. Work with community partners to obtain grants, and continuously monitor those grants for their effectiveness in supporting school goals.

- Be a teacher advocate by aligning data findings with the resources teachers need to achieve improvements. That can include planning, professional development, access to experts and leading-edge research, and creating a culture of learning for adults.

COMMUNICATING STRATEGICALLY

School goals can’t languish on a shelf. Communicating strategically devised goals and plans is vital to pointing all

Key Considerations:
Managing processes effectively starts with setting priorities and following through with those priorities.

- Align professional development with school priorities.

- Evaluations are conversations—not confrontations—when you and teacher team leaders regularly review data and progress with teachers.

- Just like students, teachers have different learning styles. Make your school a campus for adult learning.

- Administrators and office staff can’t do one thing a dozen ways. Create simple systems, put them in the teacher handbook, and make them stick.

- Do a few crucial tasks very well, instead of being OK at many things.

- For people or groups seeking to talk, ask, “Am I listening, am I helping you problem-solve, or am I taking action?”
members of the community toward the same objectives.

- Infuse primary goals into all outreach, and be sure to explain the “why.” One principal whose top priority is to develop in students a love of reading sends research blurbs to parents every week.
- Integrate learning into everything. If a local restaurant donates pizza for an event, grab a marker and write, “Don’t forget your reading log!” on the boxes.
- Infuse the vision and goals into all conversations, including those with potential volunteers. In one New York City school, parent volunteers became a distraction in kindergarten and first-grade classes. Now, the early-grades parents who want to volunteer are directed to other opportunities, with clear explanations. Most of them understand the greater goal of doing what’s best for the children.
- Build an audience for social media and electronic communications by training parents in their use. Sharing messages in multiple formats reaches audiences in their preferred media, but principals know that electronic communications save time and money.
- Quick video messages to families, teachers, and stakeholders offer opportunities to extend timely greetings (e.g., “Happy Thanksgiving!”) with quick-burst learning reminders (e.g., “Read a couple of books, kids!”). If a message happens to remind kids to listen to their parents, those parents will be eternally grateful.
- Build capacity to communicate in students’ home languages by tapping into community resources and the staff’s language and translation skills. This effort supports school goals of academic rigor by more fully engaging parents and supporting the drive for diversity, inclusion, and excellence for every student.
- Direct teachers to communicate and explain student learning, putting everything from test scores to field trips in an educational framework.
- Prepare thoroughly for parent-association meetings. Include members into goals and progress to build parents into advocates and peer messengers.

**MONITORING CHANGE**

Planned changes are only as good as the intensive monitoring required to ensure their application in the classroom.

- When implementing new processes, provide room for staff learning and monitor progress to prevent backsliding to the old ways.

**NOTES**

**What steps can we take to better communicate in students’ home languages?**
Align teacher classroom improvement goals with district assessment goals—for instance, setting a 5 percent improvement target if that’s the district’s goal.

Engage individual teachers in regular “data chats,” reviewing their classroom findings and possible corrective steps.

Review and comment on the data discussed in teacher team meetings. Take the findings to leadership team meetings to guide discussions on progress and goals.

Give teachers the autonomy to address their classroom challenges and present administrators with their ideas for new initiatives.

MAKING TIME FOR EVALUATIONS

Effective principals build momentum into the teacher evaluation process, creating an infinite loop of feedback and growth. Adhering closely to a calendar and managing a strict feedback schedule assures that little goes unfinished.

Schedule a predetermined number of teacher evaluations per day and per week. One principal packs most evaluations into Mondays and Tuesdays, finishing about 75 percent and completing the rest by week’s end.

Avoid overlooking any teachers, or spending too much time with others, by logging and tracking the time spent with each of them in formal and informal observations. Even “superteachers” crave feedback.

Balance each round of evaluations by scheduling the teachers who need the most help with one or two who usually need little intervention.

Save time by delegating much of the evaluation discussion to assistant principals, joining the conversation as it concludes.

Consider divvying up teacher observations with the data coach and instructional lead teacher every two weeks. Then reassign the observations, so every teacher gets a fresh pair of eyes.

Complete all evaluations by late winter, giving teachers time in the school year to make any needed improvements.

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Related Topics:

In addition to the ideas addressed in this section, here are some other topics for consideration related to managing processes:

• Setting priorities in a sea of needs;
• Creating consistent lesson structures across all grades;
• The art of delegating;
• Crafting an effective but nondisturbing open-door policy;
• Making the best use of summer planning time;
• Maintaining a feedback stream with teachers; and
• Tapping into community and staff language and translation skills.

NOTES

How could our teacher evaluation schedule be made more efficient? What are some methods that would ensure that equal time is spent with each teacher?
This discussion guide is based on conversations held with veteran principals from The Wallace Foundation’s Principal Pipeline Initiative school districts. Their thoughts supplement research on effective practices regarding managing people, data, and processes from the following studies and reports:


- **Mr. Maya’s Data-Rich Year.** Data Quality Campaign. [www.dataqualitycampaign.org/resource/mr-mayas-data-rich-year](http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/resource/mr-mayas-data-rich-year)

- **Strong Teachers and Leaders.** Data Quality Campaign. [www.dataqualitycampaign.org/topic/strong-teachers-and-leaders](http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/topic/strong-teachers-and-leaders)


### Additional Resources


Share the value of membership!

Being a principal is more than a profession. It’s a passion.

NAESP membership nurtures both.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS
Serving all elementary and middle-level principals

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