

The What, How, and Why of Leadership



Sit in a room full of veteran principals—as I recently did when I participated in NAESP’s national mentor training program—and the conversation will inevitably turn to a reflection of the first day, month, and year of the principalship. Principals in my cohort described scenarios of misguided perceptions and of challenges such as inheriting someone else’s legacy project.


The fact is, it can take up to five years for principals to truly own their seat in the principal’s office, change a school’s culture, or to have a lasting impact on student achievement. During that time, principals need a supportive culture that includes mentoring and continuous, job-embedded professional development.

What Works

There is a strong research base for what works; effective strategies for supporting school leaders aren’t new. They are echoed in the Learning First Alliance’s new compendium *The Elements of Success: 10 Million Speak on Schools That Work*, in NAESP’s Leading Learning Communities standards for principals, in the Professional Standards for Education Leaders (formerly ISLLIC), and in The Wallace Foundation’s five key practices of effective principals, which we drill down on in the accompanying supplement to this issue of *Principal* magazine. All call for distributed leadership, continuous learning, and a strong, supported teaching force and staff. Other common elements include a focus on the total child, a commitment to equity and access, family and community engagement, and a relationship-oriented school climate—all of which require demonstrable guidance and support from principals as well.

How and Why

This issue of *Principal* magazine explores “how” principals leverage formal and informal models of support to execute the leadership principles outlined in the foundational documents listed above. The issue presents best practices for mentoring and coaching, and shines a light on the growing impact of social media networks.

Nationwide, principals are using custom, digital PLNs to establish their leadership “why.” For some, it’s advocating for what kids deserve in a public education. For others, it’s about principals getting into classrooms and “into action.” And yet, for others, the passion is about excelling in both educational leadership and their very important role as parents. Regardless of your “why,” I hope this issue of *Principal* magazine positively impacts your leadership journey, and helps you connect to your leadership tribe. 

— Kaylen Tucker, Ph.D.
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