

**Principal** magazine presents

# LEADING LESSONS

USE THIS GUIDE WITH YOUR STAFF

# Collaborate to Align Learning

**Strategies to maximize  
the assistant principal role**

School leaders are asked to do more than ever because of an increase in instructional leadership and students' heightened social-emotional needs. School leaders must understand they cannot do it alone. They need to leverage the assistant principal (AP) role and leadership teams to help impact academic and social-emotional learning. Working in collaboration as a leadership team provides the opportunity to build collective efficacy where everyone can grow.

Collective efficacy is the collective self-perception that adults in a given school make an educational difference to students over and above the educational impact of their homes and communities. Although it is often focused on teachers, the result of leadership teams working together can be equally as powerful. Use this guide to build collective efficacy—starting with your AP.



## Remove Barriers to Success

Despite wanting to improve their instructional leadership practices, many APs report that they have a difficult time because they are busy with managerial tasks. The result is problematic—even after many years in the role, APs often transition to the principalship without a complete understanding of research and practice regarding instructional leadership.

**KEY CONSIDERATION:** Review how much you delegate responsibilities to your AP, and then look at how you could leverage your AP to take on more instructional roles.

**REFLECTION:** Write down—and have your AP do this, too—what percentage of your day goes into various aspects of leadership like managerial role, instructional leadership, administrative tasks, building relationships with students, and cultivating relationships with parents and families. Then compare these percentages to find ways to even out leadership roles.

APs can use the following strategies to work through the challenges of becoming an instructional leader.

- ♦ **Advocacy.** APs need talking points to use with their principals about their desire to focus on instructional leadership. Why? Because many APs don't feel comfortable sharing their feelings with their principals.
- ♦ **Reflection.** Have APs journal for one week. They can reflect on how much time they spend in classrooms, in their offices, and focusing on student discipline. It gives them a starting point to improve moving forward.
- ♦ **Goal-setting.** Every AP is responsible for a caseload of teachers. Have APs sit down with each teacher to find out what instructional goals are important to him or her. The AP can then find resources to help the teacher meet the goals, which gives the AP the chance to offer authentic feedback during observations.

### In a typical day, how do I spend my time?

Leadership Roles & Responsibilities	Time Spent


## How to Collaborate With Your AP

Collaborative leadership can help combat high turnover rates and mid-year placements. APs—who are most frequently assigned to discipline and scheduling duties—need time to visit classrooms. Use these methods to create collective efficacy among the team.

### 1. Build a Guiding Team

Every school has a guiding team that consists of the principal, AP, and lead teachers. To challenge our perspectives on how they all work within a school, regardless of positions and status, make sure members of the team understand why they have been chosen.


- ◆ Define why each member is a part of the team.
- ◆ Define the expectations of being on the team.
- ◆ Co-construct a goal together around an initiative.
- ◆ Assign duties for each member of the team.
- ◆ Promote and support discourse among the team.

 **REFLECTION:** In a meeting with your AP, brainstorm what processes are working and then list areas for improvement as you work together toward common goals.

### 2. Assess Processes and Develop Goals

Instead of focusing on discipline, help APs increase their roles as instructional leaders.

- ◆ **Conduct instructional rounds together.** This allows principals and APs to calibrate the walkthrough process, which will benefit leaders, teachers, and students.
- ◆ **Create a sacred meeting time.** Don't meet on the fly; it doesn't allow for real thinking time. Instead, meet before or after school to minimize distractions.
- ◆ **Determine and define goals.** Ask your AP to define a goal that focuses on lowering discipline issues and another that helps them focus on instructional strategies or student engagement.
- ◆ **Collect evidence.** Collective efficacy is more than just believing in each member of the team. It's about how the team collects instructional evidence to understand its impact.

 **KEY CONSIDERATION:** Open communication between principals and APs about school processes will ensure everyone is on the same page, and it gives leaders a chance to bounce ideas off of each other to improve.

#### What do we do well?

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#### What could we do better?

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### 3. Practice Collaborative Leadership

Principals should let go of some of their control as leaders and allow others to share their voices and perspectives so they know their opinions are valued. To do this, principals should practice leadership responsiveness—follow through on what you say and, if the group takes a different direction, don't try to change it just to flex your leadership muscles. It allows principals to:

- ◆ Establish trust;
- ◆ Challenge thinking;
- ◆ Focus on learning;
- ◆ Prioritize conversations on adult issues;
- ◆ Create a school climate that is inclusive of all students;
- ◆ Understand how self-efficacy affects teachers, leaders, and students;
- ◆ Collect evidence to understand impact; and
- ◆ Have a common language/understanding.

**KEY CONSIDERATION:** Define a common language. Issues among leadership often develop when there are different perspectives on frequently used words or phrases, like "feedback," "student engagement," and "growth mindset."

**REFLECTION:** So what are the next steps? Use the space below to make notes of how you can apply what you've learned.

NOTES & NEXT STEPS

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Contributor **Peter DeWitt** is the author of *Collaborative Leadership: 6 Influences That Matter Most* (Corwin Press, 2016) and *Coach It Further: Using the Art of Coaching to Improve School Leadership* (Corwin Press, 2018).

## Resources

### Collective Efficacy

- ◆ *Collective Efficacy: How Educators' Beliefs Impact Student Learning* by Jenni Anne Marie Donohoo.
- ◆ *School Climate: Leading with Collective Efficacy* by Peter DeWitt.
- ◆ *Leading Impact Teams: Building a Culture of Efficacy* by Paul J. Bloomberg and Barb Pitchford.
- ◆ *Leading School Teams: Building Trust to Promote Student Learning* by David M. Horton.

### Assistant Principals

- ◆ *The Assistant Principal: Essentials for Effective School Leadership* by L. David Weller and Sylvia J. Weller.
- ◆ *The Assistant Principal's Handbook: Strategies for Success* by Jeffrey G. Glanz.
- ◆ *The Awesome Assistant Principal Bucket List: A Journal* by Leaf Star Press and Creative Smart Journals.
- ◆ *I'm the Assistant Principal: What's Your Superpower?* by Teacher Appreciation Quotes and Gifts.

### Instructional leadership

- ◆ *Impact Coaching: Scaling Instructional Leadership* by Julie Rae Smith and Raymond L. Smith.
- ◆ *Now We're Talking: 21 Days to High-Performing Instructional Leadership* by Justin Baeder.
- ◆ *Everyday Instructional Coaching: Seven Daily Drivers to Support Teacher Effectiveness* by Nathan D. Lang-Raad.
- ◆ *The Instructional Leadership Toolbox: A Handbook for Improving Practice* by Sandra L. Gupton.