

New Principal Connection

Insights from new principals, for new principals

New principals often feel prepared for the position in a theoretical sense, but many times not in a practical sense. Some of the best professional learning resources are friends and colleagues in the field who face similar challenges and successes in the principalship. We asked new principals what their greatest challenges have been, and the resources used to tackle those challenges.



We asked NPNP to rank areas that have presented the greatest and least challenges this year.

Top 5 Greatest Challenges:

- Developing Professional Capacity of School Personnel
- Engaging Meaningful Engagement of Family and Communities
- Supporting Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
- Fostering Community for Teachers and Staff
- Managing Operations and Resources

Least Challenges:

- Cultivating a Community of Care and Support for Students
- Creating Equity and Cultural Responsiveness
- Responding to Ethics and Professional Norms
- Supporting School Improvement
- Developing Mission, Vision, and Core Values

Based on experience as an early career principal, panelists shared skills, strategies, and resources used to address challenges in the following 10 areas:

Developing Mission, Vision, and Core Values:

- Staff input during summer session.
- Come together with the leadership team to determine a theme for the year; getting outside professionals to evaluate [mission, vision, and core] areas.
- Be YOU. What you think people may want, or would like to see won't be as authentic; do your research, get to know your stakeholders and identify needs together. Make sure the Mission, Vision, and Values are in concert with who you are.

Responding to Ethics and Professional Norms

- Higher the standard through conversation and building community relationships.
- Use the PLC process to develop norms for each committee and team. As the leader, also have face-to-face meetings to address particular conduct that goes against the community you are trying to establish.
- Review all compliance protocols and expectations together to move forward with everyone acknowledging their professional responsibility. Knowing what's in a contract has been very helpful because then there is evidence as a reason for something. Meet with your Faculty Advisory Council monthly; sharing the meeting notes is helpful to show you are responding to concerns.

Creating Equity and Cultural Responsiveness:

- Start SEL staff development sessions, listening to parents and providing feedback to staff. Implement a PBIS committee: add schoolwide cultural celebrations that require some instruction for all students to understand relevance of the event.
- Provide professional development learning opportunities addressing specific demographic needs.
- Use data to track progress and hold teachers accountable for knowing students' successes and struggles; frequently share subgroup data with the parent population; and detail actions implemented to close the achievement gap.

Supporting Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment:

- Daily walkthroughs in classrooms; post-observation conferences; create innovation plan that includes hands-on learning experiences for students. Overall, watch instruction as much as possible and attend grade level curriculum trainings.
- Regularly meet with instructional leadership team to develop and support rigorous expectations for curriculum, instruction, and assessment.
- Create systems for PLCs and instructional practices (like learning walks with teachers); create expectations and support staff in areas of need.

CHALLENGE

MISSION



SUPPORT
PREPARATION



Cultivating a Community of Care and Support for Students:

- Utilize school counselors and social workers; seek new partnerships with local hospitals and physicians; communicate with the families.
- Implement the Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS).
- Utilize PBIS Norms and Data. Have a clear PBIS Plan. Include teachers and classified staff to serve on Climate/Safety Committee to determine ways to create a positive school climate; train staff (from teachers to aides) in Responsive Classroom and Restorative Justice techniques.

Managing Operations and Resources:

- Establish a close relationship with the office manager to manage funds and needs; use school funds to support student academics and behavioral needs; utilize assistant principals and other classified staff to manage areas that do not require micro-managing.
- Be aware of current resources within the building and share those; budget for items that are lacking.
- Open dialogue with the business manager about needs and how to shift budget items to better meet needs; checklists are very helpful; create visual charts so information can be communicated in an organized, efficient, and clear manner.

Fostering Community for Teachers and Staff:

- Create committees and include them in the decision making. Acknowledge the work and efforts of one another; create community inclusion activities. Provide monthly recognition and collaboration opportunities.
- Teacher roundtable discussions with other districts to generate new ideas and collaboration.
- Form a Social Committee that facilitates team bonding events. Keep an open-door and a jar of candy to encourage people to drop by the Principal's office and chat.

Engaging Meaningful Engagement of Family and Communities:

- Communicate continuously via newsletters, onsite invitations, and events; alter calendar to be more family friendly; provide community and family engagement opportunities at least once a month with diverse activities, time, and learning with each experience. Provide evening assemblies for students and parents.
- Work with parents through parent volunteer organization. Encourage parents to share their time and become a reading buddy. NAESP has great professional articles to help principals build community.
- Create diverse and multiple monthly committees/groups so all parents can participate in a way that is meaningful to them. Examples: an African American Support Group, English Learner Advisory Council, Special Ed Resource Group, and School Beautification Committee that all meet monthly.

Developing Professional Capacity of School Personnel:

- Empower staff to lead through professional leadership opportunities.
- Format staff meetings in a way that allows staff to learn from each other; use 'edcamp' structures; provide PD with Instructional Leadership Team Book Studies.
- Create systematic and structured monthly PD on patterns of practice identified in teacher/admin learning walks.

Supporting School Improvement:

- Celebrate student success; include specialist, counselor, coordinator of SPED. Be transparent with data and require faculty to review and analyze the evidence.
- Ground decisions in data.
- Have clear, honest, vulnerable conversations about where you've been, where you are now, and where you're going.



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