Leadership Matters

Building Principals' Capacity with the ASCD Principal Leadership Development Framework

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Leadership Matters

LEADERSHIP ESSENTIALS

Leadership. Entering that simple keyword into any Internet search engine will return millions of hits in a fraction of a second. Further investigation of these sources will confirm what you already knew: Leadership is a complex, subtle, delicate, and dynamic concept. In our schools, districts, and education systems, we must have leaders—and effective leaders, at that—to achieve the results that our society requests and requires. "One essential ingredient for success in education and any business, for that matter, is effective leadership" (Stronge, Richard, & Catano, 2008, p. xii).

DYNAMIC EMPOWER LEADERSHIP
SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT
RESULTS PLC PARTNERS TEACHING
CAPACITY BUILDING
GROWTH CRUCIAL

At ASCD, the very heart of our mission and vision is the desire to enhance educational leadership performance around the world. We have spent the better part of the last 70 years investigating, researching, proposing, and clarifying the characteristics, behaviors, attitudes, and dispositions of effective school leaders. Over that span, we have embraced the concept that the school principal is arguably one of the most influential positions in education. This is not to diminish the influence of district superintendents, state department officials, legislators, the U.S. Secretary of Education, and the legions of professional teacher leaders and educators working to improve children's lives on a daily basis; rather, it is to acknowledge the unique influence held by the building administrator. Who is better equipped than the principal to build a solid bridge between policy and practice?

In their key research report *How Leadership Influences Student Learning*, Kenneth Leithwood and his colleagues noted that "it turns out that leadership not only matters; it is second only to teaching among school-related factors in its impact on student learning" (2004, p. 3). Principals, in particular, must create a school culture and infrastructure that supports effective teaching and school-based leadership roles. They can transform school leadership by creating opportunities for teachers to lead; building professional learning communities; providing high-quality, results-driven professional development; and celebrating innovation and teacher expertise (Childs-Bowen, Moeller, & Scrivner, 2000).

Further, in John Hattie's impressive meta-analysis of the factors influencing student achievement, *Visible Learning*, 27 of the top 30 factors, as ranked by effect size, are centered around schools, teachers, and curricula, all of which the building principal can influence (2009). In a summation we welcome fondly, noted school leadership expert Douglas Reeves states quite plainly, "Leadership matters" (2009, p. 107).

ASCD'S PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

"If we are to succeed as an educational enterprise in a highly competitive world, then we must embrace leadership development—not in a cursory fashion, but rather in an ongoing, comprehensive, sustained manner" (Stronge et al., 2008, p. xii). And if the principal is such an important driver in the educational engine, then it would behoove us as educators to embrace a comprehensive and detailed outline of effective leadership approaches. To that end, in 2008, ASCD composed the first iteration

of its Leadership Development Framework. Aligned with the 2008 Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards, with a definitive bent toward instructional leadership research, the original ASCD Leadership Development Framework provided guidelines for what effective principals do. Created, vetted, and refined collaboratively by ASCD leaders and a team of school and district leaders, state department of education officials, and ASCD Faculty members with leadership development expertise, the leadership development content provided a suitable framework for expressing the core characteristics of effective educational leadership.

With the public release of the updated ISLLC Standards (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2014) and the increasing prevalence of state leadership standards, ASCD was inspired to further support the field with an update of its work, now titling it the *Principal* Leadership Development Framework, to better address a handful of key questions:

What is the purpose of the framework? ASCD's Principal Leadership Development Framework establishes a clear and concise picture of effective building leadership, expressing the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and actions necessary for success in the principalship. In essence, it provides a clear target for educational leadership excellence.

In what ways is this framework unique? Over the past seven decades, ASCD has built a brand and reputation on leading the discussion about research-based best practices in education. As a worldwide organization with 125,000 members, ASCD has particular strengths—one of these is instructional leadership. The framework is designed with a significant tilt toward instructional leadership, as opposed to the duties of school management and operations.

How does the framework support principals' growth? There are two clear pathways to access and use this tool. First, with a clear target in view, principals, assistant principals, and aspiring principals can address their own professional learning, which Linda Lambert defines as "learning opportunities that can be found in collegial conversations, coaching episodes, shared decision-making groups, reflective journals, parent forums, or other such occasions" (2003, p. 22). This professional learning pathway will bolster the practices, structures, and processes essential for sustained growth. Second, districts can integrate the content and descriptions in the framework into the design of a sustainable leadership development and coaching program for principals, assistant principals, and aspiring principals. Both of these pathways are explained in greater detail later in this document.

What is the philosophy that drives this framework? The ASCD Principal Leadership Development Framework is grounded in the belief that growth of individual leaders and leadership teams leads to school and system growth that positively affects student learning. Just as we must build teachers' capacity to support ongoing growth and effectiveness, so must we build leaders' capacity through continuous learning and reflective practice. This alignment provides a solid stanchion to which all of our approaches are inextricably connected.

PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK AT A GLANCE

Many theories and approaches exist concerning the particular skills and strategies of effective leadership, and attempting to cover each component would prove cumbersome, exhausting, and fruitless. Instead, building on the foundation provided by prominent researchers, educational thinkers, and practitioners, the ASCD Principal Leadership Development Framework emphasizes four key roles of the building administrator: Visionary, Instructional Leader, Influencer, and Learner and Collaborator. ASCD has significant expertise in each of these roles. Further, the ASCD Principal Leadership Development Framework offers 17 crucial descriptors of effective practice that channel our focus onto the leadership behaviors that have the greatest influence on the culture, climate, staff, students, and achievement within a particular school community. Knowing that others are also in formal leadership positions, we've used "Administrator" in addition to "Principal" to be more inclusive.

Below is the ASCD Principal Leadership Development Framework explained:

Principal/Administrator as Visionary

1. Articulates, communicates, and leads the collaborative implementation and ongoing revision of the school's mission and vision.

2. Aligns and bases all decisions, practices, policies, and resources (e.g., human capital, time, budgetary, and facilities) on the school's mission and vision.

3. Promotes the collaborative creation, monitoring, and refinement of short- and long-term school improvement plans.

4. Compels the district and school community to embrace and work toward the attainment of the shared mission and vision.

Principal/Administrator as Instructional Leader

1. Builds collective capacity of the entire staff through the cultivation of a robust Professional Learning Community.

2. Builds individual capacity of the entire staff through differentiated supervision, coaching, feedback, and evaluation practices.

3. Ensures the alignment of rigorous curricula, research-based best practices in instruction, and comprehensive formative and summative assessment approaches.

4. Promotes monitoring systems that use real-time data to inform instruction and intervention decisions at the teacher, team, and school site levels.

Principal/Administrator as Influencer

1. Maintains an unwavering priority of establishing and fostering an environment that tends to the whole child: healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged.

2. Creates and cultivates partnerships within the parent, district, business, political, and greater community spheres to support the achievement of the school's mission and vision.

3. Drives and navigates positive change by assessing, analyzing, and anticipating emerging trends and implementing change-savvy techniques with staff and the school community.

4. Safeguards community values, ethics, and equitable practices, advocating for all children and displaying an appreciation for diversity.

5. Develops policies and practices that cultivate staff as reflective practitioners.

Principal/Administrator as Learner and Collaborator

1. Facilitates the delivery of job-embedded, ongoing, coordinated professional learning opportunities that lead to increased student achievement.

2. Develops internal leaders and nurtures an environment of distributed leadership, collective responsibility, and collaborative decision making.

3. Models reflective practice, confidence, humility, grit, and interest in continuous growth and lifelong learning.

4. Participates regularly in professional learning organizations, a community of practice, and a leadership network.

THE PRINCIPAL'S CONTINUUM OF SELF-REFLECTION

Knowing the descriptors of effective practice, as outlined in the ASCD Principal Leadership Development Framework, is helpful only insofar as it provides a clear target at which to aim. As we have learned from the assessment for learning movement, if we are to expect growth toward mastery of these targets by asking, "Where am I going?" we must simultaneously ask, "Where am I now?" and "How am I going to get there?" (Stiggins et al., 2004).

Here enters the Continuum of Self-Reflection. First introduced in *Building Teachers' Capacity for Success: A Collaborative Approach for Coaches and School Leaders*, the Continuum of Self-Reflection is a powerful tool that helps identify our reflective habits and guides us toward growth as reflective practitioners (Hall & Simeral, 2008). Based on research that dates all the way back to John Dewey's seminal work, *How We Think* (1910), Hall and Simeral espouse the value of building self-reflective tendencies in all educators: "The skill of self-reflection transcends all other skills, strategies, and teaching approaches because it can grow over the course of a teacher's career and enable the teacher to cultivate and solidify all of his or her professional learning" (2008, p. 38).

To support the reflective development of principals and building leaders, one must only substitute the word "principal" for "teacher" in the above quote. Here, the *Principal's* Continuum of Self-Reflection has been developed to show the progression of thought, mindfulness, and intentionality as principals grow, develop, and engage in the Reflective Cycle: gaining awareness of their contextual reality, acting intentionally to effect productive change, assessing the effect of their actions, adjusting their actions to alter the results, and continuously reflecting on their leadership practices.

As one might expect, the manner, depth, frequency, and accuracy with which principals reflect on their professional experiences and responsibilities varies from individual to individual. In fact, Hall and Simeral discovered, reflective skills span a continuum consisting of four distinct stages, from Unaware to Conscious to Action to Refinement (2008). Educators in each stage of the Principal's Continuum of Self-Reflection demonstrate certain reflective tendencies, as outlined in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1—The Principal's Continuum of Self-Reflection: Reflective Tendencies

	Unaware Stage	Conscious Stage	Action Stage	Refinement Stage
Leader's Reflective Tendencies	• Demonstrates little or no awareness of current reality in the school building or nuanced cultural context. • Oriented to routine. • Reacts emotionally or impulsively to the immediate needs of the school. • Focuses on the job itself—the *tasks* of the principalship.	• Demonstrates a consistent "know-ing–doing" gap. • Offers explanations for problems and circumstances. • Misconstrues the factors requiring action. • Focuses first on *self* and own role in the principalship.	• Accepts responsibility for the success of students, staff, and self with a mindfulness of equitable practice. • Evaluates situations objectively. • Seeks solutions to problems. • Focuses on the *science* of leadership, managing resources and implementing research-based practices.	• Recognizes there are multiple options or iterative cycles to address every problem. • Maintains and seeks out a vast repertoire of leadership strategies. • Adjusts course when necessary to maintain heading toward a common goal. • Focuses on the fluid *art* of leadership, seeking ongoing feedback and maintaining a relentless focus on continuous improvement within the school's unique cultural context.

ASCD has added depth to this work by describing the leadership characteristics and actions that are represented by practitioners within each of the stages along the Principal's Continuum of Self-Reflection. This perspective will be available in greater detail in a forthcoming ASCD book by the authors of this white paper. For example, Figure 2 addresses the Visionary role of the principal/administrator and actions within the context of criterion 1, "Articulates, communicates, and leads the collaborative implementation and ongoing revision of the school's mission and vision." The chart shows how the principal's reflective skills and tendencies influence performance.

FIGURE 2—Visionary Role on the Principal's Continuum of Self-Reflection

|	Unaware Stage	Conscious Stage	Action Stage	Refinement Stage
1. Articulates, communicates, and leads the collaborative implementation and ongoing revision of the school's mission and vision.	Lacks understanding or development of personal influence on the school's mission and vision.	Understands the mission and vision of the school.	Articulates and communicates the mission and vision of the school.	Initiates and proactively leads the communication, implementation, and ongoing revision of the school's mission, vision, and School Improvement Plan.

This is but a sample of the robust Principal's Continuum of Self-Reflection; the remainder of the document is available to users of ASCD's Professional Learning Services prior to the publication of the aforementioned ASCD book. The ultimate goal, clearly, is to support our building leaders' development as reflective practitioners, deepening their thoughtfulness and increasing the frequency with which they engage in the Reflective Cycle. With concerted effort and consistent support, we can usher our principals along the continuum toward the Refinement stage. As expert school leader and author Thomas Hoerr so aptly reminds us, there is an art to leadership: "Strong leaders are artists because they recognize that there is no one formula, no particular policy, no set of procedures that will always work with everyone or, even, will always work with any one person" (2005, p. 1).

PATHWAYS TO ENHANCE LEADERSHIP CAPACITY

As mentioned earlier, there are two pathways for accessing and using the ASCD Principal Leadership Development Framework, illustrated in Figure 3.

FIGURE 3—Pathways to the ASCD Principal Leadership Development Framework
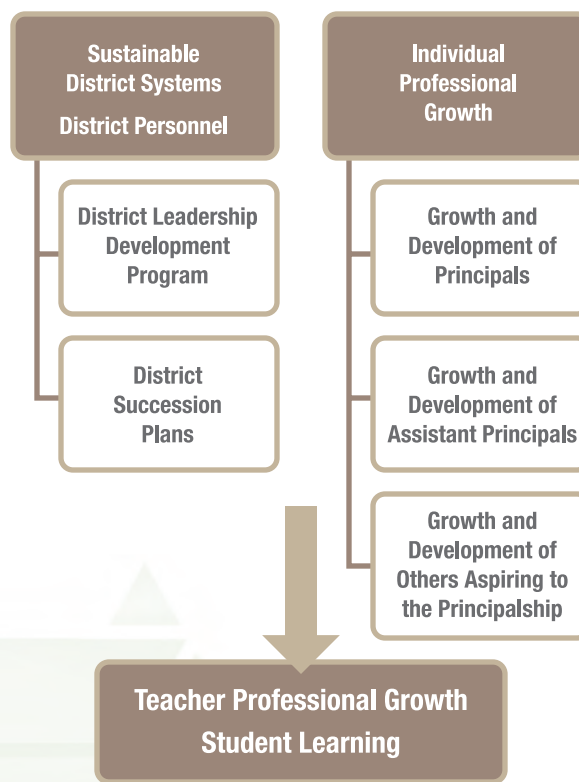
Sustainable District Systems for School Leadership Development/District Personnel

The most popular definition of sustainability can be traced to a 1987 United Nations conference. In the 96th plenary meeting of the General Assembly held that year, sustainable developments were defined as those that "meet present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Districts today are faced with the task of creating sustainable, renewable systems of leadership development that support future generations. The ASCD Principal Leadership Development Framework provides insights into the *what* and *how* of designing such systems.

- **District Leadership Development Program:** From the district perspective, leadership development within the ranks is a top priority. Every member of the central or district office must understand effective leadership practices and act accordingly. This framework assists in the creation of robust and rigorous leadership development programs, inclusive of central office staff, that prepare the district to systematically tackle leadership capacity building that has a positive influence on student achievement. As Robert Marzano, Timothy Waters, and Brian McNulty expressed in *School Leadership That Works*, "Leadership is vital to the effectiveness of a school" (2005, p. 4).

- **District Supervisors, Mentors, and Coaches for Principals:** School district officials have long felt the challenges associated with leading, motivating, and guiding the ongoing professional growth of building principals. When professional development includes designs and resources such as coaching, the level of application increases to around 95 percent (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Within the ASCD Principal Leadership Development Framework lie the tools for districts tackling this ambitious and vital task.

- **District Succession Planning:** Twenty percent of first-year principals leave their schools within the first or second year, creating a domino effect that affects both teaching and student achievement (Burkhauser, Gates, Hamilton, & Ikemoto, 2012). Every school site within a district has particular needs, shaped in part by its unique demographics, climate, culture, and current contextual reality. Conducting a real-time needs assessment and matching principals' skills to particular assignments ensures having the "right people in the right seats" at the right time (Collins, 2001, p. 41).

Individual Professional Growth

To create effective schools that have the strongest influence on student learning, leadership development efforts must be embedded throughout all leadership roles, and professional learning experiences must be guided by a specific set of principles.

- **Growth and Development of Principals:** Pursuing new learning, striving for continuous improvement, and building a never-ending repertoire of leadership skills are hallmark traits of effective school leaders (Marzano et al., 2005). Seated building principals—whether newly appointed, midcareer, or veterans—can all benefit from the identification and creation of key strategies, targeted goal setting, and deliberate job-embedded work plans to develop results from reflective leadership practices.

- **Growth and Development of Assistant Principals:** The position of assistant principal is one of the most dynamic, essential, and fluctuating roles in education, requiring a specific set of skills and dispositions (Pounder & Crow, 2005). At the same time, assistant principals are next in line to lead schools instructionally, yet they often assume the principalship unprepared to implement the practices of effective leadership. Among these practices is the cultivation of educational leadership approaches; this framework provides direction and support for those in the assistant principal role to help their growth and transition.

- **Growth and Development of Others Aspiring to the Principalship:** Even before setting foot in a school principal's office, aspiring administrators must have a clear picture of what the position entails. The ASCD Principal Leadership Development Framework illustrates the necessary behaviors and approaches for effective leadership, which can help inform preservice administrators' intentional preparation strategies and direct district personnel as they tap candidates for leadership roles (Pounder & Crow, 2005).

REFLECTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

In any school environment, leadership is vital. Developing effective school leaders is a monumental responsibility, shared equally between the leaders themselves and their district leadership counterparts.

From the demystification of effective leadership behaviors to the clarification of individual leadership strengths and collective system needs, school district officials

and building administrators who actively collaborate on continuous growth can have an immense influence on the ultimate result: enhanced student achievement. Using the ASCD Principal Leadership Development Framework and the Principal's Continuum of Self-Reflection is an ideal strategy for reaching that goal.

Complementary to any educator effectiveness model, principal evaluation model, or leadership rubric already in place in a district, this growth-oriented tool supports goal-setting, planning, and strategic development of ongoing professional growth. Its reliance on building self-reflective abilities ensures an enduring, capacity-building impact on system, school, and individual leadership influences.

ASCD is proud to provide this Principal Leadership Development Framework and the Principal's Continuum of Self-Reflection as part of its comprehensive Professional Learning Services. Working directly with school and district leaders, ASCD offers an array of tailored opportunities to build capacity, from on-site professional learning, ongoing consulting, and virtual and face-to-face coaching support to a wide selection of research-based digital product resources and books. Partnering with ASCD and working directly with ASCD's Leadership Faculty experts will ensure strong, sustainable instructional leadership in schools and districts for many years to come.

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