



# MANAGING TO SUPPORT LEARNING TOOLKIT

*Toolkit 3 in the Utah Educational Leadership Toolkit Series*

Prepared for Utah Leading through Effective, Actionable, and Dynamic (ULEAD) Education

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In this toolkit, Hanover Research and ULEAD explore strategies and resources that current and aspiring school principals can utilize to meet the criteria outlined in Strand 3: Management for Learning of the Utah State Standards for Educational Leadership.



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## INTRODUCTION

This toolkit provides guidance and resources to support current and aspiring school principals in developing their personal capacity for leadership and meeting the criteria outlined in the **Utah State Standards for Educational Leadership** (located [here](#)). Specifically, this toolkit is designed to develop current and aspiring principals' skills and knowledge related to **Strand 3: Management for Learning**.

### Utah's Educational Leadership Strand 3: Management for Learning



*Effective educational leaders manage school operations and resources to promote the success and well-being of faculty, staff, and students.*

**Standard 3.1:** Manage staff resources, including the assignment of teachers and staff to roles and responsibilities in order to optimize their professional capacity to equitably address each student's learning needs.

**Standard 3.2:** Seek, acquire, and manage fiscal, physical, and other resources to support the school's vision, mission, and values.

**Standard 3.3:** Comply with mandated budget and accounting practices as responsible and ethical stewards of the school's monetary and non-monetary resources.

**Standard 3.4:** Promote and protect the welfare and safety of students, faculty, and staff through implementation of federal, state, and local educational agency (LEA) policies and effective schoolwide procedures and practices.

**Standard 3.5:** Promote adult-student, student-peer, and school-community relationships to create the climate and conditions which value and support academic learning and positive social and emotional development.

**Standard 3.6:** Follow LEA policies, Utah State Code, and Utah State Board of Education rules governing human resource functions, including remediation and/or termination of faculty and staff employment as needed.

Source: Utah State Board of Education<sup>1</sup>

Research shows that—aside from teachers—**school principals are the most influential school-based factor in promoting student achievement.**<sup>2</sup> Specifically, research finds that principals account for a quarter—on average—of their school's overall impacts on student achievement outcomes. Likewise, research observes that differences in student achievement up to 20 percentage points may occur when a school has an "above-average principal" rather than an "average principal."<sup>3</sup>

**Effective principals are integral to their school's success.**<sup>4</sup> Research shows that effective principals positively impact the mission and vision of their schools and student and staff outcomes.<sup>5</sup> In particular, effective principals are more likely to retain qualified and effective teachers, which helps drive student achievement.<sup>6</sup> More broadly, research shows that "it takes multiple in-school factors coming together to significantly improve student achievement on a larger scale" and "that principals are in a unique position to bring those factors together."<sup>7</sup> The impact of having an

effective principal is greater in schools facing more challenges. Researchers find "no documented instances[...]where troubled schools are turned around if they do not have a talented leader."<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, it is accurately and "widely believed that a good principal is the key to a successful school" given the many roles they fill: instructional leader, staff evaluator, lead disciplinarian, overseer of daily operations, school representative to families and the community, and more.<sup>9</sup> Principals are integral to all aspects of their school's operations, from the quality of the teachers to the instructional strategies used with students to the overall school climate.<sup>10</sup>

As such, principals require an array of knowledge and skills to act as effective change agents, instructional leaders, and personnel managers.<sup>11</sup> This **Managing to Support Learning Toolkit**—and the six accompanying toolkits in the *Utah Educational Leadership Toolkit Series*—support Utah's current and aspiring principals in meeting the demands of the Utah State Standards for Educational Leadership to successfully:<sup>12</sup>

- Shape a vision of academic success for all students, one based on high standards;
- Create a climate hospitable to education in order that safety, a cooperative spirit, and other foundations of fruitful interaction prevail;
- Cultivate leadership in others so that teachers and other adults assume their part in realizing the school vision;
- Improve instruction so teachers can teach at their best and students can learn at their utmost; and
- Manage people, data, and processes to foster school improvement.

### Why Utah's Schools Need Strong and Effective Principals

“ Everyone remembers a teacher that inspired them. How many people remember their principals? Principals ensure that schools are open, that teachers are receiving the support they need, and that classrooms are environments that will help all students learn.

*The strongest model for schools is one in which principals are creative, innovative instructional leaders. They find opportunities for teachers to lead. They support teachers in their growth and create a safe space for adults to take risks in their learning. As educators look at what builds a great school, they need to look at the principal. Who is at the helm? What vision have they set for their communities? How have they developed an environment that fosters learning and creativity?*

**Students need great teachers, and teachers need great leaders. One can't exist without the other.** Principals bring in opportunities for their communities. They find resources where there weren't any before. They connect families. They find places for children to thrive both in and outside of the classroom.

”

Source: U.S. Department of Education<sup>13</sup>

## OVERVIEW

This toolkit:

- ✓ Reviews strategies to support **effective recruitment and hiring of school staff** and to **promote current staff members' effectiveness via performance evaluations**;
- ✓ Addresses policies and procedures to help principals **advocate for financial resources during their district's budgeting cycles** and provides guidance on **resource mapping for and inventorying of human and physical capital**; and
- ✓ Discusses actions that principals can take to **establish and maintain a safe and secure climate** and to **nurture relationships between different school stakeholder groups**.

## AUDIENCE

This toolkit is designed to support current and aspiring school principals across the state of Utah in meeting the criteria outlined in the Utah State Standards for Educational Leadership, particularly in relation to **Strand 3: Management for Learning**.

## INCREASE STAFF EFFECTIVENESS

### HIRE AND ASSIGN THE RIGHT PERSONNEL FOR THE RIGHT ROLE

Principals must work diligently to ensure that their school's staff—including teachers, support staff, and other administrators—are strong fits for the positions that they assume and the larger organizational culture.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, one of the most critical functions that principals perform is overseeing and guiding the selection and hiring of "high-quality, mission- and vision-aligned teachers" and school support staff.<sup>15</sup> However, it can be hard to determine which teacher and school support staff candidates will be a good fit for open positions, necessitating that principals—and other personnel involved in hiring decisions—carefully consider the procedures they use to recruit, assess, and eventually hire applicants.<sup>16</sup>

#### Basic Questions to Assess Potential New Hires

-  Does the candidate have the capacity to meet outlined performance expectations?
-  Are there any warning signs to look for relative to the requirements for success in this role?
-  Is the candidate a good fit for the grade, subject, or department in which they will work?

Source: Concordia University-Portland<sup>17</sup>

When seeking to hire new personnel, principals need to "[f]ish for a purpose," meaning that they must seek out the right professional skills, experience, expertise, and temperaments in order to find "the right match between institution and individual."<sup>18</sup> Consequently, principals should advertise positions and structure their school's hiring processes—according to the level of autonomy that their district provides them—to facilitate the identification and onboarding of individuals that will be strong in their assigned role, effective in meeting school goals for student and operational outcomes, and of the right disposition to fit within a school's larger professional culture.<sup>19</sup> In planning for and executing this process, principals should understand that "there is no one-size-fits[-]all solution or simple hiring formula" for recruiting and hiring the best candidates and that the process will likely look different depending on the position being filled and the professional culture of individual schools and districts.<sup>20</sup>

#### Why Does It Matter How Schools Select and Hire Staff?

“ The primary task of human resource management is simple: to choose the right person for the right job. This is especially important in education, because the success of a school is determined to a large extent by the effectiveness of its teacher, leader, and staff workforce. If one focuses specifically on teachers, the notion that teachers make a significant impact on student learning has been empirically validated by numerous studies and widely accepted by educational policy makers and practitioners, as well as by the general public. Thus, it is safe to say: effective teachers = student success.

One fundamental issue is that, no matter the source of applicants for teacher and other staff openings, the pivotal step is to select the right people from the applicant pool. It is important—essential, in fact—to select personnel based squarely on valid, research-based quality standards in a systematic and consistent manner. Locating and acquiring what a principal believes to be a quality applicant pool is not sufficient. Rather, how they discern, sort, and select from among the available applicants is the deciding factor for onboarding talented teachers and school support staff. Thus, having and using a research-guided, field-tested, standards-based, and systematic selection protocol matters.

Source: *The International Educator*<sup>21</sup>

Selecting the right people to fill open positions at a school is an effective way to improve the quality of school faculty and staff while also limiting students' and staff's potential exposure to unqualified and ineffective personnel in any given role.<sup>22</sup> Broadly, this means hiring impactful teachers and instructional personnel that have strong pedagogical and collaborative skills.<sup>23</sup> Likewise, effective hiring and personnel assignment must extend to non-teaching, support, and operations staff—such as front office personnel, paraprofessionals, custodians, and library/media specialists—considering the fact that "there are as many non-teaching adults as there are teachers in U.S. public schools."<sup>24</sup>

**School Personnel that Principals May Oversee and/or Hire**

Assistant Principals	General Education Teachers	Special Education Teachers	Intervention Specialists
Instructional Coaches	Guidance Counselors	Library/Media Specialists	Speech Therapists
Occupational Therapists	Physical Therapists	Administrative Assistants	Teacher's Aides
Paraprofessionals	Nutritionists	Cooks	Computer Technicians
Nurses		Custodians	Maintenance Staff

Source: ThoughtCo.<sup>25</sup>

Consequently, **principals—in collaboration with other school leaders and district-level human resources personnel—should identify those skills, competencies, and temperaments that are necessary for success within the positions to be filled and tailor recruitment strategies (e.g., publicizing of open positions) and hiring procedures (e.g., interview questions, performative exercises, demonstration lessons) to the identified competencies and temperaments.**<sup>26</sup> Specifically, this means that principals and their collaborators must articulate the attitudes, expertise, skills, and knowledge that they desire for those personnel that will eventually fill open positions, attributes which should align with broader organizational goals for student achievement (i.e., in the case of teachers and instructional personnel) and operations (i.e., in the case of non-instructional personnel).<sup>27</sup> Outlined criteria may encompass credentials (e.g., certifications, degrees), attitudes about education (e.g., commitment to students, enthusiasm for the position), cognitive skills (e.g., time management, organization), and instructional capacity (e.g., subject matter knowledge, classroom management strategies).<sup>28</sup>

Because determining the quality of an individual candidate's fit for a given position can be challenging given the constraints of candidate review and interview procedures, principals should invite other school leaders (e.g., assistant principals, department chairpersons, support staff supervisors) to participate in the process in order to obtain a more holistic understanding of a candidate's ability to meet the expectations of the open role and operate within the school's larger culture.<sup>29</sup> In essence, having second and third (and so on) opinions of a candidate's viability helps ensure the best possible match for the candidate and the school itself.<sup>30</sup> Working in concert with a dedicated hiring team of other school leaders will help principals deploy the right people within the right roles in order to best meet school needs.<sup>31</sup>

On the next page, the "**Best Hiring Practices Infographic**" summarizes key elements of effective recruiting and hiring practices for school personnel. Principals can use this infographic as baseline guidance for constructing their recruiting and hiring procedures. They may also share it with collaborating personnel supporting recruiting and new hiring within their organizations.



## Best Hiring Practices Infographic

**Description:** Principals, in tandem with collaborating personnel involved in a school's hiring process, should adhere to the four best hiring practices presented below as a baseline for effective recruitment and onboarding of individual personnel.

### HIRE EARLY

The best available talent is often hired early during peak school hiring season (i.e., spring and summer). As such, principals and their collaborators should:

- Identify vacancies early by sending out intent surveys to current personnel asking their plans for the upcoming school year;
- Conduct follow-up conversations with personnel to retain high performers or push for early notification of separation; and
- Once a vacancy is identified, hire quickly to capitalize on when the candidate pool is strongest.



### CREATE A HIRING COMMITTEE

Creating a strong hiring committee helps divide responsibilities among administrators, teacher leaders, and content area specialists and considers multiple perspectives to better judge candidate potential during the hiring process. As such, principals and their collaborators should:

- Identify administrators, teacher leaders, and content experts among current staff;
- Outline roles and responsibilities for efficient hiring processes, from reviewing resumes to scheduling interviews to marketing the school; and
- Devote time to hiring committee training to make sure all members are aware of responsibilities.



### USE A SELECTION MODEL

Schools that use a selection model with multiple measures to assess candidates typically hire better personnel because they see a more comprehensive picture of candidate ability. As such, principals and their collaborators should:

- Identify the most important competencies and traits necessary to be effective in the open position at their school;
- Create interview questions and hiring exercises that assess for the identified competencies and traits; and
- In addition to an interview, have teacher candidates perform a hiring exercise or sample lesson to enable observation of them in multiple contexts performing the skills they will need to demonstrate in the classroom.



### MARKET THE SCHOOL

To recruit top talent, it is imperative that a school markets its strengths, treats interviews as a two-way process, and finds innovative ways to attract candidates. As such, principals and their collaborators should:

- Create marketing materials that highlight school strengths (e.g., brochures, website);
- Identify someone on the hiring committee devoted to "candidate cultivation" (e.g., developing candidate interest, greeting candidates on interview day, following up with phone calls); and
- Remember that interviews go both ways and work to impress candidates to attract top talent.

Source: Georgia Association of Educational Leaders<sup>32</sup>

Relatedly, on pp. 10-11, the "**Sample Teacher Interview Questions**" tool provides principals and other individuals involved in the teacher hiring process with a sample list of questions that can be used in interviews with teacher candidates. Questions are attached to specific domains, which themselves correlate with vital components of teachers' professional responsibilities (e.g., instructional planning and delivery, classroom management, teamwork, ethical behavior). Though the sample questions are specifically for teachers, they can provide principals and others with insight into how to link interview questions back to any open position's mandated job responsibilities and professional expectations.

## SUPPORT STAFF'S PROFESSIONAL WORK VIA EFFECTIVE EVALUATIONS

While hiring the right staff and assigning them to best-fit roles represent essential functions in strengthening a school's workforce, **principals must also cultivate the talent of staff within (and even beyond the scope of) their assigned roles to promote professional development and career longevity.**<sup>33</sup> In fact, retention of effective staff and continued development and improvement of staff, together with effective recruitment and hiring practices, represent a "triumvirate" of sorts for vital human resources functions conducted by strong principals.<sup>34</sup> Principals, therefore, must strive to build relationships with the faculty and staff at their school that are fair and consistent in their application of professional expectations and marked by the provision of praise when it is earned and corrective action as warranted.<sup>35</sup>

To ensure smooth school operations, principals should "nurtur[e] and [support] their staffs, while facing the reality that sometimes [personnel] do not work out" as was hoped for when they were initially hired.<sup>36</sup> At the same time, principals must recognize that their own professional effectiveness directly impacts the quality of their staff, as high-performing personnel are more likely to stay at a given school under the leadership of an effective principal.<sup>37</sup>

### Leveraging Staff Strengths and Rectifying Weaknesses

*“ A leader understands that it is the individual parts in a machine that keep the entire machine running. They know which of those parts are fine-tuned, which are in need of a little repair, and which could potentially need to be replaced. A principal knows each teacher's individual strengths and weaknesses. They show faculty and staff how to use their strengths to make an impact and create personal development plans to foster professional growth. A leader also evaluates the entire faculty as a whole and provides professional development and training in areas where broader improvement is needed. ”*

Source: ThoughtCo.<sup>38</sup>

To best facilitate faculty and staff members' professional growth and effectiveness within their roles, "principals [must] set clear expectations for performance and [conduct] ongoing observations of classroom practice [and the execution of non-instructional duties] to determine whether expectations [a]re being met" for personnel in all positions at the school.<sup>39</sup> In particular, principals—or their designated proxy (e.g., an assistant principal or department supervisor)—should know the specific responsibilities, performance expectations, and school-driven goals attached to individual positions in order to assess a given individual's effectiveness within their assigned role.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, principals or their proxies should use multiple data measures, observational tools, and performance assessments to pinpoint individual strengths and development areas among faculty and staff.<sup>41</sup> Doing so serves to strengthen the determination of instructional and non-instructional staff quality during both formative and summative evaluations of professional performance.<sup>42</sup>



## Sample Teacher Interview Questions

**Directions:** Principals and other individuals involved in the teacher hiring process can use the questions below as part of their interviews for open instructional positions. Though the sample questions are specifically for teachers, they can provide principals and others with insight into how to link interview questions back to an open position's mandated job responsibilities and professional expectations.

### Opening Questions (i.e., "Ice Breakers")

- Tell us about your experience and how it relates to this position?
- Why are you interested in this position?
- What experience have you had that has prepared you for this position?
- What would you bring to our staff that would be unique?
- Describe the assets you have to offer this district/school.
- What makes or will make you a great teacher?
- Why do you feel this school/district is a good fit for you?

### Instructional Planning and Preparations

- How do you know what to teach your students?
- What are the things you have done that demonstrate initiative and creativity?
- How have you incorporated cross-curricular standards into planning and teaching?
- What would you do to determine whether your lesson plans were effective?
- Give an example of what you did (or would do) to engage a student who was bored or not participating? What was the outcome?
- What information do you feel is important to know about your students? Why?

### Classroom Management, Organization, Environment, and Safety

- You have a student who is constantly disruptive. What do you do?
- How would your students describe you? Why?
- How have you organized your classroom to maximize instruction?
- Describe a time when you worked with a reluctant student. What were the results? What did you learn?
- While monitoring and interacting with small groups you notice one student is isolating and crying. What would you do?
- You see a student cheating on a test. What would you do?

### Professional Knowledge and Pedagogy

- Describe professional development you have attended recently, why you chose it, and how you will use it to benefit your students.
- Describe a time when you suspected a child was being neglected or abused. What did you do?
- How would you respond to unethical behavior by a student, parent, or staff member?
- How have you adapted your instruction to meet the needs of diverse learners?
- What do you do to stimulate student interest in learning that other teachers do not do?
- Describe how you have stimulated students' interest in learning.
- Describe a lesson you taught recently and how you knew it was effective.
- What do you believe parents expect from you as their child's teacher?

### Instructional Strategies and Assessment

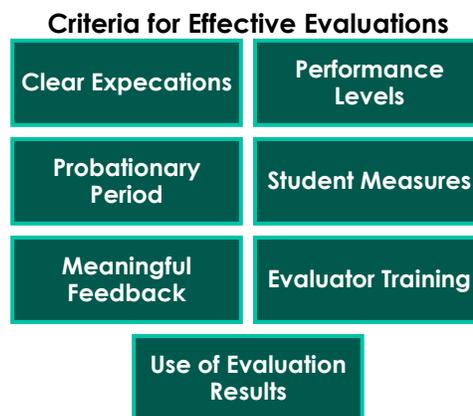
- What strategies have you used with a student who performed poorly on assignments or assessments? How do you know these worked?
- How do you meet the needs of students with learning differences?
- How have you integrated technology into your teaching?
- How has the diversity of your students influenced your teaching?
- How do you ensure that your lessons are relevant to your students?
- What system do you have in place to help students monitor their progress and set individual learning goals?
- Several students were unable to complete their homework last night. They report that they did not understand how to do the assigned work. What would you do?
- What techniques do you use to involve parents in their child's learning?

### Leadership, Teamwork, Professional Growth, and Ethical Behavior

- Describe when you have been a part of a work team. What role did you play on the team?
- Give an example of a professional learning community that you have participated in and how you used the experience.
- Describe a challenging experience you have had with a colleague or administrator. How did you resolve the situation?
- You have noticed that a teacher on your grade-level team is having a difficult time with the instructional pacing and is behind in delivering the team -planned lessons. She starts asking you for help. What would you do?

Source: Texas Association of School Boards<sup>43</sup>

Evaluations of employee performance are critical to identify broader faculty and staff strengths and needs and to determine individual areas of effective practice and development for individual employees. In fact, principals and other school leaders should use all evaluations of employees (e.g., formal, informal, formative, summative) as a basis for professional development of individuals, as well as all personnel operating within a given role.<sup>44</sup> Specifically, evaluations of staff performance and the results of those evaluations should clearly connect to actionable feedback and a plan to improve performance in identified areas of need.<sup>45</sup> In other words, **evaluations conducted by principals or their proxies should leverage clearly defined performance criteria for individual roles at the school, which are measured via multiple credible methodologies, instruments, and data sources to generate actionable feedback that helps personnel "build on their strengths and bolster their weaknesses."**<sup>46</sup>



Source: Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education<sup>47</sup>

Performance evaluations can be framed more productively (e.g., improving or maintaining job performance) rather than judgmentally, though principals should be clear that areas of poor performance will be addressed directly to avoid continuing issues.<sup>48</sup> This can be accomplished, in part, via transparency about performance criteria and evaluation parameters. Similarly, evaluations can be more productive and less combative if principals "[a]ddress poor performance immediately and respectfully" as it is observed.<sup>49</sup> Notably, routine and purposeful employee evaluations can help principals:<sup>50</sup>

- Let employees know what is expected of them as they receive feedback, praise, and criticism of their work, relative to strengths and shortfalls in their performance or conduct;
- Recognize, celebrate, and reward good employees and identify and coach employees who are having trouble; and
- Stay in tune with the strengths, needs, and concerns of groups of employees within specific roles and of the larger school workforce.

**LEARN MORE**

Watch the videos below to learn more about motives and practices for evaluating teachers and other school personnel:

- ["Making Teacher Evaluations Meaningful: Charlotte Danielson"](#) – Advance Illinois
- ["Hardin Coleman: Teacher Evaluation"](#) – Boston University
- ["Employee Performance Review - An Easy How-To-Guide"](#) – Candid Culture
- ["SBCUSD Classified Employee Evaluation Process"](#) – San Bernardino City Unified School District

Importantly, personnel evaluations must be leveraged to both guide professional development of staff and to maintain the overall quality of the staff.<sup>51</sup> Principals should, therefore, use staff evaluations to guide the career advancement and professional growth of employees while also basing personnel decisions (e.g., promotion, assignment for more/fewer responsibilities, termination) on the accumulated results of formative and summative evaluations.<sup>52</sup> In particular, principals and their school leadership team can use individual-level and aggregated data from performance evaluations to design and deliver "formal professional development and job-embedded learning opportunities" for faculty

and staff that will allow them to better perform in their assigned roles.<sup>53</sup> Some of these opportunities may be more remedial in nature—offered within the context of a formal performance improvement plan—to help individual employees displaying deficiencies in their performance an

opportunity to bring their work in line with the outlined expectations attached to their position before actions such as transfer, demotion, or termination are enacted.<sup>54</sup>

On the next page, the **"Pre- and Post-Teacher Observation Evaluation Questions"** provide principals with a sample of questions that they can use to support and reflect with teachers before and after formative and summative observations, a key aspect in many teacher evaluation frameworks. While these questions serve as a model and are applicable to teachers specifically, principals may also use them to reflect on how they may support other school-based personnel serving in both instructional and non-instructional capacities.

Then, beginning on p. 15, the **"Personnel Improvement Plan Template for Teachers"** provides a sample template that principals can use to create formal improvement plans for teachers who are struggling in one or more areas of their professional work. While this template is geared toward teacher improvement plans, principals may adapt it or use it as a model for improvement plans for other school-based personnel serving in instructional and non-instructional roles.



## Pre- and Post-Teacher Observation Evaluation Questions

**Directions:** Use the questions below to conduct pre- and post-evaluation conferences with teachers before and after observing a lesson they have conducted. These questions will help the observer (e.g., the principal or assistant principal) review key instruction considerations, including instructional design, learning objectives, and use of assessment data. Data gathered through conversations using these questions can help principals and other school leaders individualize professional development to teachers' individual needs.

Please note that **any observation protocols mandated by your district or school should take precedence over those provided in this tool** to ensure adherence to institutional policies.

### PRE-EVALUATION QUESTIONS

- What steps did you take to prepare for this lesson?
- Briefly describe the students in this class, including those with special needs.
- What are your goals for the lesson? What do you want the student to learn?
- How do you plan to engage students in the content? What will you do? What will the students do?
- What instructional materials or other resources, if any, will you use?
- How do you plan to assess student achievement of the goals?
- How will you close or wrap up the lesson?
- How do you communicate with the families of your students? How often do you do this? What types of things do you discuss with them?
- Discuss your plan for handling student behavior issues should they arise during the lesson.
- Are there any areas you would like for me to look for (e.g., questioning strategies) during the evaluation?
- Explain two areas that you believe are strengths going into this evaluation.
- Explain two areas that you believe are weaknesses going into this evaluation.

### POST-EVALUATION QUESTIONS

- Did everything go according to plan during the lesson? If so, why do you think it went so smoothly? If not, how did you adapt your lesson to handle the surprises?
- Did you get the learning outcomes you expected from the lesson? Explain.
- If you could change anything, what would you have done differently?
- Could you have done anything differently to boost student engagement throughout the lesson?
- Give me three key takeaways from conducting this lesson. Do these takeaways impact your approach moving forward?
- What opportunities did you give your students to extend their learning beyond the classroom with this particular lesson?
- Based on your daily interactions with your students, how do you think they perceive you?
- How did you assess student learning as you went through the lesson? What did this tell you?
- Is there anything that you need to spend some additional time on based on the feedback received from in-lesson assessments?
- What goals are you working towards for yourself and your students as you progress throughout the school year?
- How will you utilize what you taught today to make connections with previously taught content as well as future content?
- After I finished my evaluation and left the classroom, what immediately happened next?
- Do you feel that this process has made you a better teacher? Explain.

Source: ThoughtCo.<sup>55</sup>



## Personnel Improvement Plan Template for Teachers

Directions: Principals can use the template presented below to create an improvement plan for teachers. Principals will need to outline the reasons precipitating the need for a formal improvement plan along with evidence of identified performance deficiencies. Then, principals will outline corrective actions to support the teacher along with a timeline for implementation.

Please note that **any formal improvement plan documentation or guidance provided by your district should be used in lieu of this form** in order to adhere to contractual and legal parameters.

**Teacher:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Principal:** \_\_\_\_\_

**School:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Reason(s) for Action:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Purpose of Plan:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Area(s) of Deficiency:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Evidence of Deficiencies

1.
2.
3.
4.

**Corrective Actions**

1.
2.
3.
4.

**Expected Outcomes**

1.
2.
3.
4.

**Timeline for Implementation:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Consequences of Failure to Improve:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I have read the information outlined in this letter of admonishment and plan for improvement. Although I may not agree with the assessment of my supervisor, I understand that if I do not make improvements in the areas of deficiency and follow the suggestions listed within this letter that I may be recommended for suspension, demotion, non-reemployment, or dismissal.

**Teacher Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Principal Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

*Source: ThoughtCo.<sup>56</sup>*

# ALLOCATE FISCAL RESOURCES TO MEET NEEDS

## BUDGET APPROPRIATELY AND ETHICALLY

In Utah, district superintendents—or their designated proxy—are ultimately responsible for developing and managing the budgets for their districts and the schools encompassed by their districts.<sup>57</sup> Though the state provides this guidance, principals should also recognize that the particular budgeting processes and the execution of those processes at their district may vary from those at other Utah districts.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, principals must consider that the funds available to conduct educational operations at their campus result from complex applications and dispersals of federal, state, and local dollars originating from both public and private sources.<sup>59</sup>

**LEARN MORE**

Watch the video below to learn more about budgeting at the school level:

- ["Webinar: Training Principals For Budgeting At The School Level"](#) – Edunomics Lab, Georgetown University

This dynamic places constraints on principals in the allocation of funds that their individual school receives. However, guidance from the Utah State Board of Education states that "persons in the best positions to provide [fiscal] information for each area [of district operations] should be involved in the budgeting process at their level of responsibility and at the appropriate time," opening the door for greater involvement by principals in determining the funds allocated to their school—dependent on the fiscal and managerial dynamics of their local education agency.<sup>60</sup>

### Ten Steps to Budgeting Success for Districts and Schools

STEP	DESCRIPTION
 <b>Determine Allotments</b>	Before deciding what educationally-related expenditures to make, it is important to know the specified funding allotment that has been appropriated within each budgetary category. Furthermore, certain budgetary allotments can only be used for specified services and expenditures at the school level. As a result, some funds are more restrictive than others. These restricted funds are often associated with Title I, English learners, and special education dollars and programs.
 <b>Identify Fixed Expenditures</b>	Recognize and note those expenditures that do not vary from year to year. Set aside the necessary funds in the amount of the fixed expenditures before building the school budget.
 <b>Involve All Parties</b>	All stakeholders (e.g., staff, families, community members) should be invited to participate in the budgetary decision-making process. By involving as many parties as possible, a school leader can more effectively ensure ultimate "buy-in" as related to the school budget.
 <b>Identify Potential Expenditures</b>	The effective school leaders review past budgetary records to better identify and predict future expenditures. By knowing which expenditures are necessary and imperative, a school administrator can help faculty and staff avoid making impulsive purchases.
 <b>Cut Back</b>	School leaders must examine all potential expenditures and determine where cutbacks can occur. However, cutting back too severely can build discontent among stakeholders. Likewise, school budgets that are continually out of balance may lead to future fiscal sacrifices. Thus, school leaders should cut back as necessary and be aware that budgeting is an exercise in self-discipline for all stakeholders.

STEP	DESCRIPTION
 <b>Avoid Continued Debts</b>	The effective budget manager knows exactly what funds are out of balance and where debt is or has accumulated. Many school leaders fail to list and total their debts during the course of the fiscal year and thus wait until the end of the school year to make necessary budget revisions to amend for such shortsighted calculations. Debt reduction can be readily achieved by avoiding unnecessary purchases.
 <b>Develop a Plan</b>	Any budget should be based on a plan. From a school perspective, an educationally centered action or improvement plan has to be developed to target and prioritize instructional goals and objectives along with school programs and activities. In addition, a second plan of action (i.e., a school budget plan) is designed to identify budgetary priorities, focusing on appropriations and expenditures. Furthermore, such a plan is designed to determine what programs and activities match the budgetary allotments for the school.
 <b>Set Goals</b>	It is important that the effective school leader do all the preliminary work of determining what funds are available before determining how to spend the funds. Nevertheless, setting goals (whether management or instructional) is the one fundamental step that all self-disciplined administrators utilize and the one step that most are—unfortunately—inclined to skip. School leaders must establish priorities for budgeting and consider what expenses must be incurred and which can be deferred or eliminated from the present budget.
 <b>Evaluate the Budget</b>	After a plan has been developed, it needs to be put into action. School leaders should meet regularly with collaborating stakeholders to evaluate the budget process to better determine if the established goals and the budgeted dollars are equitable and compatible. Planned budgeting and goal evaluation go hand-in-hand.
 <b>Abide by the Budget</b>	Abiding by the budget means living by the budget. School leaders must set an example in all areas of instructional leadership for others at their organization to follow. This is most certainly true in relation to the school budget, as it is essential for school leaders to monitor, evaluate, and abide by the budget and the accompanying action plan that they have developed.

Source: Corwin<sup>61</sup>

As such, **principals should actively advocate for the appropriate school-level funding to provide the needed resources (e.g., personnel, facilities, technology) to proactively and effectively promote positive outcomes for students and the larger school community.**<sup>62</sup> Indeed, principals must work with and appeal to district-level administrators and decision-makers to ensure that their school's budget provides "appropriate funding for all educational programs so that the students may benefit and learn from quality learning experiences based on educationally sound and fiscally prudent planning."<sup>63</sup> As part of this work, principals should provide district-level decision-makers with insights into the particular needs of their campus, as they relate to staffing levels, resource allocations, facilities maintenance, and other instructional and operational expenses.<sup>64</sup>

Therefore, principals—or a designated proxy—should track and record data on annual expenditures, both to provide a reference point for future budgeting and to ensure that present spending adheres to outlined budgets and fiscal regulations.<sup>65</sup> At the same time, accurate monitoring of spending can help principals weigh the return on investment (e.g., the magnitude of outcomes) resulting from particular forms of spending, which can inform future decisions about what spending a district should prioritize when allocating funds to a school and what items may be deferred or discontinued.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, principals will want a clear, transparent, and accurate accounting of all funds allocated to and spent by their schools to facilitate comprehensive examination of the total costs of specific programs and initiatives relative to their benefits.<sup>67</sup> Districts and schools will only want to spend in ways that ultimately benefit students, an ideal that is especially important as educators are often "asked to do more with less."<sup>68</sup>

### K-12 Education Spending in Utah

The Utah Foundation—an organization dedicated "to produce objective, thorough[,] and well-reasoned research and analysis that promotes the effective use of public resources, a thriving economy, a well-prepared workforce and a high quality of life for Utahns"—published two reports on K-12 spending in 2018, linked via the icons below. One examines education spending generally, and the other looks at spending for disadvantaged populations. Both reports can provide insight to current and aspiring principals in Utah seeking to learn more about education spending and budgeting in the state.

"Simple Arithmetic? K-12 Education Spending in Utah"



"A Level Playing Field? Funding for Utah Students at Risk of Academic Failure"



Source: Utah Foundation<sup>69</sup>

Beginning on the following page, the "Essential School Budget Procedures Infographic" encapsulates several important steps and practices for principals seeking to effectively manage their school budgets. Principals can attend to the listed considerations to ensure that school-level budgeting is conducted efficiently and effectively.

### TRACK HUMAN CAPITAL AND PHYSICAL RESOURCE NEEDS

Budgeting and successful management of a school's day-to-day operations require an intimate knowledge of the institution's personnel, facilities, and material resource needs.<sup>70</sup> As such, school principals—in concert with district leaders and other school-based personnel—should regularly examine available data, collect and analyze additional data (e.g., community

perceptions), and work with stakeholders to assess the needs of their campus relative to the available assets the school can access (e.g., personnel, equipment).<sup>71</sup> Such practices will help principals clearly articulate what actions and resources require funding year-over-year.<sup>72</sup>

Indeed, principals will need to ensure that their schools have the required personnel, physical materials, and facilities to support student achievement outcomes, as well as smooth daily operations at their campus.<sup>73</sup> They must understand that "adequate and apposite resources are vital to the administration of [their] school," as any deficiencies in terms of human or physical capital can have adverse impacts on educational programming.<sup>74</sup> Likewise, principals should seek to connect specific resources to specific priorities and needs at their school. To accomplish this, **principals should inventory currently available resources, determine existing deficits in available resources, and map available resources and deficits to those school goals and priorities upon which they exert the greatest impacts.**<sup>75</sup> This will allow for the most efficient and purposeful allocation of fiscal, human, and physical resources.<sup>76</sup>

Knowing what resources are available at one's school and what resources are needed, yet absent or undersupplied, is necessary to ensure effective allocation of finite funds to the highest priority items for a given school.<sup>77</sup> Essentially, regular resource needs assessments will help principals ensure that specific school initiatives and action items designed to address strategic goals have the appropriate human and physical capital to achieve desired outcomes.<sup>78</sup> Principals should seek to find clear answers to the "what" and "how much" questions to best determine those resources they require to successfully execute their school's academic programming and maintain the integrity of daily operations.<sup>79</sup>

In tracking human capital and physical resources needs, it is helpful for principals to map personnel, equipment, facilities, programming, and consumable materials to individual school goals and needs.<sup>80</sup> With clear connections established between people, materials, equipment, and facilities and goals and priorities, principals have a basis for identifying resource needs that are currently met by available capacity and volume and those needs that need additional capacity and volume to be fully addressed.<sup>81</sup>



## Essential School Budget Procedures Infographic

Description: Principals, in tandem with collaborating school-level and district personnel involved in the school budgeting process, should enact the following action steps to facilitate an efficient and effective budgeting process for their school or district.

### 1. Identify Budgetary Allocations and Restricted Funds

Principals must know and understand revenue sources and how these sources impact a school's budgetary allotment. Certain funds (e.g., special education, Title I, English learner) have specified restrictions associated with the appropriateness of expenditures and student services. Principals can readily determine restricted funding categories and related student services by communicating with district business department leaders who understand how restricted funds must be expended.

### 2. Project Incoming and Exiting Student Populations

Effective principals regularly monitor incoming and exiting student populations since student enrollment can significantly impact the budget allocation.

### 3. Conduct a Needs Assessment

A needs assessment allows principals to recognize which interventions are most effective in increasing student achievement and which cost the least. An effective needs assessment process allows for the prioritization of school goals and objectives through a four-part quality analysis approach in which a principal and site-based team examine: outside-the-school qualitative data and information (i.e., "best practice" literature); outside-the-school quantitative data and information derived from federal and state entities and statutes (e.g., adequate yearly progress reports); inside-the-school qualitative data and information (e.g., survey results, focus group queries, school-site visits, teacher opinions, brainstorming sessions); and inside-the-school quantitative data and information (e.g., state assessment data, accountability standards, benchmarking records).

### 4. Seek Input from All Stakeholders

Recall the old adage, "All of us are smarter than any one of us." Effective principals incorporate collaborative strategies that, in turn, generate the involvement and input of stakeholders to include faculty, staff, students, and parents, along with local business and community members. When collaborative decision-making is implemented, the overall budgetary process generates measurable improvements that ultimately serve to benefit students, faculty, and the organization.

### 5. Project and Prioritize Expenditures

Consider all line-item accounts within the campus budget, including supplies and materials, capital outlay, travel, and contracted services, when analyzing and prioritizing budgetary expenditures. Principals who actively monitor and regularly evaluate the school budget are able to project and prioritize expenditures that center on specified objectives that correlate with the instructional program, the school improvement or action plan, and the overall vision of the learning community.

## **6. Build the Budget**

Exceptional principals regularly meet with the site-based team to create a school vision, develop an action plan, and build a budget. This level of quality leadership serves to demonstrate the following outcomes essential to budget development:

- Knowledge of the complete budget process;
  - Knowledge of the amount of funding available and how and where the budgetary allotment is derived;
  - Knowledge of collaborative decision-making procedures and proper protocol involving the input of all parties; and
  - Knowledge that the budgetary process reflects—on the part of the principal—honesty, integrity, and transparency.
- 

## **7. Amend and Adjust the School Budget**

Even with purposeful budgetary planning and careful monitoring and evaluation, principals can never expect the school budget to remain on target without certain adjustments being made during the course of a fiscal year. Budget transfers and amendments are necessary when unexpected circumstances and situations inevitably arise. Having a working knowledge of the amendment process will facilitate the need to move funds from one account to another without leaving an impression of budgetary incompetence or mismanagement.

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*Source: Principal* <sup>82</sup>

**Sample Mapping of Human Capital and Physical Resources to Priorities and Goals**

PRIORITY/GOAL #1	PRIORITY/GOAL #2	PRIORITY/GOAL #3	PRIORITY/GOAL #4
Physical Resource A			---
---	Physical Resource B	---	Physical Resource B
Physical Resource C			
---		Human Capital A	
Human Capital B	---	Human Capital B	---
---	Human Capital C		

Source UN Women, United Nations<sup>83</sup>

Resource maps and the individual links they establish between human and physical capital and school priorities are necessary to inform well-supported decisions around resource assignment and budgeting by a school's local education agency.<sup>84</sup> In essence, principals should consider maps and inventories of available resources as "catalyst[s] of change" that can either confirm that their schools have enough of what is needed to fulfill their obligations to students, families, and staff or solidify knowledge of areas in which resources are limited or insufficient to their intended purpose.<sup>85</sup> As such, principals should establish and maintain resource maps that encompass the full scope of available resources and the nature of resource usage as it corresponds with key strategic goals and priorities at their school site.<sup>86</sup>

On the next page, the "**Resources Stock-Take Worksheet**" provides a tool that principals can use to map specific resources (i.e., human, physical, and financial capital) to specific school goals and priorities. After mapping resources, principals can then articulate resource deficits that may exist in each category which inhibit the attainment of the strategic priority or school goal, along with a rationale for why existing resource deficits are problematic.



**Resources Stock-Take Worksheet**

Directions: Using the worksheet below, principals can map out specific resources that they have across three domains—human capital, physical capital, and financial capital—as they relate to a specific school priority or goal. This worksheet can support reflections around a given institution's resource needs and further conversations with district decision-makers about how to maintain current resource access and fill resource deficits

**Strategic Priority/School Goal:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

WHAT MY SCHOOL HAS	WHAT MY SCHOOL NEEDS	CHALLENGES RESULTING FROM DEFICIT
<b>Human Capital</b>		
<b>Physical Capital</b>		
<b>Financial Capital</b>		

Source: Better Evaluation<sup>87</sup>

# PROMOTE A SAFE AND SECURE CLIMATE

## PRIORITIZE THE WELFARE OF STUDENTS, FAMILIES, AND STAFF

As the primary leader and public face of their schools, principals play an integral role in helping students, families, and staff navigate the daily challenges that accompany K-12 educational operations while also helping stakeholders feel safe, secure, and comfortable at their school sites.<sup>88</sup> Principals act as the primary agents driving and maintaining healthy school climates that are safe, orderly, responsive to individual student, family, and staff needs, and focused on academic success for all students regardless of their cultural or socioeconomic background.<sup>89</sup> As such, principals own and drive their school's efforts to be a "great place to work and learn."<sup>90</sup>

Indeed, principals must lead their staff, students, families, and any collaborating community partners in creating a hospitable school climate that implicitly addresses students', families', and staff's wellbeing so they can focus on teaching and learning.<sup>92</sup> This is especially important for principals to attend to, as research finds a correlation between academic achievement and positive perceptions of school climate.<sup>93</sup> Consequently, **principals must actively work**

**to establish and maintain stakeholders' trust in the school organization's ability to keep them safe and secure and address their individual needs, as well as stakeholders' confidence in the principal themselves to effectively steer the school organization in this purpose.**<sup>94</sup>

### Reflection Questions to Assess School Climate

Using the questions listed below, principals and other school leaders can begin to reflect on the inclusiveness of their school's climate and its responsiveness to individual stakeholder needs. Please note that these questions are reflective in nature, and any formal evaluation of school climate should utilize a combination of measures including surveys, interviews, focus groups, and analysis of relevant data (e.g., discipline, mental health).

- Do all students feel a strong sense of belonging?
- Do all families believe that the school values their perspectives and contributions?
- Do parents and educators leave meetings together with a renewed sense of shared purpose on behalf of the student?
- Does the school purposively nurture positive student relationships and shared activities?
- Are all faculty members appreciative of diversity in student readiness, learning, language, race, culture, experiences, and more?
- Do student considerations take priority over adult considerations when concerns arise?
- Is shared ownership for all students clearly expressed as a non-negotiable by the principal and other school leaders?

Source: Multiple<sup>91</sup>

### Core Dimensions of School Climate



#### Physical Dimension

- Appearance of school and classrooms
- School size and ratio of students to teachers
- Order and organization of classrooms and other spaces
- Availability of resources
- Safety and comfort



#### Social Dimension

- Relationship quality among students and staff
- Equitable and fair treatment of students by school staff;
- Competition and comparison between students
- Degree to which students and staff contribute to school decision-making



#### Academic Dimension

- Quality of instruction
- Teacher expectations for student achievement
- Monitoring student progress and promptly reporting results to students and parents

Source: Leadership Compass<sup>95</sup>

**LEARN MORE**

Watch the videos below to learn more about key aspects of school climate:

- ["Making Caring Common: Building Caring School Communities and Reducing Achievement Pressure"](#) – National Association of Independent Schools and Graduate School of Education, Harvard University
- ["Webinar: Using School Climate Data to Meet Student Needs"](#) – National Urban League and Learning Policy Institute
- ["The Power of Relationships in Schools"](#) – Edutopia | George Lucas Educational Foundation

Principals should understand that the quality and character of their school's climate depends upon a number of factors over which they exert direct and substantial influence, including "norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures."<sup>96</sup> Armed with this knowledge, they can then promote productive and healthy behaviors among students and staff, build a stronger sense of school community, and coordinate school-based programs and services in a systematic way to best address stakeholder needs and priorities.<sup>97</sup> In particular, principals will increase their chances of success relative to school climate if they link all their individual actions and schoolwide initiatives to

addressing student needs. Likewise, they should seek to collaborate with staff, families, and community partners to exchange information and share responsibility for student outcomes and the school's overall success relative to strategic goals.<sup>98</sup> Through such steps, principals can establish—in collaboration with the school's stakeholder constituencies—a shared vision of the kind of school they wish to operate.<sup>99</sup>

In particular, this means that principals must steer the climate and "vibe" of their school community by having a positive attitude themselves and committing to supporting the needs of all students. They should also encourage staff, students, and families to do the same, both via formal policies and procedures and via informal actions and conversations. Likewise, **principals should ensure that they respond thoughtfully, appropriately, and expediently when issues related to climate do arise** (e.g., a particular demographic of students expressing concerns, a traumatic incident occurs in the community).<sup>100</sup> The simple act of recognizing and responding to issues allows principals to gain greater insights into the underlying dynamics driving climate-oriented problems and work with involved stakeholders to address those problems before they become more disruptive, difficult to resolve, or even dangerous for students', staff's, and families' physical, mental, and emotional well-being.<sup>101</sup>

As a core component of school climate, principals and other school staff must work to ensure stakeholders' safety and security via "thoughtful and constant attention to the security and safety of the facilities; creation of clear policies and procedures for student and staff conduct; frequent and effective communication with parents, families, and the school community; and attention to classroom management as well as the

**Best Practices for School Safety and Security**

In February 2019, Hanover and ULEAD collaborated to produce and publish "School Safety and Security, a Best Practices Report" which provides an overview of two core components of school safety and security:

- Building safety and security features (i.e., physical features, technology, school policies, and staffing); and
- Risk assessment and threat response strategies.

The report (linked through the icon below) provides in-depth information around both areas, as well as actionable recommendations that principals can leverage to help their students, staff, and families feel safer and more secure while at school.



Source: Hanover Research and Utah Leading through Effective, Actionable, and Dynamic Education (ULEAD)<sup>102</sup>

requisite professional development."<sup>103</sup> At the center of a principal's duties is helping to ensure that their schools are places where everyone—students, staff, families, and community members—feel safe from violence, harassment, and harm so that they can serve their core purposes at school as they relate to teaching and learning.<sup>104</sup>

### Elements of Safety

DOMAIN	DESCRIPTION
 <p><b>Physical Safety</b></p>	<p>Schools need to get students in the door safely. They need to create safe on-campus spaces in classrooms, hallways, lunchrooms, and outdoor areas by providing supervision and communicating clearly to students about staying in bounds while at school. Schools also need to make sure students get home safely, whether on the bus or through carpool pickup. Tight, carefully coordinated and practiced systems need to be in place for this to happen smoothly. Communication to parents about safety procedures and protocols lets families know that the school cares about and values the physical safety of its students.</p>
 <p><b>Emotional Safety</b></p>	<p>Students need to feel they are in an environment that nurtures and preserves relationships among students and with teachers. Every child in a school should have at least one adult with whom they feel a connection or the ability to reach out to in a time of need. This adult can be a teacher, staff member, or coach, but the school has a responsibility and obligation to systematically make sure that each child feels that connection, something beyond relationships with peers. Schools also need to communicate the importance of that relationship to students and families.</p>
 <p><b>Academic Safety</b></p>	<p>Teachers inside their classrooms are advocates for student learning and are charged with providing students with the academic tools for success. Students must feel safe taking risks, asking questions, and tackling challenges. Academic safety can come in the form of working with a student at recess, before school, or after school or clarifying a question over email in a tone and manner that leaves the student feeling inspired and heard. Also, teachers can send the message that the struggle of learning is a key part of growth and progress so that students are prepared to work hard, put forth effort, and persevere through challenges, all of which ensures academic safety.</p>

Source: Edutopia | George Lucas Educational Foundation<sup>105</sup>

Clear policies and goals around school climate—including specific safety and security measures and plans—that are inclusive of stakeholder's needs and created in concert with stakeholders will help students, staff, and families feel more secure and safer than they would in the absence of such policies and goals.<sup>106</sup> In particular, these policies communicate the school community's—and principals'—awareness of potential risks and threats, commitment to minimizing the potential impacts of those risks and threats on students, staff, and families, and readiness to tackle challenges head-on.<sup>107</sup> For reference, the "**Foundations for Safety and Security Policies and Planning Infographic**" beginning on next page can support school principals in guiding discussions around safety and security and designing and implementing applicable policies, plans, and procedures.

Overall, **principals require "valid, useful, and timely measures of school climate to focus improvement efforts."**<sup>108</sup> This means that principals should leverage existing data points that their school or district collects (e.g., disciplinary data, attendance data) to identify trends related to school climate and qualitative instruments such as focus groups, individual stakeholder interviews, and school climate surveys to collect data around students', staffs' and families' perceptions of school climate.<sup>109</sup> Please note that a sample set of questions from Hanover's K-12 School Climate Survey is provided on p. 29.



## Foundations for Safety and Security Policies and Planning Infographic

Description: Principals, in tandem with collaborating school-level and district personnel involved in school safety and security, should carefully consider the items presented within this infographic and prioritize them as essential elements in broader policymaking and planning.

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### 1. A Commitment to Safety

The first step is creating a written commitment to providing a safe and inviting school environment—for each individual student and for the whole school community. The commitment should include a "zero tolerance" policy that clearly addresses bullying, harassment, words and actions that intimidate and threaten, and any kind of action that would make the school unsafe.

Written copies of the policy should be distributed widely and posted throughout the school. Teachers can teach it as a focused lesson and integrate it into the curriculum. Administrators can add copies to student handbooks, school-provided student portfolios, and letters home to families.

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### 2. Education and Communication at School

Information about the plan should flow from principal to students, teacher to teacher, and teacher to students.

*Principal-to-Students:* The principal should visit every classroom and talk about the school safety policy, what it means, and how students are expected to behave. The discussion should include: how it feels to be ridiculed, harassed, or bullied; the kinds of behaviors that constitute harassment; how harassment contributes to making the school feel unsafe or uncomfortable. The principal should help students understand the thinking behind hurtful words that they may use without knowing the meaning.

*Teacher-to-Teacher:* During teacher in-service and professional development days, teachers should discuss harassment and environmental issues, assess the school's climate, and develop ways to ensure a safe emotional experience for all students.

*Teacher-to-Students:* To support the principal's talks, each teacher should discuss harassment issues, both real ones occurring at school and potential ones, with their students. The teachers work with students to teach nonthreatening behavior and verbal exchanges, and help students understand how behavior and verbal exchanges become harassment issues.

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### 3. Education and Communication with Families

Because families are critically important in developing student attitudes and behaviors, schools should engage them in this process. Schools can begin by preparing a list of guiding behaviors (e.g., mutual respect, cultural responsiveness) and send families a letter containing the list, the school's safety policy, and the school's beliefs regarding diversity, understanding, and tolerance.

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#### **4. Immediate and Appropriate Response**

Preventative measures are essential, but they cannot keep all dangerous situations from occurring. Everyone must work hard to create a safe school, but when problems arise, everyone must respond quickly.

Administrators should:

- Promptly review reports of each incident and interview students;
- Call in the police if weapons are involved;
- Take great care in determining the length of expulsion and creating an educational plan that provides, among other elements, continued contact with the school;
- Provide any needed counseling on the topic of harassment;
- Use the incident(s) to discuss inappropriate behavior, tolerance, stereotyping, diversity, and school climate with staff and parents;
- Send a letter home to parents describing the activities the school will be using to promote the school goal of creating a safe and welcoming environment; and
- Ask parents to join school staff in mutually supporting their students by fostering tolerance and positive behavior.

All educators in the school should:

- Use the incident(s) to discuss the issues with every class in the school; and
  - Plan additional ways to integrate understanding and background into the curriculum.
- 

*Source: National Education Association<sup>110</sup>*

**Sample Hanover Research Climate Survey Questions, School/Building (Main) Construct**

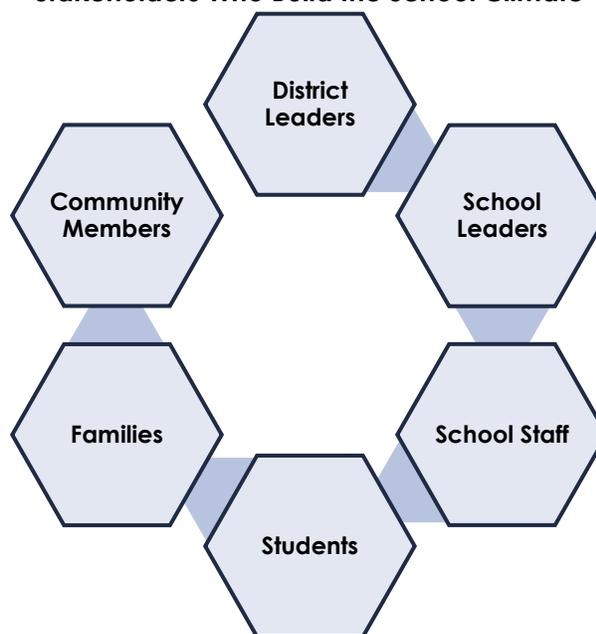
SUB-CONSTRUCT	QUESTION	SCALE	TARGET POPULATION
<b>Positive Emotional Climate</b>	[Students] are proud to attend the school.	Agreement	Students, Parents, School Staff
	[Students] feel welcome at school.		
	[Students] feel like they belong at school.		
	[Students] like school.		
<b>Building &amp; Personal Safety</b>	[The school] provides a safe learning space for students.	Agreement	Students, Parents, School Staff
	[The school] does NOT have issues with violence or theft.		
	[I/my child feels] safe at school.		
	[I/my child feels] safe going to and from school.		
	[I/my child feels] safe at school-sponsored events and activities held after school.		
<b>Physical Environment</b>	[The school] has clean bathrooms.	Agreement	Students, Parents, School Staff
	[The school] is well-maintained.		
	[The school] has clean common spaces (e.g., hallways, cafeteria).		
	[The school] has classroom environments that support student learning (e.g., size, temperature, lighting).		

Source: Hanover Research<sup>111</sup>

**FOSTER RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CONSTITUENT GROUPS**

Strong relationships between and among school leaders, school staff, students, families, and community members represent one, if not the most, important pillar of a positive school climate. While specific constituencies (i.e., school leaders, school staff) may exert greater influence and capacity in determining the day-to-day climate dynamics of a given school, the manner and motivations by which stakeholders engage with and support one another act as catalysts to the overall levels of engagement, inclusivity, and responsiveness embedded within the school culture and climate.<sup>112</sup> As such, **it is important that principals cultivate relationships within the school and build partnerships with families and community partners in order to advance the positive aspects of school climate and mitigate risk on and off campus.**<sup>113</sup>

**Stakeholders Who Build the School Climate**



Source: Community Matters<sup>114</sup>

Because strong relationships form the foundation of a positive school climate and heavily influence the quality of academic and related programming, principals should foster communication between stakeholder groups while simultaneously empowering individual stakeholders with agency and motivation to participate in their school's daily operations and decision-making.<sup>115</sup> Thus, on an individual level, principals themselves should practice and project an inclusive and responsive perspective that "embrace[s] positive attitudes and beliefs, cultural

**Characteristics of Strong School-Community Partnerships**

CHARACTERISTIC	DESCRIPTION
 <b>Focus on Students</b>	Districts, schools, and their partners approach their work with a commitment to putting students' needs first.
 <b>Alignment of Vision and Goals</b>	Districts, schools, and their partners agree upon common goals and establish shared expectations for the functioning of their partnership. Typically, these partnerships will aim to support a district's or school's work on previously outlined strategic priorities.
 <b>Leveraging of Strengths</b>	Districts, schools, and their partners identify their respective strengths and weaknesses, based on past experience and existing evidence, to provide a continuum of services and supports to students, staff, and families while minimizing duplicative efforts.
 <b>Leadership and Oversight</b>	Districts, schools, and their partners compose common memos of understanding and service agreements. They also outline a clear framework for overseeing their partnership, whether by designating individual personnel or forming a committee to guide the partnership.
 <b>Open Communication</b>	Districts, schools, and their partners build and maintain two-way communication channels and emphasize mutual trust, transparency, and a commitment to high-quality programs as key aspects of their collaboration.
 <b>Sustained Duration</b>	Districts, schools, and their partners commit to multi-year partnerships to support continuity of programming and guide sustained progress toward partnership goals.

Source: National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, Aspen Institute<sup>120</sup>

potentially resulting in a higher degree of family involvement in school-based activities and familial reinforcement of school-based efforts while students are at home.<sup>119</sup>

To support such results stemming from improved school-to-home communications, principals should also facilitate events and volunteer opportunities for families—and community members—to come on campus and share in students' educational experience.<sup>121</sup> Likewise, principals should work with and support their staff in working with attendees at such events to better students' overall educational experience and reap the highest degree of benefit from the collaboration.<sup>122</sup>

and linguistic competence, an understanding of the needs and experiences of students, and an understanding of the school environment" at-large.<sup>116</sup> As a baseline, principals should seek to build trust with and among their instructional and non-instructional staff and encourage all school-based personnel to commit themselves to the best interests of students.<sup>117</sup> They must also make the formation of strong student-staff relationships a core component of any climate-related policies. This will help strengthen student bonds with school-based adults and forge a sturdy system of supports on which students can depend to promote their academic success and physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing.<sup>118</sup>

Furthermore, principals should promote communication between their staff and students' families to increase touchpoints and improve information exchange between teachers, other support staff, and students' caregivers. Importantly, principals should emphasize that all communications be child-centered and constructive to minimize conflict and further the display of the school's commitment to students. As a result of more frequent and consistent communications from the school, students' parents and guardians may become more actively involved and invested in their children's education,

Notably, principals can employ the "Eight P" philosophy to support stronger bonds between personnel at their schools and students' families. The strategies that compose the "Eight P" philosophy include:<sup>123</sup>

- **Priority:** Both schools and families give top priority to establishing partnerships. This includes partnerships between schools and families and between teachers and parents. All parties view partnerships as essential. Otherwise, they do not work well to serve the educational needs of children.
- **Planning:** Building effective partnerships between schools and families does not just happen. The school must develop a plan. This involves assessing a school's strengths and weaknesses. It also involves assessing families' specific needs and characteristics. Likewise, families should plan how they want to be involved in their children's education.
- **Proactive and Persistent Communication:** Regular communication must occur between families and schools in order to surface issues. Teachers should use a variety of methods to communicate with parents. This lets parents know they are an important part of their children's educational experience. Likewise, all communication should be culturally appropriate.
- **Positive Communication Style:** Both families and teachers respond best when the communication between them is positive and focuses on strengths. Negativity is often perceived by the other as an attack, and conveying positive messages helps make communication easier when problems do occur. Sharing good news or offering sincere compliments contributes to positive communication.
- **Personalization:** Families are much more likely to be responsive when communication is personal. Communication should focus on their children's successes, challenges, and needs. Schools should also encourage families to tell teachers about their children's unique characteristics and needs.
- **Practical Ideas:** Both families and teachers value practical suggestions for how children can learn best. Teachers need to help families understand the important role they play in their children's school success. They also should give families ideas and resources for helping their children succeed in school. Likewise, families should give teachers practical suggestions for helping their children learn.
- **Program Monitoring:** It takes a sustained effort over time to establish effective partnerships involving families. First, principals should set benchmarks or standards for the school in fostering family partnerships. Then, they should develop an action plan to track how well the school is meeting those benchmarks.
- **Process:** Building relationships between schools and families is an ongoing process that requires continual attention and shared responsibility to be most effective. Besides monitoring their overall school climate, principals should evaluate attitudes and atmosphere of staff, students, and families.

Relatedly, principals should understand that their school exists as part of a larger community, and consequently, schools benefit from support and partnerships with community-based businesses, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations.<sup>124</sup> Then, principals should examine any existing needs at their school to determine if and where resources or programmatic support from community partners can be of benefits to students, families, and staff.<sup>125</sup> Following such examination, principals will be in a better position to negotiate with potential community partners regarding the particulars of a future collaborative relationship.<sup>126</sup>

### **Training Materials to Support Formation of Strong School-Family-Community Partnerships**

As part of its Priority Schools Campaign, the National Education Association has developed a comprehensive, 250+ page training manual (linked via the icon below) featuring six individual modules that focus on different strategies for building partnerships between schools, families, and community partners. Principals may use the materials contained within this module to support their own and their staff's work in communicating and collaborating with students' families and local community entities.



Source: National Education Association<sup>127</sup>

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