



# HIGH-LEVERAGE PRACTICES FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

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

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In the following report, Hanover Research and ULEAD provide an overview of different high-leverage, research-based practices that school leaders can implement to raise student achievement and improve learning communities. Findings from this report can assist Utah's school leaders in prioritizing strategies that can positively impact student learning and school success.



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## INTRODUCTION

As schools in Utah become more and more complex, school leaders require additional guidance to support school improvement efforts. ULEAD aims to provide an added layer of support by helping principals identify promising practices that have been used to transform schools. Given competing priorities and time constraints, principals need more targeted assistance in identifying how they should be spending their time, energy, and resources.

To support ULEAD in its goal, Hanover prepared this report to provide principals with high-leverage, research-based practices that can positively impact student achievement and school success. This report analyzes secondary sources and peer-reviewed studies that support the enhanced benefit of using research-based approaches within a context of systemic and continuous school improvement.

This report identifies six strategies, in the domains of “Instructional Leadership” and “School Climate and Culture”, that school leaders should adopt to positively impact student learning and school success. Research studies associated with these strategies are included in the “Research-Based Summary”, beginning on page 5.

Domain	Strategies
Instructional Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Make Data-Based Informed Decisions</li> <li>▪ Create Opportunities for Collaboration</li> <li>▪ Invest in Professional Development</li> </ul>
School Climate and Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Create a School Climate Conducive to Learning</li> <li>▪ Engage with the Community</li> <li>▪ Implement Culturally Responsive Practices</li> </ul>





## KEY FINDINGS



**Routinely analyzing student data to make data-based instructional decisions that respond to students’ learning needs should be a key component in school improvement efforts.** To achieve this goal, effective instructional leaders should collaborate with teachers to create learning plans that address students’ needs and simultaneously incorporate adequate student support. Further, school leaders should support the development of high-quality curricula and implementation of evidence-based instruction to ensure students from all backgrounds can succeed.



**Effective school leaders should promote professional learning communities (PLCs) to build a collaborative culture and improve teaching and learning.** Creating collaborative teams of educators that take collective responsibility for student learning is critical to this objective. Research recommends that school leaders not only use student data to identify students’ learning needs but also work collaboratively with the teaching staff to create intervention plans to address students’ needs.

-  **Continual professional development improves teaching and learning by providing staff individualized support, offering intellectual stimulation, and providing appropriate models of practices.** School leaders should create a team of instructional leaders that respond to the professional learning needs of the teaching staff, which can include collaboration, peer observations, or instructional coaching. Finally, school leaders should define clear performance expectations for teachers and assist them in developing a schedule that prioritizes the effective use of teacher time.
-  **School leaders should work to create a safe and positive school climate that is conducive to students' learning.** When school leaders improve the school climate, they help their school increase student outcomes, close achievement gaps, increase attendance, decrease teacher turnover, and lower dropout rates. Effective school leaders should conduct self-assessments to identify the school's capacity for change and collaborate with staff to improve inclusion and safety.
-  **Engaging parents and the community is a necessary component of the school improvement process.** Research recommends integrating the following practices to drive community engagement successfully: school leaders should establish systems to achieve collaborative work, and to encourage class environments where students feel their academic and social needs are addressed. Moreover, school leaders should rely on stakeholder feedback to inform programmatic decisions.
-  **Effective school leaders should also promote culturally responsive practices to create a school climate inclusive of students from all backgrounds.** To do so, they should self-reflect on their students' needs for culturally responsive teaching and use school data to promote a safe and culturally inclusive environment. They should develop teachers' capacities for culturally responsive instruction, and support parents in gaining the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate the education system.

## RESEARCH-BASED SUMMARY

The two tables below (“Instructional Leadership” and “School Climate and Culture”) present the studies analyzed for this report. They note the strategy the studies target (“Strategy”), the source’s title and authors (“Source”), the methodology used (“Methodology”), and the effect sizes, if applicable (“Effect Sizes”). The majority of the publicly-available resources that Hanover located are literature reviews that do not necessarily present effect sizes.

### Instructional Leadership

STRATEGY	SOURCE	METHODOLOGY	EFFECT SIZES
Make Data-Based Instructional Decision	Robison, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008). “The Impact of Leadership on Student Outcomes: An Analysis of the Differential Effects of Leadership Types.”	Meta-Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Establishing goals and expectations (ES=0.42)</li> <li>▪ Strategic Resourcing (ES=0.31)</li> <li>▪ Planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum (ES=0.42)</li> <li>▪ Promoting and participating in teacher learning and development (ES=0.84)</li> <li>▪ Ensuring an orderly and supportive environment (ES=0.27)</li> </ul>
	Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004). “How Leadership Influences Student Learning.”	Literature review	n/a
Create Opportunities for Collaboration	Seashore, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, and Anderson (2010). “Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning.”	Survey analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Impact teacher’s work setting (ES=0.58)</li> <li>▪ Enhancing teacher motivation (ES=0.55)</li> </ul>
	Hattie (2011). <i>Visible Learning for Teachers. Maximizing Impact on Learning</i>	Meta-Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Encouraging cooperative learning (ES=0.55)</li> <li>▪ Providing feedback (ES=0.73)</li> <li>▪ Enhancing teacher collective efficacy (ES=1.57)</li> </ul>
	DuFour, Mattos (2013). “How do Principals Really Improve Schools?”	Literature review	n/a
	Little (2006). “Professional Community and Professional Development in the Learning-Centered School.”	Literature review	n/a

STRATEGY	SOURCE	METHODOLOGY	EFFECT SIZES
Invest in Professional Development	Hill, Beisiegel, Jacob (2013). "Professional Development Research: Consensus, Crossroads, and Challenges."	Literature Review	n/a
	Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, Shapley (2007). "Reviewing the Evidence on How Teacher Professional Development Affects Student Achievement."	Literature Review	n/a
	Brolund (2016). "Student Success Through Instructional Leadership."	Literature review	n/a
	Guskey (2014). "Planning Professional Learning."	Literature review	n/a

**School Climate and Culture**

STRATEGY	SOURCE	METHODOLOGY	EFFECT SIZES
Create a Climate Conducive to Learning	Hattie (2015). "High Impact Leadership."	Please note that Hanover could only locate a partial excerpt from the study, limiting our ability to examine additional results.	<p>Leaders who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>believe their major role is to evaluate their impact (ES=0.91)</li> <li>get everyone in the school working together to know and evaluate their impact (ES=0.91)</li> <li>learn in an environment that privileges high-impact teaching and learning (ES=0.84)</li> <li>are explicit with teachers and students about what success looks like (ES=0.77)</li> <li>set appropriate levels of challenge and never retreat to 'just do your best' (ES=0.57)</li> </ul>
	National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments	Best Practices	n/a
	Neufeld (2014). "School Leadership and Student Achievement: Supporting a Framework of Leadership Actions Known to Improve Student Outcomes."	Literature review	n/a
	Akar (2018). "A Meta-Analysis Study on Organizational Outcomes of Ethical Leadership."	Meta-analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Impact of ethical leadership on organizational trust (ES=0.82)</li> <li>Impact of ethical leadership on job satisfaction (ES=0.63)</li> <li>Impact of ethical leadership on organizational justice (ES: 0.76)</li> <li>Impact of ethical leadership on organizational commitment (ES: 0.44)</li> </ul>
Engage with the Community	Redding, McCauley, Jackson, and Dunn (2018). "For Domains for Rapid School Improvement. Indicators of Effective Practice."	Best Practices	n/a

STRATEGY	SOURCE	METHODOLOGY	EFFECT SIZES
Implement Culturally Responsive Practices	Khalifa, Gooden, Davis (2016). "Culturally Responsive School Leadership: A Synthesis of the Literature."	Literature Review	n/a
	NAESP. "The Principal's Guide to Building Culturally Responsive Schools."	Best Practices	n/a
	Khalifa, Gooden, Davis. "Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework."	Literature Review	n/a



## SECTION I: INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

In this section, Hanover Research reviews high-leverage instructional leadership strategies for school improvement. Research defines instructional leadership as “a model of school leadership in which a principal works alongside teachers to provide support and guidance in establishing best practices in teaching.”<sup>1</sup> Evidence suggests that collective instructional leadership in which a variety of stakeholders influence school decisions positively impacts student outcomes and increases student learning.<sup>2</sup> School leaders, thus, should emphasize instructional leadership in their daily practice to drive school change. John Hattie identifies seven mind frames, listed in Figure 1.1, that inform high-impact instructional leaders.

**Figure 1.1: Seven Mind Frames for High-Impact Instructional Leaders**

1	Understand the need to focus on learning and the impact of learning
2	Believe their fundamental task is to evaluate the effect of everyone on student learning
3	See themselves as change agents
4	See assessment as feedback on their impact
5	Understand the importance of dialogue and listening
6	Set challenging targets
7	Welcome errors

Source: Missouri Statewide System of Support<sup>3</sup>

A substantial body of research, which draws both from case studies and a large-scale qualitative and quantitative analysis, underscores the importance of talented school leadership in impacting student achievement.<sup>4</sup> For example, a joint study on the nature of successful educational leadership conducted at the University of Minnesota and the University of Toronto recognizes an empirical link between school leadership and improved student achievement.<sup>5</sup> The researchers conducted interviews with 12 principals and 65 teachers in 12 schools.<sup>6</sup> The study of the interviews revealed that teachers and principals perceive the following practices as the most instructionally helpful:<sup>7</sup>

- Focusing on student achievement;
- Keeping track of teachers’ professional development; and
- Creating opportunities for teachers to collaborate.

<sup>1</sup> Brolund, L. “Student Success Through Instructional Leadership.” *BU Journal of Graduate Studies in Education*, 8:2, 2016. p. 42. Retrieved via Eric.ed.gov: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1230490.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Seashore Louis, K. et al. “Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning.” The Wallace Foundation, 2010. <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Investigating-the-Links-to-Improved-Student-Learning.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Day, A. “Leadership Research: Opening and Introduction.” Missouri EduSAIL. <http://www.moedu-sail.org/lessons/opening-and-introduction/>

<sup>4</sup> “The School Principal as Leader: Guiding Schools to Better Teaching and Learning.” The Wallace Foundation, January 2013. p. 5. <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/The-School-Principal-as-Leader-Guiding-Schools-to-Better-Teaching-and-Learning-2nd-Ed.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Seashore Louis et al., Op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 69–70.

<sup>7</sup> Bulleted item adapted from: Ibid., p. 66.

This section reviews three specific strategies identified in the secondary literature as indispensable for effective instructional leaders:

- Make Data-Based Instructional Decisions;
- Create Opportunities for Collaboration; and
- Invest in Professional Development.

## STRATEGY 1: MAKE DATA-BASED INSTRUCTIONAL DECISIONS

Effective school leaders use student data to identify learning needs and effective supports. A study by the Center on School Turnaround recognizes the importance of a) assessing student learning needs to implement instructional interventions; b) providing high-quality curricula to achieve rigorous instruction; and c) identifying and removing learning barriers to increasing students’ academic and personal success.<sup>8</sup> Figure 1.2 shows best practices for data-driven instructional transformation identified by the Center on School Turnaround.

**Figure 1.2: Best Practices to Make Data-Based Instructional Decisions**

PRACTICE	PRACTICE DESCRIPTION
Diagnose and respond to student learning needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Diagnose student learning needs and use identified needs to drive all instructional decisions</li> <li>■ Incorporate effective student supports and instructional interventions</li> <li>■ Use fluid, rapid assessment and adjustment of instructional grouping and delivery to adapt to student learning needs</li> </ul>
Provide rigorous evidence-based instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Set high academic standards and ensure access to rigorous standards-based curricula</li> <li>■ Provide supports to ensure evidence is used in instructional planning and facilitation of student learning</li> <li>■ As gaps are identified in the curriculum or instructional delivery, develop plans to strengthen these key components</li> </ul>
Remove barriers and provide opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Systematically identify barriers to student learning and opportunities to enhance learning opportunities for students who demonstrate early mastery</li> <li>■ Partner with community-based organizations, such as health and wellness organizations, youth organizations, and other service providers, to support students in overcoming obstacles and developing the personal competencies that propel success in school and life</li> </ul>

Source: Center on School Turnaround<sup>9</sup>

To effectively diagnose and respond to student learning needs, the Center on School Turnaround recommends that principals embed collaborative data analysis into teachers’ routine work. Teachers and principals can use student data to support flexible grouping for instruction and develop alternative learning plans that respond to student learning needs as well as incorporate adequate student supports.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Redding, S. et al. “Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement.” The Center on School Turnaround, 2018. pp. 19–25. [https://csti.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/CST\\_Indicators-Effective-Practice-Four-Domains.pdf](https://csti.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/CST_Indicators-Effective-Practice-Four-Domains.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Table content cited verbatim from: Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

Instructional leaders should also use a curriculum analysis process to ensure that instruction aligns with core state learning standards. This process promotes analysis of individual student data in order to identify additional supports such as tutoring or tiered interventions. It is important for school leaders to support the staff in developing the best instructional practices to integrate into their class instruction.<sup>11</sup>

## STRATEGY 2: CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION

In addition to working directly with individual teachers, effective instructional leaders create opportunities for collaboration among teachers and other staff members. Professional learning communities (PLCs) refer to groups of teachers who collaborate to address a shared problem of instructional practice.<sup>12</sup> Teachers in PLCs develop common goals and collect formative student data to assess progress toward these goals, meeting regularly to share progress and ideas for improvement.<sup>13</sup> Research suggests that building a collaborative culture and using PLCs is an effective practice that instructional leaders can implement to improve teaching and student learning.<sup>14</sup> When leaders embrace PLCs in their schools, educators are more likely to:<sup>15</sup>

- Take collective responsibility for student learning, help students achieve at higher levels, and express higher levels of professional satisfaction;
- Share teaching practices, make results transparent, engage in critical conversations about improving instruction, and institutionalize continual improvement;
- Improve student achievement and their professional training;
- Experience beneficial professional development; and
- Remain in the profession.

Principals can support collaborative teams in using student data to improve instructional practices. Research highlights that a sustained collective analysis of learning using a PLC model is more effective than intermittent classroom observations by principals in improving learning outcomes. Further, the PLC process encourages shared leadership by empowering teams of educators to make relevant decisions about the curricula, instructional strategies, and assessments.<sup>16</sup> Research suggests that school leaders focus on five critical practices, listed in Figure 1.3, to foster a collaborative culture where PLCs are implemented. Principals can form teams in which members share responsibility for student learning, provide teams with collaboration time, and ensure members have access to the appropriate resources to achieve their objectives.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>12</sup> Little, J.W. "Professional Community and Professional Development in the Learning-Centered School." National Education Association, 2006. [http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/HE/mf\\_pdreport.pdf](http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/HE/mf_pdreport.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Brown, B.D., R.S. Horn, and G. King. "The Effective Implementation of Professional Learning Communities." *Alabama Journal of Educational Leadership*, 5, August 2018. p. 54. [https://eric.ed.gov/?q=professional+learning+communities&ft=on&ff1=dySince\\_2016&id=EJ1194725](https://eric.ed.gov/?q=professional+learning+communities&ft=on&ff1=dySince_2016&id=EJ1194725)

<sup>14</sup> DuFour, R. and M. Mattos. "How Do Principals Really Improve Schools?" *Educational Leadership*, 70:7, April 2013. <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/apr13/vol70/num07/How-Do-Principals-Really-Improve-Schools%2%A2.aspx>

<sup>15</sup> Bulleted item cited verbatim with minor adaptations from: Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

**Figure 1.3: Five Steps to Success on the PLC Journey**

<b>1</b>	Embrace the premise that the fundamental purpose of the school is to ensure that all students learn at high levels and enlist the staff in examining every existing practice, program, and procedure to ensure it aligns with that purpose
<b>2</b>	Organize staff into meaningful collaborative teams that take collective responsibility for student learning and work interdependently to achieve shared goals for which members hold themselves mutually accountable
<b>3</b>	Call on teams to establish a guaranteed and viable curriculum for each unit that clarifies the essential learning for all students, agree on pacing guidelines, and develop and administer common formative assessments to monitor each student's learning at the end of each unit
<b>4</b>	Use the evidence of student learning to identify: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Students who need additional time and support to become proficient</li> <li>▪ Students who need enrichment and extension of their learning because they're already highly proficient</li> <li>▪ Teachers who help students achieve at high levels so team members can examine those teachers' practices</li> <li>▪ Teachers who struggle to help students become proficient so team members can assist in addressing the problem</li> <li>▪ Skills or concepts that none of the teachers were able to help students achieve at the intended level so the team can expand its learning beyond its members to become more effective in teaching those skills or concepts. The team can seek help from members of other teams in the building with expertise in that area, specialists from the central office, other teachers of the same content in the district, or networks of teachers throughout the United States that they interact with online</li> </ul>
<b>5</b>	Create a coordinated intervention plan that ensures that students who struggle to receive additional time and support for learning in a way that is timely, directive, diagnostic, precise, and most important, systematic

Source: *Educational Leadership*<sup>18</sup>

### STRATEGY 3: INVEST IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Effective principals also encourage continual professional learning for all staff to improve teaching and to learn from one another.<sup>19 20</sup> School leaders can positively help develop their staff by providing individualized support, offering intellectual stimulation, and providing appropriate models of practices.<sup>21</sup> The Center on School Turnaround identifies professional development as one of the essential domains for rapid school improvement and recommends that school leaders implement the best practices listed in Figure 1.4. School leaders should not only recruit, train, and retain talent in their schools; they should also assist their teaching staff by establishing clear performance expectations and by identifying diverse opportunities for professional growth, including mentorship, coaching, and peer observations.

<sup>18</sup> Figure content cited verbatim with minor adaptations from: Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> "The School Principal as Leader: Guiding Schools to Better Teaching and Learning," Op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>20</sup> Brolund, Op. cit., p. 43.

<sup>21</sup> Leithwood, K. et al. "How Leadership Influences Student Learning." The Wallace Foundation, 2004. p. 9.

<https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/How-Leadership-Influences-Student-Learning.pdf>

**Figure 1.4: Best Practices in Professional Development**

PRACTICE	PRACTICE DESCRIPTION
Recruit, develop, retain, and sustain talent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Proactively plan for recruiting and developing talent with turnaround-specific competencies to quickly fill the vacancies which will inevitably occur during the turnaround process</li> <li>▪ Use multiple sources of data to match candidate skills and competencies to school needs, prioritizing the highest need schools</li> <li>▪ Institute succession planning activities by creating in-house district preparation programs designed to foster and generate turnaround competencies to develop future turnaround leaders and teachers</li> </ul>
Target professional learning opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Offer high-quality, individualized, and responsive professional learning opportunities designed to build the capacity needed for rapid school improvement</li> <li>▪ Offer regular opportunities for job-embedded learning including coaching, mentoring, and observation (including peer observations)</li> <li>▪ Leverage and maximize the effectiveness of high-performing teachers, coaches, and leaders by using them as models and peer coaches</li> </ul>
Set clear performance expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Create and share expectations for a level of professional performance by every role in the system</li> <li>▪ Develop and implement performance-management processes that include clear means for monitoring progress, flexibility to rapidly respond to professional learning needs, and opportunities to revise milestones as needed</li> </ul>

Source: Center on School Turnaround<sup>22</sup>

School leaders should develop a team of instructional leaders that uses data to identify and respond to the professional learning needs of the teaching staff. It is important that principals provide learning opportunities for teachers and ensure that learning experiences are purposeful, differentiated, and targeted.<sup>23</sup> Finally, school leaders should define clear expectations for teachers. They should consider how to effectively leverage teacher effort and time and assist them in developing a schedule that prioritizes the effective use of teacher time.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Figure content cited verbatim from: Redding et al., Op. cit., pp. 13–17.

<sup>23</sup> Redding et al., Op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

## SECTION II: SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

In this section, Hanover Research reviews research-based practices school leaders can use to improve school climate and culture. The most effective school principals foster a school climate and culture that is conducive to student learning and improving teaching practices.<sup>25</sup> Research suggests that students who attend schools with a positive climate experience increased self-esteem, decreased absenteeism, and reduced behavioral issues.<sup>26</sup> As a result, school leaders need to create an engaged, collaborative, and inclusive environment that encourages a sense of belonging.<sup>27</sup>

This section examines three strategies that research recognizes as indispensable for establishing a positive school climate. These strategies are:

- Create a Climate Conducive to Learning
- Engage with the Community; and
- Implement Culturally Responsive Practices.

### STRATEGY 1: CREATE A CLIMATE CONDUCTIVE TO LEARNING

Student learning improves when students feel safe, supported, challenged, and accepted at school. Research shows that when schools improve the school climate, students are more likely to develop positive relationships, engage in the learning process, and improve behavior.<sup>28</sup> When school leaders strengthen their school climate, they can help their school:<sup>29</sup>

- Boost student achievement and close achievement gaps;
- Increase attendance;
- Decrease teacher turnover and increase teacher satisfaction;
- Turn around its low performance;
- Lower dropout rates and increase high school graduation rates; and
- Improve school safety, student morale, and discipline.

To build a strong community focused on student learning, school leaders should establish systems to support collaborative work and improve job satisfaction for staff members, while establishing a positive, safe, and encouraging environment for students. It is critical for school leaders to also celebrate team accomplishments and analyze and discuss data on turnaround progress with stakeholders.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, school leaders should solicit stakeholders' input through surveys, focus

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<sup>25</sup> "The School Principal as Leader: Guiding Schools to Better Teaching and Learning," Op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>26</sup> "Ensuring a Positive School Climate and Culture." Ed Trust. p. 1. [https://edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/ESSA\\_FactSheet\\_\\_Positive-School-Climate-and-Culture\\_Hyperlinks-1.pdf](https://edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/ESSA_FactSheet__Positive-School-Climate-and-Culture_Hyperlinks-1.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> "School Climate and Shared Leadership." National School Climate Center, February 2013. p. 1. <https://www.schoolclimate.org/themes/schoolclimate/assets/pdf/practice/sc-brief-leadership.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> "School Climate Improvement Action Guide for School Leaders." National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments. p. 1. Retrieved via Eric.ed.gov: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED580910.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> Bulleted item cited verbatim from: "School Climate Improvement Action Guide for School Leaders.," Op. cit.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

groups, forums, and suggestion boxes. They should analyze the data collected from these sources to inform programmatic decisions to develop a positive school culture.<sup>31</sup> Effective leaders should also engage students and families in pursuing the students’ education goals. To achieve this goal, school leaders need to assist students in setting their learning goals and pursuing them by monitoring their progress on coursework.<sup>32</sup>

The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments outlines key practices, listed in Figure 2.1, that school leaders should follow to improve school climate. As shown in Figure 2.1, effective school leaders actively participate in the planning of school improvement efforts by conducting self-assessments to identify the school’s capacity for change, making data-informed decisions, and collaborating with staff to improve inclusion and safety. Further, principals should engage with internal and external stakeholders around discussions of school climate improvement, and should continuously monitor program implementation and routinely communicate results.<sup>33</sup>

**Figure 2.1: Best Practice for School Climate Improvement**

PARTICIPATE IN PLANNING FOR SCHOOL CLIMATE IMPROVEMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Plan where and how school climate improvements can be incorporated into and enhance your existing work</li> <li>▪ Determine what data the school already has and what new data will be needed. Think about how your school will collect the new data (e.g., surveys, focus groups, and interviews).</li> <li>▪ Note where and how new efforts will need to be added to see measurable school climate improvements. Consider how to fund new efforts or needed resources.</li> <li>▪ Enlist a strong staff member to lead the charge</li> <li>▪ Support development of a school climate team or assign climate improvement work to an existing team</li> <li>▪ Work with the team on incorporating professional development related to school climate into the school’s overarching professional development plan for the year</li> <li>▪ Build buy-in from community agencies, families, and other key partners so that all parties are on the same page about why improving school climate is important in your school</li> <li>▪ Think about your overall hiring practices and how to identify staff members who are committed to building supportive conditions for learning for all students</li> <li>▪ Develop a plan for disseminating information about the climate improvement process to various stakeholders</li> <li>▪ Consider sustainability in the early stages of planning to ensure that the school climate improvements continue</li> </ul>
ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS IN SCHOOL CLIMATE IMPROVEMENTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Make sure that staff, community partners, families, and students know why they are implementing school climate improvements and the overarching goals of the effort</li> <li>▪ Let everyone know that improving school climate is a continuous improvement effort that operates in cycles of data collection and analysis, choosing and implementing interventions based on that data, and continually monitoring and adjusting future efforts as necessary</li> <li>▪ Communicate with instructional staff, noninstructional staff, families, students, and community partners about their role in climate improvements</li> <li>▪ Solicit stakeholder feedback</li> <li>▪ Explain the importance of all data collection activities so that everyone involved understands why they are being asked to participate in surveys and how important good data collection practices are</li> </ul>

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

SUPPORT THE USE OF DATA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provide opportunities and resources for professional development on making school climate improvements, including best practices in data collection</li> <li>▪ Show support for data collection by communicating its importance to school staff</li> <li>▪ Include youth voice in data collection efforts</li> <li>▪ Encourage your school climate team to periodically collect and report school climate data using a reliable, valid, and actionable survey of students, instructional staff, noninstructional staff, and parents/guardians</li> <li>▪ Collect data on a range of school climate topics (e.g., engagement, safety, emotional safety, physical safety, bullying instructional environment, physical health, mental health, and discipline)</li> <li>▪ Know who can help with issues and challenges that may arise during survey administration and have a system in place for resolving the issues</li> <li>▪ Emphasize and monitor acceptable survey response rates and for your respondent subgroups of interest</li> <li>▪ Ensure that the data inform the intervention(s) your school chooses and implements</li> <li>▪ Foster an atmosphere of continuous quality improvement by examining and using data</li> <li>▪ Support the use of school climate survey data, as well as related administrative and qualitative data</li> <li>▪ Utilize focus groups and interviews to provide context for other data</li> </ul>

HELP CHOOSE AND IMPLEMENT SCHOOL CLIMATE INTERVENTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Review evidence-based interventions and choose one that has proven to be effective with your student population and context</li> <li>▪ Consider the kinds of interventions that could be implemented (or enhanced, if already in place) to maximize strengths and address needs with your school climate team</li> <li>▪ Review the logistics, required training, materials, and resources needed for each potential intervention to ensure that your school has the capacity and funds to implement the intervention as it was designed</li> <li>▪ Make sure to get input from everyone (staff, community partners, families, and students), and consider a range of programs and strategies to ensure that the final strategy selected is right for your school</li> <li>▪ Communicate about the chosen intervention with staff in a variety of ways (e.g., faculty meeting, e-mail, or distributing written materials) to help them fully understand its components and their role in implementing it</li> <li>▪ Show constant support for implementation by checking in regularly with the team, ensuring that resources are available, and communicating with the school community about what is happening</li> <li>▪ Gather feedback continuously on implementation quality and what is and is not working about the chosen intervention. Use the feedback to make adjustments</li> </ul>

HELP CHOOSE AND IMPLEMENT SCHOOL CLIMATE INTERVENTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Revisit your goals and the logic model or theory of change that you developed with your team to determine what evaluation questions you have</li> <li>▪ Work with your school climate team to develop an evaluation plan, including identifying what data you have collected, what data you still need to collect, and how you want to report out on that data</li> <li>▪ Make a plan to collect input from a variety of stakeholders on the overall school climate improvements to inform future efforts</li> <li>▪ Consider your audiences and how you want to share information publicly about your successes and challenges</li> <li>▪ Host a planning session in which you, your climate team, and other key stakeholders (e.g., school staff, community partners, families, and students) review the data, reflect on their meaning, and make plans for refining the intervention</li> </ul>

Source: The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Table content cited verbatim with minor adaptations from: "School Climate Improvement Action Guide for School Leaders.," Op. cit., p. 2.



## STRATEGY 2: ENGAGE WITH THE COMMUNITY

Proactively engaging parents and the broader school community is key to maximizing student learning and success. A substantial body of research finds that family engagement correlates with strong academic and social-emotional outcomes for students.<sup>35</sup> The Center on Turnaround Education, for instance, defines community engagement as a key strategy to drive school success. Their research-based approach underscores three practices to drive engagement in school communities: build a strong community focused on learning, solicit and act upon stakeholder input, and engage students and families in pursuing education goals (Figure 2.2).

**Figure 2.2: Best Practices to Create Engagement**

PRACTICE	PRACTICE DESCRIPTION
Build a strong community intensely focused on student learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Celebrate successes — starting with quick wins early in the turnaround process — of students, family, teachers, and leaders; early success promotes an expectation for further success and engenders confidence in the competence of colleagues</li> <li>▪ Provide explicit expectations and support for each person’s role (expected behaviors) both in the turnaround and in student progress</li> <li>▪ Create opportunities for members of the school community to come together to discuss, explore, and reflect on student learning</li> <li>▪ Champion high expectations (of self and others), embed them in everyday practice and language, and reinforce them through shared accountability and follow through on strategies for dramatically improving student outcomes</li> </ul>
Solicit and act upon stakeholder input	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Gather stakeholder perceptions — held by school personnel, students, families, and the broader community — about the degree to which their school climate is or is not positive and use these perceptions to gauge the climate-related work to be done by a school striving for turnaround</li> <li>▪ Acknowledge and respond to constructive feedback, suggestions, and criticism</li> </ul>
Engage students and families in pursuing education goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Intentionally build students’ personal competencies to pursue goals, persist with tasks, appraise their progress, hone learning strategies, and direct their own learning to further enhance their capacity to learn and succeed</li> <li>▪ Provide students with opportunities to connect their learning in school with their interests and aspirations</li> <li>▪ Meaningfully engage parents in student learning, progress, interests, and long-term goals</li> </ul>

Source: Center on Turnaround Education<sup>36</sup>

Several organizations have developed resources to support schools in engaging the community. For example, the research organization WestEd has developed the Academic Parent-Teacher Team (APTT), a research-based model to engage families in their children’s education and school success.<sup>37</sup> APTT integrates the following practices to successfully drive community engagement:<sup>38</sup>

- Integrate family engagement into a school’s curricula, instruction, and assessment;

<sup>35</sup> Leo, A., K.C. Wilcox, and H.A. Lawson. “Culturally Responsive and Asset-Based Strategies for Family Engagement in Odds-Beating Secondary Schools.” *School Community Journal*, 29:2, 2019. p. 255. <https://eric.ed.gov/?q=family+engagement+outcomes&ft=on&id=EJ1236587>

<sup>36</sup> Redding et al., Op. cit., pp. 26–30.

<sup>37</sup> “Family Engagement — Academic Parent-Teacher Teams (APTT).” WestEd. <https://www.wested.org/service/family-engagement-academic-parent-teacher-teams/>

<sup>38</sup> Bulleted item cited verbatim from: Ibid.

- Develop trusting relationships with families that enable two-way communication and collaboration;
- Develop partnerships focused on student grade-level learning goals;
- Equip families with tools, skills, and strategies to support home-based learning;
- Facilitate APTT meetings with families that are engaging, inspirational, and dynamic;
- Build community and create a school culture that honors families as partners; and
- Help families feel empowered to support their children’s grade-level learning goals.

### STRATEGY 3: IMPLEMENT CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PRACTICES

Effective school leaders should promote a school climate inclusive of *all* students. To do so, culturally responsive school leaders should encourage partnerships with community members and offer professional development to ensure their teaching staff is responsive to students from culturally diverse backgrounds.<sup>39</sup> It is important for leaders to promote culturally responsive and respectful approaches in social skill instruction, character education, and discipline.<sup>40</sup>

An extensive body of research emphasizes the importance of school leaders in addressing the needs of linguistically and culturally diverse students.<sup>41</sup> *Educational Leadership* recommends school leaders match classroom instruction to cultural norms for social interaction to enhance students' problem-solving skills. They should be sensitive to the cultural shifts and transition challenges of minority students and families, as well as help parents gain the necessary skills and knowledge to understand the education system and the norms of behavior that govern schools.

The University of Minnesota has developed a research-based framework, presented in Figure 2.3, to assist school leaders to implement culturally responsive practices.<sup>42</sup> They recommend culturally responsive leaders critically self-reflect on their students’ needs for culturally responsive teaching, develop teachers’ capacities for cultural responsive instruction, use school data to promote a culturally responsive school environment, and establish meaningful engagement with the community, students, and their families.

**Figure 2.3: Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework**

PRACTICE	DESCRIPTION
Self-Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Commitment to continuous learning of cultural knowledge and contexts</li> <li>■ Critical consciousness of practice in and out of school</li> <li>■ Use of school data and indicants to measure CRSL</li> <li>■ Use of parent/community voices to measure cultural responsiveness in schools</li> <li>■ Use of equity audits to measure student inclusiveness, policy, and practice</li> </ul>

<sup>39</sup> Khalifa, M.A., M.A. Gooden, and J.E. Davis. “Culturally Responsive School Leadership: A Synthesis of the Literature.” *Review of Educational Research*, 86:4, December 2016. p. 1274. <https://www.cue.pitt.edu/sites/default/files/images/CRSL.pdf>

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Bazron, B., D. Osher, and S. Fleishman. “Creating Culturally Responsive Schools - Educational Leadership.” *Educational Leadership*, 63:1.

<sup>42</sup> Khalifa, M., M.A. Gooden, and J.E. Davis. “Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework.” University of Minnesota. <https://www.cehd.umn.edu/assets/docs/policy-breakfast/UMN-Culturally-Responsive-School-Leadership-Framework.pdf>

PRACTICE	DESCRIPTION
Professional Development for Culturally Responsive Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Development of teacher capacities for cultural responsive pedagogy</li> <li>▪ Creation of culturally responsive PD opportunities and collaborations for teachers</li> <li>▪ Use of school data to see cultural gaps in achievement, discipline, enrichment, and remedial services</li> <li>▪ Creation of a CRSL team that is charged with constantly finding new ways for teachers to be culturally responsive</li> <li>▪ School curriculum reform to become more culturally responsive</li> <li>▪ Use of culturally responsive assessment tools for students</li> </ul>
Promotion of Cultural Responsive School Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Creation of an inclusive and welcoming school environment</li> <li>▪ Modeling of CRSL for staff in building interactions</li> <li>▪ Promotion of a vision for an inclusive instructional and behavioral practices</li> <li>▪ Use of school data to discover and track disparities in academic and disciplinary trends</li> </ul>
Student and Parent Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Development of a meaningful, positive relationships with community</li> <li>▪ Advocate for community-based causes in both the school and neighborhood community</li> <li>▪ Use the community as an informative space from which to develop positive understandings of students and families</li> </ul>

Source: University of Minnesota<sup>43</sup>

Similarly, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) recommends school leaders provide professional development and other resources for teachers to implement culturally responsive pedagogy. NAESP notes four areas on which school leaders should focus efforts: advancing culturally responsive leadership, diversifying student and adult capacity to transform schools, utilizing assets to ensure culturally responsive teaching and learning, and developing awareness and leading the charge to provide diverse opportunities for all students. For each domain area, NAESP developed recommendations for school leaders, listed in Figure 2.4, to facilitate an inclusive school climate that addresses the needs of students from all backgrounds.<sup>44</sup>

**Figure 2.4: NAESP Recommendations for Culturally Responsive Leadership**

<b>Advancing Culturally Responsive Leadership</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Conduct individual and building-wide self-assessments</li> <li>▪ Create a positive climate and culture by intentionally promoting inclusivity and positive relations among students, among teachers and staff, and between students and adults on site</li> <li>▪ Explore innovative ways to engage with the community</li> </ul>
<b>Diversifying Student and Adult Capacity to Transform Schools</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Establish clear methods and practices for collaborating with families and community members regularly</li> <li>▪ Provide strong professional development on cultural competence, equity, and social justice so that teachers and staff can improve classroom instruction and provide equitable school management strategies that will improve achievement for all students</li> <li>▪ Recruit qualified teachers who are enthusiastic about change</li> </ul>

<sup>43</sup> Chart contents taken verbatim from: Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> “The Principals Guide to Building Culturally Responsive Schools.” National Association of Elementary School Principals. p. 6. [https://www.naesp.org/sites/default/files/NAESP\\_Culturally\\_Responsive\\_Schools\\_Guide.pdf](https://www.naesp.org/sites/default/files/NAESP_Culturally_Responsive_Schools_Guide.pdf)

<b>Utilizing Assets to Ensure Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Create a library with research and resources for staff and teachers to help build foundational knowledge and skills for ensuring culturally responsive teaching and learning</li><li>▪ Provide opportunities for faculty and staff to engage in professional conversations in developing skills related to cultural sensitivity</li><li>▪ Equip educators with the skills to increase their instructional differentiation repertoire to meet the educational needs of students</li><li>▪ Develop student interest surveys and lead teachers to learn about their students' interests</li><li>▪ Initiate discussions with local, state, and national evaluation process designers to include indicators or cultural responsiveness as essential components in teacher and staff observations</li></ul>
<b>Developing Awareness and Leading the Charge to Provide Opportunities for all Students</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Create student diversity leadership training and diversity workshops for administrative teams and student leaders</li><li>▪ Provide chats, newsletters, and blogs written and led by the principal and school leadership team that promote the diverse school culture</li><li>▪ Endorse student-teacher collaboration by celebrating the school's diversity through developmentally appropriate activities and celebrations</li><li>▪ Promote regular school-to-parent communications in the native languages of families</li><li>▪ Include representatives from all demographic groups in the school 's diversity planning</li></ul>

Source: National Association of Elementary School Principals<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Table content adapted from: "The Principals Guide to Building Culturally Responsive Schools," Op. cit.