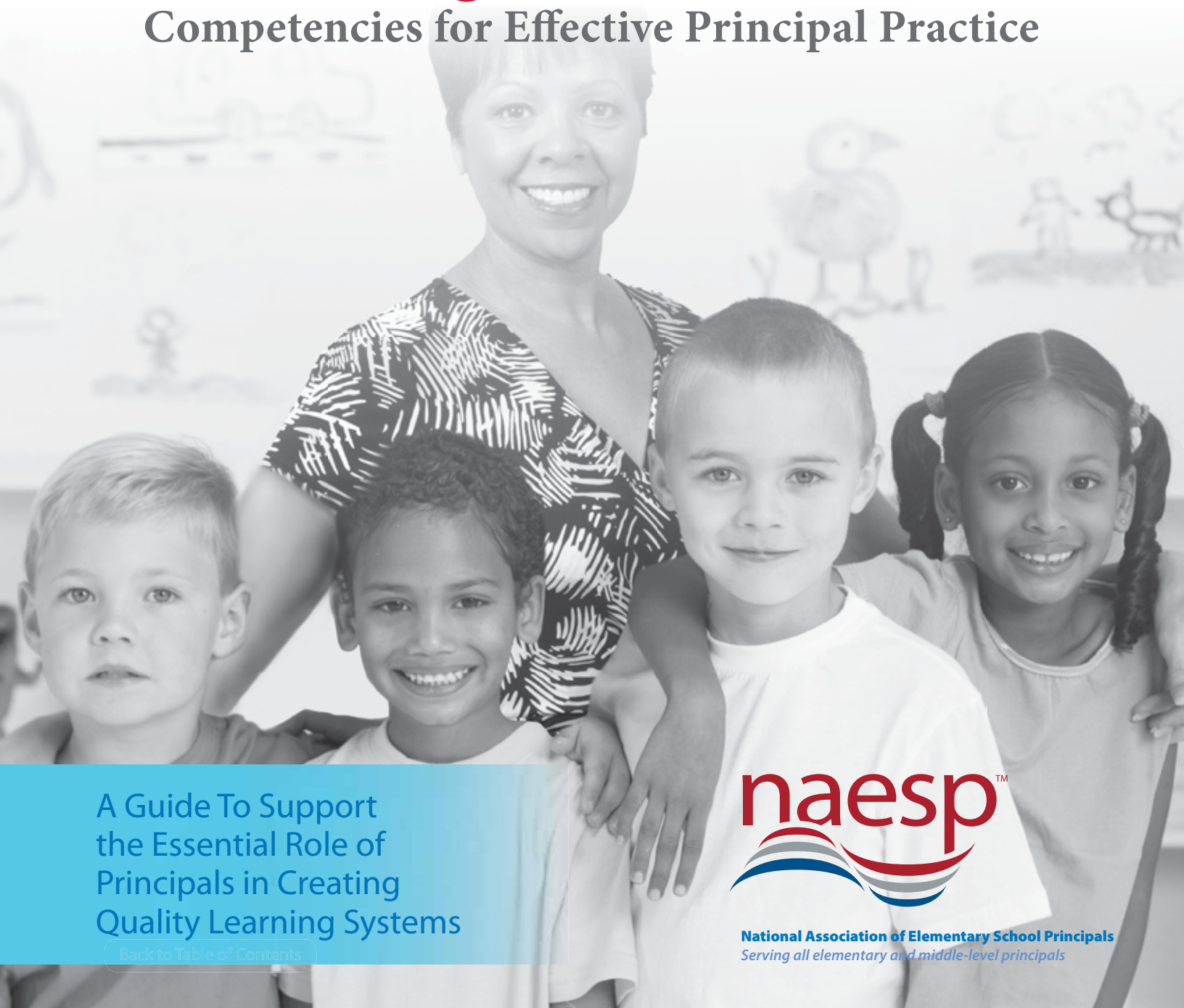# Leading Pre-K-3 Learning Communities

Competencies for Effective Principal Practice

A Guide To Support the Essential Role of Principals in Creating Quality Learning Systems

naesp™

National Association of Elementary School Principals
Serving all elementary and middle-level principals

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Principals are the primary catalysts for creating lasting foundations for learning. Since 1921, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) has been the leading advocate for elementary and middle level principals in the United States and worldwide. NAESP advances the profession by developing policy, advancing advocacy and providing professional development and resources for instructional leadership, including specialized support and mentoring for early career principals. Key focus areas include Pre-K-3 education, school safety, technology and digital learning, and effective educator evaluation. For more information about NAESP, please visit www.naesp.org. NAESP administers the National Principals Resource Center, the American Student Council Association, and the President's Education Awards & American Citizenship Awards Programs.

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inside

Foreword by Gail Connelly

When the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) produced *Leading Early Childhood Learning Communities* in 2005, we focused primarily on learning for children from birth to age five—the time before they begin first grade. We encouraged principals to pay attention to the early years, as the time when learning—and a child's disposition to learning—begins.

Over the years, we have broadened our perspective, and now we are encouraging principals to "think Pre-K-3." This framework of prekindergarten through third grade, or age three to grade three, follows the evolving literature and policy over the past decade. It also represents a span within a child's entire learning continuum that elementary school principals have direct connections to and an opportunity to influence.

The term Pre-K-3 might be new to some. But it encompasses so much of what principals already believe, such as:

- Learning starts early
- Supporting children to be prepared when they start school is essential to helping them get on the right track
- Developing appropriate skills, knowledge and dispositions is fundamental to children's future success
- Getting children on grade level by the time they leave third grade, particularly in reading and math, is essential to ensuring that they graduate from high school ready for college, careers and life

Research shows that achievement gaps appear early and widen over the years that children are in school. Arguably, then, the investments made from age three to grade three pay enormous dividends over the life a child. In addition, such investments pay off much greater when compared to efforts in later grades to remediate children if they don't learn early on what they need to know. Given that potential

leverage to make a difference, in the lives of children why wouldn't we invest in Pre-K-3 early learning?

As education and community leaders, principals are deeply troubled that, as important as early learning is, too few American children get off to a good start. This is particularly so for children who live in poverty and for immigrants and other children learning English as a second language in the early grades.

We also must improve the knowledge and practice of principals. Despite the importance of leadership development in ensuring Pre-K-3 success, the preparation and professional development of principals has not been a key focus of the Pre-K-3 continuum. Indeed, as of the time of this writing, little attention is being paid to leadership development in Pre-K-3. A survey of early childhood leadership development programs suggests that the field does not fully recognize the potential of leadership to serve as a change catalyst, although there is increasing evidence to the contrary.

Research from the Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes states that of more than 50 self-reported early childhood education leadership development programs, only a handful are targeted at individuals who hold, or aspire to, leadership positions in educational organizations serving children and youth (early childhood through postsecondary). And, as limited as the number of programs is, the impact is lessened further by the fact that only a few of the principals working in this country actually participate in these programs.

Ten years after the publication of Leading Early Childhood Learning Communities, most principal knowledge of child development and the Pre-K-3 learning continuum remains largely self-taught.

We have to do more to address this situation. To build the capacity of principals to help more children grow and learn early on, NAESP has developed a set of competencies for what principals need and specific strategies for obtaining them. Ten years ago, we outlined a set of standards for what principals should know and be able to do to lead effective learning communities. As education shifts to looking at competency-based outcomes, we are identifying the knowledge and skills principals need to know and be able to do as "competencies."

Principals working in the Pre-K-3 continuum essentially straddle two entirely separate universes—birth to five, and K-12—each of which has had its own history and infrastructure, whether policy or funding streams, as well as preparation systems. To successfully navigate these two worlds, we must recognize that success in Pre-K-3 is not a one-size-fits-all approach. Each school and each community is different. The goal of this guide is to provide a structure and a set of principles that can guide principals in creating and supporting connections between the worlds of birth to five and K-12 in order to build successful Pre-K-3 continuums in their schools.

Our research, and our synthesis of the research of others, shows that successful principals who ensure that these systems work together can help create learning environments where young children come to school ready to learn, read on grade level by grade three and achieve in later grades. What we said in 2005 is still true: By bringing Pre-K practices in line with those in kindergarten and the early school years, principals provide a coherent, related set of experiences for children during the first critical years of schooling.

In sum, this body of work provides a tool for principals to not only keep pace with the changing role in the profession, but to help them support children to reach their greatest potential. This guide will help principals and others who care about creating quality Pre-K-3 learning systems by identifying important areas of focus, and to think about leadership practices that are developmentally-appropriate, including how to:

- Identify quality indicators of effective Pre-K-3 systems.
- Understand providing a student-centered, personalized and well-rounded approach from ages 3 to 8.
- Use the principal's role as a vital link between prekindergarten and the primary grades and as a bridging force between school and community.
- Build understanding among parents, community members and others who are part of the learning community about the benefits of early learning.
- Build capacity to work effectively with parents and families.

- Increase awareness among policymakers at the federal, state and local levels about the professional supports educators need to deliver quality Pre-K-3 learning systems.
- Develop a keen understanding of the role of appropriate assessments in early learning.
- Help principals advocate for what is needed to provide high-quality early learning experiences—at their school level as well as at district, state and federal levels.

Creating this Pre-K-3 continuum requires a strong commitment by principals and all educators to break down silos and work together to ensure that all of the needs of children are met. We hope that the recommendations, taken together and advanced by educators in the field, will truly ensure that "childhood is a journey, not a race".

NAESP will continue to uphold its work in Pre-K-3 education and alignment to emphasize the importance of high quality learning experiences for every child. Our association will partner with stakeholders in early childhood and K-12 alike as we advocate for policy, practice and support at all levels for principals and other leaders to create an aligned, cohesive and robust Pre-K-3 system that supports all children and their learning needs.

Gail Connelly is executive director of the National Association of Elementary School Principals.

Elements of Effective Pre-K-3 Programs

Key elements of effective Pre-K-3 programs include:

- High-quality, voluntary universal Pre-K for all children three and four years old
- Full-day kindergarten
- Qualified teachers who have both a bachelor's degree and specialized training in how young people learn
- Opportunities for teachers to share data, planning and professional development across grade levels
- Strong leadership committed to providing to children a seamless educational experience
- Quality, developmentally-appropriate curriculum and standards aligned from Pre-K through third grade
- Shared accountability, between preschools, public schools, parents and communities, for ensuring that all children read and do math on grade level by the end of third grade

Source: *Foundation for Child Development. (2008). America's Vanishing Potential: The Case for Pre-K-3rd Education. New York, NY: Foundation for Child Development.*

COMPETENCIES FOR EFFECTIVE PRINCIPAL PRACTICE

Using This Guide as a Tool to Improve Practice

This guide is aimed primarily at principals, but it can be a resource for anyone who cares about supporting quality teaching and learning for Pre-K-3 learners, including childcare providers, directors of preschool programs, coaches, mentors, professional developers, teachers, superintendents, school board members, policymakers and parents. Beyond its use for active practitioners, this guide can also be used to support the pre-service professional learning of teachers and principals serving children from age three to grade three.

Backed by relevant and recent research findings, the guide first outlines the characteristics of what constitutes quality in Pre-K-3 programs, whether these programs are set in schools or connected to schools. We have defined six competencies that we believe are required for principals to lead effective, high-quality learning environments—both for children age three to grade three and for the adults who serve them—and the strategies it will take to meet these competencies. The competencies are related and interdependent. They must be integrated to create an effective learning system; implementing just a few of them will not lead to success.

The guide is a tool in itself, but is written in a way that serves to connect principals to additional tools, including resources and ideas that can be used in faculty and parent meetings and other meetings of the learning community. The guide deliberately provides examples of the concepts in practice—including case studies where these ideas are in play and successful. Some key elements of the guide are included as a way to intentionally support principals' knowledge and skills.

This includes:

Stories of effective practice. We believe that understanding lessons learned from principals who are leading efforts to align Pre-K-3 and improve results for children across the country can help other principals build similar systems in their schools. Two stories of effective practice are presented for each competency throughout this guide to provide a variety of strategies for readers, regardless of the conditions in which they work. These stories are intended to demonstrate effective attitudes and daily practices of people across the country who are making a difference in Pre-K-3 learning and who themselves are continually learning and growing.

Questions for reflection. To encourage practitioners to engage and reflect on their own practices, a series of reflection questions are outlined for each competency, providing support for principals to reflect on their own efforts and to encourage discussion and inquiry among or with others in their immediate learning community.

Self-assessment. Each competency contains a self-assessment tool, which principals can use multiple times a year as a periodic "check-in" on their instructional leadership practice. These self-assessments are aligned to the reflection questions for each competency and are intended not as an evaluation tool, but as a tool for principals to reflect and shift practices on an on-going basis, such as at the beginning, middle and end of each school year.

Links to additional tools. Each competency contains references to online organizational links and resources, so principals and others can go deeper to learn more about key areas of practice.

Age Three to Grade Three: Rethinking the Early Learning Continuum

According to a 2014 NAESP survey, more than 60 percent of practicing elementary principals today report that their schools include prekindergarten, where principals are currently leading programs serving three and four year olds or have some connection to leadership of a program in the community. Principals have also shared that little has been developed in "Pre-K-3 leadership" specifically for principals, and that they are looking for additional resources, practical knowledge, and professional learning opportunities to improve instructional leadership practice. Similarly, survey findings show that more than one-half of all elementary principals would like to receive additional professional development and resources to address K-3 developmentally-appropriate practice specifically for principals in elementary schools.

This guide is provided to not only fill the void in literature and practical resources in the Pre-K-3 leadership space, but provide a robust base of knowledge that principals can reliably draw upon to understand developmentally-appropriate practice, and to enhance instructional leadership capacity to align Pre-K programs with K-3 learning.

Our research, and synthesis of research of others, shows that successful principals who ensure that these systems work together can help create learning environments where young children come to school ready to learn, read on grade level by grade three and achieve or reach their greatest potential in later grades. What we said in 2005 is still true: the benefits of high-quality preschool and prekindergarten education are well documented. Since the initial publication of seminal research reports on the results of the Perry Preschool Program and the Abecedarian Project in the 1970s, volumes have been written about the cognitive, social, emotional and economic impact of preschool. In recent decades we have learned something equally important: We need to apply the same successful principles of practice from high-quality Pre-K to through the third grade to sustain the benefits.

To reframe the discussion from NAESP's original publication in 2005 and expand on work in 2010, *Leading Pre-K-3 Learning Communities* is provided to help the profession address the critical need to align high-quality, developmentally-appropriate practices from prekindergarten through the third grade.

The guide draws from more than 100 resources, including research reports, meta-analyses, policy briefs, toolkits and websites published over the past decade. In addition, NAESP has worked with principals to increase their awareness of the positive impact of high-quality early learning experiences for young children and to implement strategies from a child-centered perspective.

This guide was created for principals working with children from Pre-K to the third grade, typically age three to age eight. It is intended to help them set goals for effective instructional leadership and to improve their collaborations with local stakeholders—including teachers, parents,

families, community partners and district leaders. Many of the resources included here offer advice and recommendations regarding the design and implementation of Pre-K-3 programs and instructional leadership practice.

Research findings throughout this guide make a powerful case for the importance of early learning, school readiness and early success in literacy and numeracy. The research also points to the need for effective principal leadership, and the need to set and create –developmentally-appropriate learning environments that address the social, emotional and developmental needs of children.

Principals are indeed important, but they cannot do this work alone. Throughout the competencies and strategies outlined in this guide, we acknowledge the essential communications and collaboration that must occur between principals, teachers, early childhood education and care providers, as well as among parents, families, and external partners within the community. Continual engagement and shared responsibility among all of these stakeholders is essential to delivering effective, developmentally-appropriate learning for all children.

With the guidance and leadership of successful principals working with children in Pre-K-3, NAESP has identified six competencies for what principals should know and be able to do as effective leaders of Pre-K-3 learning communities. This perspective from the field, paired with leading research on early childhood development and learning, will help principals include effective learning of children age three to grade three in their vision of school success, and work to make improvements in the learning communities they lead tirelessly each day.

Six Competencies That Characterize Leadership of Pre-K-3 Learning Communities

Effective leaders of Pre-K-3 learning communities:

- Embrace the Pre-K-3 early learning continuum
- Ensure developmentally-appropriate teaching
- Provide personalized, blended learning environments
- Use multiple measures to guide student learning growth
- Build professional capacity across the learning community
- Make school the hub of Pre-K-3 learning for families and community

How would early childhood education change the lives of **20 children** living in poverty?

Educational Benefits

Preschool ●   No Preschool ●

Ready for school at age 5

Basic achievement at age 14

Do not require special education

Graduate high school on time

Graduate high school/earn GED
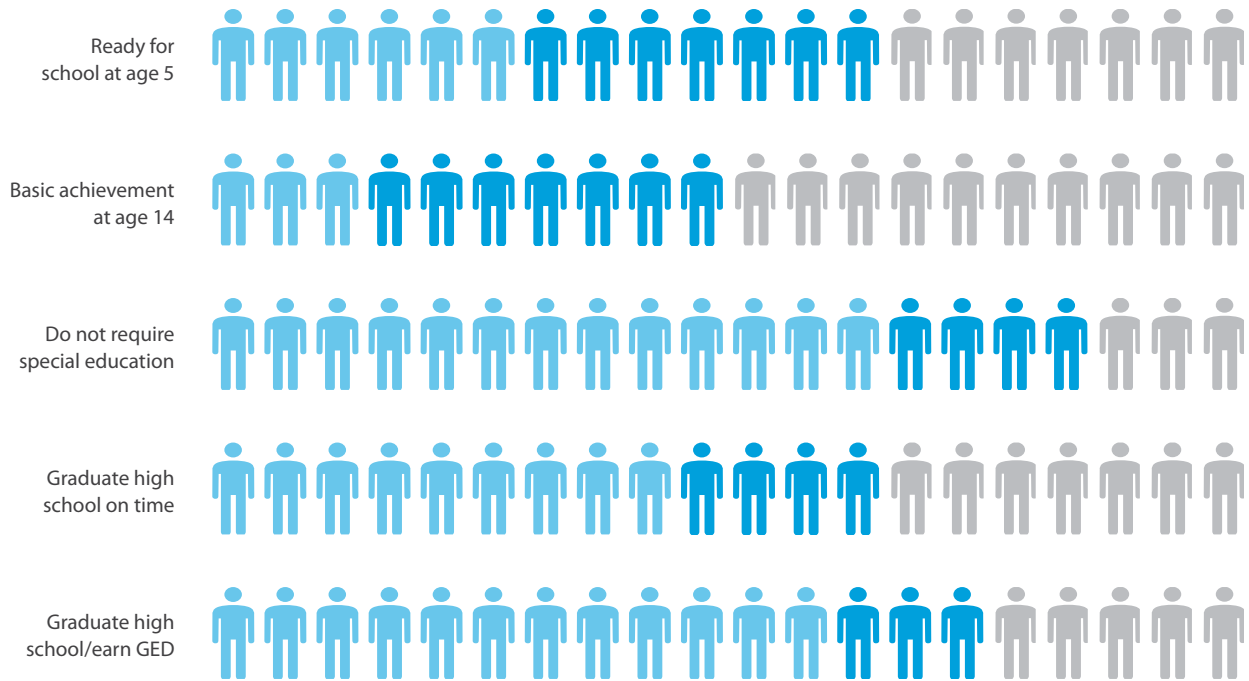
Lifelong Benefits

Five more adults would earn more than $2,000/month by age 27

Car ownership would increase by
37%

Home ownership would increase by
32%

Twice as many men would raise their own children

46 **Fewer total arrests** by age 27 (2.3 per person)

440 **Fewer lifetime months** spent in prison (22 per person)

Median Annual Earnings

$25,000 — +36%
$20,000
$15,000 +20%
$10,000
$5,000
$0

Age 27   Age 40
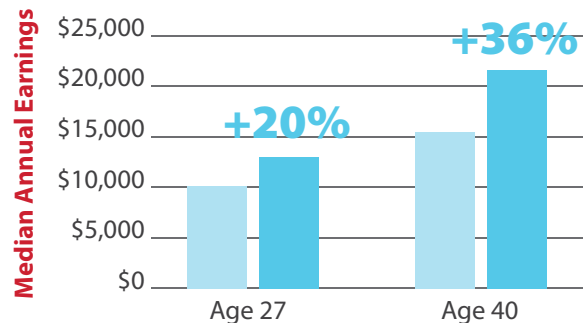
Source: Collaborative Communications Group, Inc.

COMPETENCIES FOR EFFECTIVE PRINCIPAL PRACTICE

What's the return on **$20** invested in early childhood education?

$20

$9.63
education savings

$18.57
additional taxes
on earnings

$3.65
welfare savings

$226.13
crime and
punishment savings

$257.98
total return
on investment

Participants in preschool programs earn **14%** more than they would have otherwise; additional lifetime earnings of **$156,490**.

Source: Lifetime effects: The High/Scope Perry Preschool study through age 40. Ypsilanti: High/Scope Press, 2005.

> **Investing in human capital formation early in the life cycle is likely to be more effecient than mitigating disadvantages at older ages. Indeed, research on attempts to provide remedial human capital investments for adults in the form of job training, for example, have often concluded that these have been largely unsuccessful.**

Paul Heckman

COMPETENCIES FOR EFFECTIVE PRINCIPAL PRACTICE

Six Competencies and Strategies to Guide Principals in Leading Pre-K-3 Learning Communities

1 Embrace the Pre-K-3 Early Learning Continuum

- Engage your learning community in understanding the importance of the early learning continuum and the transitions along it.
- Set expectations that the continuum of learning from age three to grade three is fundamental to your school's mission.
- Expand the concept of "learning community" to include collaboration among external, as well as internal, stakeholders.
- Articulate the long-term value of early learning and the benefit of inclusive early learning to parents and all learning community stakeholders.
- Align funding, resources and governance to support the Pre-K-3 framework.

2 Ensure Developmentally-Appropriate Teaching

- Align ambitious standards, curriculum, instruction and assessments to create a consistent framework for learning from age three to grade three.
- Provide a comprehensive curriculum inclusive of, but not limited to, language arts and math.
- Work with teachers and teacher leaders to develop an interactive and engaging early learning curriculum.
- Create professional communities of practice to empower teachers to learn from each other and to improve instruction.

3 Provide Personalized, Blended Learning Environments

- Promote environments that blend face-to-face and technology-enhanced learning and that are rigorous, are developmentally-appropriate and that support individual learning.
- Facilitate the use of technology tools for learning and provide instructional leadership in schools to use technology effectively.
- Support instructional use of appropriate technology and interactive media to support learning and development—through work and play—in school, at home and in community settings.

- Integrate technology directly into curriculum, student learning and outcomes.
- Help teachers develop their understanding and ability to use technology effectively to individualize and differentiate instruction for each student.

4 Use Multiple Measures To Guide Growth in Student Learning

- Build understanding throughout the learning community of the various purposes and appropriate uses of different student assessments to improve teaching and learning.
- Support teachers in using multiple forms of assessments, along with observation, portfolios and anecdotal records, to guide student learning and growth all along the Pre-K-3 continuum.
- Support open and collaborative discussions about assessment data with parents and community.
- Share information about program effectiveness among schools and other providers.

5 Build Professional Capacity Across the Learning Community

- Build principal professional knowledge about what is age- and developmentally-appropriate across the continuum.
- Support ongoing, job-embedded professional learning opportunities for teachers all along the continuum.
- Support professional learning communities that focus on authentic work.

6 Make Your School a Hub of Pre-K-3 Learning for Families and Communities

- Develop a welcoming environment and sense of belonging, and cultivate a shared responsibility for children's learning from age three to grade three.
- Provide meaningful transitions between preschool and elementary school.
- Develop out-of-school and summer learning opportunities for children age three to grade three.
- Blend and braid funding to maximize resource opportunities.

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Embrace the Pre-K-3 Early Learning Continuum

Effective principals embrace a concept of high-quality early learning from age three to grade three as the foundation for children's developmental growth.

Leaders of effective Pre-K-3 communities know that a strong foundation in early learning sets the stage for future academic and personal achievement. Operating within a patchwork of early learning programs, funding streams, goals, standards and levels of quality, effective principals help their learning communities define a Pre-K-3 continuum that transcends the boundaries of preschool and elementary school to create a seamless learning experience for children from age three to grade three. This learning continuum includes prekindergarten, kindergarten and the primary grades—regardless of whether each of those grades exists within a school's specific physical structure.

According to the University of Washington's Kristie Kauerz, ages three to eight are a time when children acquire three specific types of skills and knowledge:

- Foundational cognitive skills in literacy and numeracy
- Social and emotional competence critical to creating constructive relationships with peers and adults
- Engagement in school and learning

By emphasizing a Pre-K-3 learning continuum, principals help to ensure that children who come from a variety of prekindergarten opportunities are supported along consistent, high-quality pathways of learning that can help to prepare them for success in school, work and life.

Numerous research studies have shown that children's achievement levels from age three to age eight are important predictors of later success. For instance, studies on the language acquisition of children from low-income families, compared to that of children from families with two professional parents, reveals a gap that begins at 18 months of age and that grows over time. This "vocabulary gap" itself makes a compelling argument for universal early learning and prekindergarten, particularly for children living in poverty. High-quality prekindergarten programs also increase math and reading scores, while reducing the likelihood of a child being retained in a grade or needing later interventions such as special education services.

The positive academic impacts of early learning are further enhanced when schools connect high-quality prekindergarten programs with kindergarten, first, second and third grade programs. Longitudinal studies have shown that an integrated learning continuum for children from age three to grade three contributes to sustaining achievement gains made in prekindergarten programs. It is important to sustain learning from high-quality prekindergarten programs for students through the third grade.

Therefore, leaders of Pre-K-3 learning communities commit to investments in learning from age three to grade three, knowing that concerted efforts at providing a high-quality educational experience for all children at this level is more efficient and can generate more benefits than investments made later in the learning cycle. Leaders of early learning communities also know that young children at the highest risk of educational failure—those living at or below the poverty threshold—benefit the most from high-quality early care and education programs.

Strategies/indicators of the competency in practice

- Engage your learning community in understanding the importance of the early learning continuum and the transitions along it, especially Pre-K-K and K-3.
- Set expectations that the continuum of learning from age three to grade three is fundamental to your school's mission.
- Expand the concept of "learning community" to include collaboration among external, as well as internal, stakeholders.
- Articulate the long-term value of early learning and the benefit of inclusive early learning to parents and all learning community stakeholders.
- Align funding, resources and governance to support the Pre-K-3 framework.

COMPETENCIES FOR EFFECTIVE PRINCIPAL PRACTICE

Engage your learning community in understanding the importance of the early learning continuum and the transitions along it.

Pre-K-3 is not just about extending the existing education system to serve younger children. It is about changing the system itself. This approach starts with three-year-olds and provides:

- High-quality and unified learning in well-staffed classrooms
- Teachers and aides who are well-prepared to educate children in the three to eight age range
- School district policies to support principals and teachers to work in a Pre-K-3 continuum
- Strong principal leadership that supports joint professional development for teachers and early childhood education providers along the Pre-K-3 continuum to plan for effective coordination across and between grades
- Engaged families and communities that share accountability with Pre-K-3 schools for children's educational success

It is worth underscoring the essential need to sustain gains achieved in high-quality Pre-K programs by connecting them with complementary and coordinated education in kindergarten and first, second and third grades.

Studies show that the foundations of brain architecture—and subsequent lifelong development potential—from early in a child's life. Early experiences in the home, in other care settings and in communities interact with genes to shape the developing nature and quality of the brain's architecture. The growth and environmental pruning of the neuronal systems support a range of early skills, including cognitive skills

(early language, literacy, math) social skills (theory of mind, empathy, pro-social behavior), persistence, attention and self-regulation, and executive function skills (the voluntary control of one's attention and behavior). Skills developed later—in schooling and employment—build cumulatively on these early skills.

By engaging all members of your learning community in both the rationale and strategies for a connected and seamless learning experience for children, principals can provide a backbone for creating a better-defined learning community and the will to change policies and practices to support that concept.

It is important that all stakeholders understand the Pre-K-3 continuum and that principals can articulate how that vision and work sets the foundation for learning in early years. Effective principals at all levels support high school graduation requirements. And they reach out to school board members, superintendents, other principals and educators at all levels to support the Pre-K-3 strategies that will have an impact on student achievement through high school. In addition to simply sharing research and strategies with those in one's immediate learning community, effective principals will also reach out to share ideas and information about a state and district's budget and other means to build systems that support the benefits of early learning as well.

Set expectations that the continuum of learning from age three to grade three is fundamental to your school's mission.

Whether principals lead learning communities that are structured as Pre-K-2, K-3, Pre-K-5 or another way, and whether they have Pre-K and kindergarten programs on- or off-site, they can set an expectation for their learning

community that learning begins well before kindergarten, and that thinking of early learning as a spectrum from age three to grade three will reap serious benefits to children.

Demonstrating that age three to grade three learning is fundamental to your school's mission means that principals are forthright about bringing every learning advantage to children, and that they are especially sensitive to the needs of children of color, those living in poverty and those who are English-language learners—children for whom investments in early learning bring even greater returns. In some cases, it may require that principals advocate for resources, materials, furniture, schedules, meal times and afterschool supports that accommodate working parents, as well as adjusting transportation options. Some schools have changed the design of their entire physical plant in order to accommodate the needs of the youngest learners by incorporating spaces to play and learn both indoors and outdoors.

Beyond physical and scheduling needs, effective leaders of Pre-K-3 learning communities help increase the level of understanding of child development principles and practices across the entire school—increasing the knowledge base of early learning among teachers, aides, parents and community members who interact with the school. Many principals have not been trained to be leaders of early learning programs and need to expand their own knowledge base of child development stages and the instructional supports required to ensure quality early learning experiences. (This is addressed in more detail in Competency Five.)

Expand the concept of "learning community" to include collaboration among external, as well as internal, stakeholders.

Effective principals create and maintain a school culture and climate that ensures that everyone involved in it feels a sense of belonging and shared responsibility—whether they work in the school or outside of it.

In cases in which every level of the Pre-K-3 continuum is not present in the school building, the principal must work to connect to preschool programs and services that typically serve the young children coming into their school building. Even in cases where preschool learning opportunities are located within the building along with the early grades, principals need to make connections to other Pre-K providers, as well as to social service agencies, parents, churches and other childcare providers to build a strong network of early learning and to know more about the learning needs of the young children who may be coming into a learning setting, and ensure effective on-going

communication and cooperation to meet learning goals.

An effective Pre-K-3 learning community works collaboratively and cooperatively to share information about the child within the school and across partner organizations. In many cases, this includes creating collaborative partnerships to share resources, space and building options.

Articulate the long-term value of early learning to parents and to all learning community stakeholders.

While considerable attention has been paid to Pre-K-3 learning in the past couple of years, historically, the value of early learning has received much less attention than that of K-12 and postsecondary education. But the rationale for early learning is both logical and demonstrable. Indeed, research shows that the longer we wait to intervene in children's lives and learning, the more costly and difficult it becomes to make up for early setbacks—both for a struggling learner and for the community in which they live.

Beyond the belief that providing equitable chances at success for all children rests on high-quality early learning experiences, prekindergarten programs turn out to be a wise investment: Rigorous research studies show that the economic benefits of early childhood education actually outweigh the costs of providing these educational opportunities. Available benefit-cost estimates based on older, intensive interventions, such as the Perry Preschool Program, as well as contemporary, large-scale public preschool programs, such as the Chicago Child-Parent Centers and Tulsa's preschool program, range from $3 to $7 for every $1 spent.

Documentation from a review of 10 economic analysis research studies shows that investments in early learning experiences help to decrease referrals for special education services and to decrease grade retention, while increasing high school completion and improving student achievement. In addition, early learning experiences lead to fewer behavioral problems, better peer relationships and more self-control. Over time, these short-term benefits lead to additional long-term benefits, including increased earnings and tax revenues, decreased reliance on social services and welfare, and decreased criminal activity. Beyond the tangible academic, social and economic benefits, data shows that early learning experiences also reap significant health benefits. Children who participate in quality early learning programs show fewer incidences of child abuse, neglect and maltreatment. They smoke less, they are more productive and healthier workers and they rely less on health services. The impact of the investment in early childhood education are summarized on page 8.

COMPETENCIES FOR EFFECTIVE PRINCIPAL PRACTICE

A single indicator of academic and social success—ensuring that students are reading on grade level by grade three—is, by itself, a powerful reason to support early learning. As documented in the Annie E. Casey Foundation's 2010 report "Early Warning: Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters," children who read proficiently by the end of third grade are far more likely to graduate from high school and have successful careers than those who do not. Children who are not proficient in reading by the end of third grade are likely to feel alienated from school, and consequences stretch well into adulthood. According to national reading assessment data, roughly 70 percent of U.S. fourth-graders (and 82 percent of low-income fourth-graders) do not read on grade level by third grade. The challenges are greater for children of color, those with disabilities and those with dual-language barriers. More than 80 percent of African-American, Hispanic and American Indian children in fourth grade are not proficient readers. Close to 90 percent of children of color do not achieve this standard for reading, and nearly as many do not perform proficiently in math.

Align funding, resources and governance to support the Pre-K-3 framework.

Principals play an essential role in ensuring that children have a seamless learning experience from the time they begin attending early childhood programs until they leave the third grade. They also play an important role in creating effective two-way communications that can help people working in Pre-K systems understand and connect to those working in K-12.

While many of the policies, regulations, funding streams and governance structures needed to implement a Pre-K-3 system sit outside of the control of the building-level principal, there are a number of things that principals can do to align funding, resources and leadership to support the Pre-K-3 framework. Early childhood programs are generally funded at much lower levels than services for children in grades four through 12.

Principals who are effective at creating such alignment are, foremost, good listeners. They seek information from Pre-K providers about their programs, concerns, challenges and opportunities. They invite these providers to the school's professional development sessions and share resources with them. They develop a "we," not "they," attitude and partnership.

Principals can advocate that adequate Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Title I funds are implemented for early learning at the local level. They can work to leverage and integrate private funding with public resources to advance the creation and sustainability of a Pre-K-3 curriculum. (This is addressed in more detail in Competency Six.) Working in local partnerships with community-based organizations, churches and parents—and helping to convene stakeholders to assess school needs—can also help to increase shared accountability and leverage neighborhood and community resources. Where principals do have some significant capacity to support effective Pre-K-3 programs is in the area of alignment, including alignment of preschool programs and services (including early intervention services, home visitation, nursery school, childcare, family childcare, prekindergarten, Early Head Start and Head Start, for example) with policies and programs in the early elementary grades (kindergarten through grade three). Improving children's transitions between programs, from prekindergarten to kindergarten and from kindergarten to first grade, for instance, can help to improve communication and provide meaningful activities for children and parents that help them understand what to expect as they encounter new learning spaces, experiences and teachers.

Establishing or adopting school wide Pre-K-3 standards that are aligned to early learning and K-12 state standards across these programs and the primary grades can help to ensure quality implementation for the programs and the adults who serve them. Principals can also work to ensure alignment of these standards in ways that can ensure that children's learning opportunities are continuous and build logically upon earlier experiences. *Horizontal alignment* refers to the alignment of standards, curricula and assessment without a given age cohort. *Vertical alignment* refers to the flow between programs that serve different ages.

Spotlight on
Effective Practice

Embrace the Pre-K-3 Early Learning Continuum
Nathan Hale Elementary School, Enfield, CT

Although Nathan Hale is a K-2 elementary school, Principal LeAnn Beaulieu works within her community to align curriculum, standards and assessments across Pre-K through grade three classrooms in Enfield, Connecticut.

To support these efforts, Principal Beaulieu and her staff have made it their mission to develop strong relationships with local Pre-K programs and receiving grade three through six elementary schools, often meeting throughout the year to examine best practices and areas for improvement. In particular, they aim to ensure that students are properly supported in their transitions from Pre-K to kindergarten and from grade two to grade three.

Each year, Principal Beaulieu meets with community Pre-K program directors to discuss the students who will be entering Nathan Hale's kindergarten class and to develop strategies around their individual education plans. These plans are based on the district-required school readiness checklists completed by all Pre-K teachers.

Concurrently, the grade three transition receives equal attention. Nathan Hale second-grade teachers meet with each of the district's third-grade teachers to review student skill levels and any other details around the child's life. They also discuss each class as a group to help third-grade teachers understand the dynamics between the students.

While the physical Pre-K and grade three classrooms are not housed under the same roof, Principal Beaulieu and the Nathan Hale staff recognize the importance of viewing education through the Pre-K-3 lens and supporting community and statewide efforts to align early education.

At the state level, the Connecticut 3 to 3 Leadership Team—with support from the Connecticut Association of Schools, the Connecticut State Department of Education, the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents, the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund, EASTCONN and the Connecticut Office of Early Education—has developed the Age 3 to Grade 3 Institute aimed at helping school districts define a continuum of services focused on narrowing achievement gaps among students. Now in its second year, the institute works with districts to build capacity and sustainability for the continuum by creating partnerships across the community and developing common language and goals from Pre-K to grade three.

Connecticut has also taken a state approach to aligning the Birth to Five Early Learning and Developmental Domains with K-3 Standards, providing professional development opportunities for principals and public school leaders around the continuum.

Create a Pre-K- 3 Continuum
Winchester Avenue School, Berkeley, WV

Berkeley County, West Virginia, has embraced a Pre-K-3 learning continuum. Dean Warrenfeltz, principal at Winchester Avenue School in the district, has been on the forefront of the effort since it began in 2003.

West Virginia is one of a limited number of states that funds prekindergarten as part of the state's per pupil funding formula. In 2013, the state achieved universality, meaning there are seats in public Pre-K classrooms for all families that wish to participate in these voluntary programs.

Principal Warrenfeltz participated in the Pre-K program from its inception, serving as one of two inaugural co-chairs of the county's planning commission. In this role he helped design the implementation of the program at the district level.

While his teaching and initial administrative experiences were at the middle and high school levels, Principal Warrenfeltz embraced high-quality early learning opportunities as a "must have" soon after becoming the principal of Winchester Avenue School. The district has also embraced the Pre-K-3 continuum in the way it organizes its schools. All primary schools in the district are Pre-K-2 or Pre-K-3. Students move from primary to intermediate school for fourth and fifth grade, then onto middle school (grades six through eight) and high school (grades nine through 12).

While the initial prevailing feeling was that the Pre-K classrooms were merely sharing space in the school building, attitudes have evolved since Principal Warrenfeltz instituted Data Teams and Professional Learning Communities at the school. "School staff know that third grade is a big year for our children. They look at the standards children must achieve when they leave our school and back-map instruction so that children are well prepared to move on to the intermediate school.

Principal Warrenfeltz embraces his role of leading a Pre-K-3 learning community. He reworked the school's schedule to create common grade-level planning time for teachers. Teachers are now able to plan lessons and units with their grade-level teaching partner and reflect on the success of their instruction on a regular basis. Also, data teams meet regularly to share pre- and post-test results vertically between grade levels.

Age 3-Grade 3
Developmental Milestones

Age	Physical	Social/Emotional	Cognitive
3	• Skips on one foot • Copies a circle • Cuts with scissors • Can wash and dry face • Can undress self (unbutton) • Jumps distances • Throws ball overhand • Can ride a tricycle	• Engages in parallel play • Enjoys being by others • Takes turns • Knows gender and full name • Enjoys brief group activities • Likes to "help" in small ways • Responds to verbal guidance • Seems sure of himself • May be defiant • Often negative • Needs controlled freedom	• Says short sentences • Uses about 1000 words but can understand 4x more • Experiences great growth in communication • Tells simple stories • Uses words as tools of thought • Wants to understand environment • Answers questions • Is imaginative • May recite a few nursery rhymes • Names colors • Can count to 3
4	• Hops and skips • Grooms self • Copies a cross and a rectangle • Good balance and smoother muscle action • Skates • Rides wagon and scooter • Prints simple letters • Establishes handedness • Ties shoes	• Plays • Enjoys company of other children and highly social • Plays tag, duck-duck-goose and simple games • Talkative and self-assured • Capable of some self-criticism • Imitates adult roles • Enjoys responsibility • Likes to follow the rules • Has imaginary friends	• Uses complete sentences • Uses plurals and prepositions • Uses about 1500 words • Asks many questions • Is learning to generalize • Is dramatic and highly imaginative • Can draw simple objects • Repeats 4 digits • Can identify body parts
5	• Copies a square • Dresses self • Catches ball with two hands	• Engages in cooperative play • Has special friends • Enjoys simple table games requiring taking turns and following basic rules • Feels pride about clothing and accomplishments • Eager to carry out some responsibility • Conformity to peers is important	• Uses 2000+ words • Tells long tales • Carries out directions well • Reads own name • Counts to 10 • Asks meaning of words • Knows colors • Is beginning to know the difference between fact and fiction • Is interested in environment, city and stores
6	• Copies a triangle • Prints letters • Draws a recognizable man with head, body and limbs • Skips with alternating feet • Rides a bicycle	• Rules of the game are key • Wants to be a part of a team	• Able to put things in order (seriation) • Shifts from egocentric to social speech • Vocabulary increases exponentially
7–9	• Demonstrates increased coordination and strength • Enjoys using new gross and fine motor skills • Sees a steady increase in height and weight	• Has increased ability to interact with peers • Has more same-sex friends • Is developing and testing beliefs that will guide behavior • Has a strong group identity; increasingly defines self through peers • Has a desire to develop a sense of mastery and accomplishment based on physical strength, self-control and school performance	• Is beginning to apply personal knowledge and experience to a particular situation to determine whether it makes sense or not (logical thinking) • Starts to understand the passage of time, day and date • Can copy adult speech patterns

Questions for Reflection

Effective principals embrace the concept of high-quality Pre-K-3 learning as the foundation for children's developmental growth.

Engage your learning community in understanding the importance of the early learning continuum and the transitions along it. Do we have a specific strategic vision and plan for Pre-K-3? Does the vision I've articulated for my school reflect a commitment to learning for children age three to grade three? Does the school's strategic plan reflect this vision? Does the school devote the necessary resources, materials and physical structure to ensure this vision is executed? Am I effective in ensuring a seamless learning transition for children at each level of the Pre-K-3 continuum?

Set expectations that the continuum of learning from age three to grade three is fundamental to your school's mission. How consistent is our vision for Pre-K-3 learning with that of preschool, childcare, home care and other early learning providers? How can I engage stakeholders outside of the school in helping to build understanding of early learning challenges children are facing before they get to our school? What additional resources does our school community need to identify to meet the learning needs of all students, especially those who may be living in poverty? How well do the adults throughout the school's learning community understand child development? What more do I need to learn about child development teaching strategies?

Expand the concept of "learning community" to include collaboration among external, as well as internal, stakeholders. What more can we do to support the learning of children in Pre-K and kindergarten? What more can we do to support the learning of children in first, second and third grades? How do we know that our key stakeholders feel a sense of belonging in our learning community? How well are we cooperating with external partners to ensure effective learning opportunities? Are we engaging middle and high school educators in understanding the importance of quality Pre-K-3 programs as a means of ensuring that students are ready to succeed in upper grades and graduate from high school?

Articulate the long-term value of early learning and the benefit of inclusive early learning to parents and all learning community stakeholders. What more can we do to gain support from all stakeholders for our Pre-K-3 vision for learning? How can we use the data on the return on investment to garner additional support for our Pre-K-3 learning community? What is our own data on students reading at grade level, and what more do we need to do to ensure that all children read on grade level? Do parents understand what they can do to support their children's learning at home?

Align funding, resources and governance to support the Pre-K-3 framework. Am I effective in communicating the Pre-K-3 framework to all stakeholders? Are our learning standards aligned to curriculum and assessment throughout all levels of the Pre-K-3 continuum? Are all of our students in each grade level progressing on grade level in reading and math? How can we create additional opportunities to convene and engage stakeholders—within and outside the school—in a common vision for students from age three to grade three.

Notes   Type your notes below.

COMPETENCIES FOR EFFECTIVE PRINCIPAL PRACTICE

Self-Assessment Tool

Use the Questions for Further Reflection to help you think about and rate the degree to which each Competency One strategy is evident in your school or in your practice as school leader. Use the checkboxes below to note your ratings.

1 Not evident in my school/practice.

2 Somewhat evident in my school/practice.

3 Consistently evident in my school/practice.

4 Consistently evident, with practices that elaborate upon or exceed expectations.

Self-Assessment: Beginning of the Year	1	2	3	4
Engage your learning community in understanding the importance of the early learning continuum and the transitions along it.				
Set expectations that the continuum of learning from age three to grade three is fundamental to your school's mission.				
Expand the concept of "learning community" to include collaboration among external, as well as internal, stakeholders.				
Articulate the long-term value of early learning and the benefit of inclusive early learning to parents and all learning community stakeholders.				
Align funding, resources and governance to support the Pre-K-3 framework.				

Self-Assessment: Middle of the Year	1	2	3	4
Engage your learning community in understanding the importance of the early learning continuum and the transitions along it.				
Set expectations that the continuum of learning from age three to grade three is fundamental to your school's mission.				
Expand the concept of "learning community" to include collaboration among external, as well as internal, stakeholders.				
Articulate the long-term value of early learning and the benefit of inclusive early learning to parents and all learning community stakeholders.				
Align funding, resources and governance to support the Pre-K-3 framework.				

Self-Assessment: End of the Year	1	2	3	4
Engage your learning community in understanding the importance of the early learning continuum and the transitions along it.				
Set expectations that the continuum of learning from age three to grade three is fundamental to your school's mission.				
Expand the concept of "learning community" to include collaboration among external, as well as internal, stakeholders.				
Articulate the long-term value of early learning and the benefit of inclusive early learning to parents and all learning community stakeholders.				
Align funding, resources and governance to support the Pre-K-3 framework.				

Resources To Help You Learn and Do More

Websites and Web-Based Resources

www.gradelevelreading.net | **Campaign for Grade Level Reading** is a collaborative effort by foundations, nonprofit partners, states and communities across the nation focused on an important predictor of school success and high school graduation—grade-level reading by the end of third grade.

www.earlyed.newamerica.net | **Early Education Initiative at New America Foundation** promotes a high-quality and continuous system of early care and education for all children, from birth to age eight.

www.fcd-us.org | **Foundation for Child Development** is a national private foundation that harnesses the power of research to ensure that all children benefit from early learning experiences.

http://depts.washington.edu/pthru3 | **Framework for Planning, Implementing and Evaluating PreK-3rd Grade Approaches** is a technical assistance tool developed for school districts and communities by Kristie Kauerz, University of Washington, and Julia Coffman, Center for Evaluation Innovation.

Relevant Research

Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2013). *The First Eight Years: Giving Kids a Foundation for Lifetime Success.* Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Barnett, W. Steven. (2013). *Why Expanding Quality Pre-K is Sound Public Policy.* New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

Foundation for Child Development. (2008). *America's Vanishing Potential: The Case for PreK-3rd Education.* New York, NY: Foundation for Child Development.

Guernsey, Lisa and Sara Mead. (2010). *A next social contract for the primary years of education.* Washington, DC: New America Foundation.

Kauerz, Kristie. (2013.) *The Path to Lifelong Success Begins with P-3.* Alexandria, VA: National Association of Elementary School Principals.

Manvell, Jessica, Christine Maxwell and Jana Fleming. "Establishing an Essential Foundation: The Prek-3 Approach to Educational Reform" (unpublished manuscript, 2011). Chicago, IL: Erikson Institute.

COMPETENCIES FOR EFFECTIVE PRINCIPAL PRACTICE

Ensure Developmentally-Appropriate Teaching

Effective principals ensure quality teaching, supported by a system of standards, developmentally-appropriate curriculum and assessments that work together to help foster children's learning and growth.

We have long understood the importance of quality teaching to a child's success. We know from research that when children consistently have good teachers, they can make great cognitive and social-emotional gains. Yet the converse is also true: When children are exposed to poor instruction, their growth and learning suffer. As Stanford University Professor Linda Darling Hammond points out: When children miss out on effective teaching for three or more years in a row, their long-term academic prospects are jeopardized.

Quality instruction has particular significance during the Pre-K-3 years, when children master foundational skills and concepts, develop attitudes toward school and form ideas about themselves as learners. Learning gaps emerge early, particularly among disadvantaged students. If not addressed early, these gaps can widen over the elementary grades.

As brain researcher Rima Shore and others argue that nothing is more important that ensuring that every child experiences quality teaching—grade by grade, year after year—over the entire Pre-K-3 continuum. Ensuring that every teacher understands what constitutes quality teaching from age three to grade three—and knows how to make it happen in the classroom—requires that principals find new ways to define professional teaching practice and organize schools to support quality instruction.

Ensuring effective instruction for every student often means that effective leaders must help to create and implement inclusive practices—those that serve the needs of all students, with and without disabilities—such as flexible curricula, adaptive technologies, early childhood interventions and prevention strategies. Many of these practices build from the idea of universal design for learning. The basic premise of universal design for learning is that a curriculum should include alternatives to make it accessible and applicable to students, teachers and parents with different backgrounds, learning styles, abilities and disabilities in widely varied learning contexts. Universal

Learning gaps emerge early, particularly among disadvantaged students. If not addressed early, these gaps can widen over the elementary grades.

design does not imply that one approach fits all learners; instead, it underscores the need for flexible, customizable content, assignments, participation and activities.

Ensuring that every child experiences quality teaching in the early grades is often daunting in any setting, because when learning matters most, in Pre-K-3, experiences are often disjointed. And teacher knowledge and capacity vary dramatically. These factors are linked to significant differences in children's learning. Supporting effective teaching in Pre-K-3 requires that principals be committed, prepared and collaborative., as well as mindful of social emotional needs of children. While effective leaders offer guidelines to teachers and coaches that can improve instruction, they also allow flexibility for teachers to exercise their own judgment and creativity as they work to help each child grow and learn.

Effective Pre-K-3 principals know that every year of schooling counts. They observe teachers to help ensure the alignment of lessons to curriculum and assessment. They track the annual progress of children in ways that can inform how teachers can best teach and successfully advance children from one year to the next, being mindful of developmental milestones that are reached or note despite grade-level equivalency. They provide professional learning opportunities and communities of practice where teachers can learn from each other to address the unique needs of students.

Strategies/indicators of the competency in practice

- Align ambitious standards, curriculum, instruction and assessments so that they create a consistent framework for learning from age three to grade three.
- Provide a comprehensive curriculum inclusive of, but not limited to, language arts and math.
- Work with teachers and teacher leaders to develop an interactive, relevant and engaging early learning curriculum.
- Create professional communities of practice to empower teachers to learn from each other and to improve instruction.

Align ambitious standards, curriculum, instruction and assessments so that they create a consistent framework for learning from age three to grade three.

Alignment of standards, instruction, assessment and professional development ensures that students enter each successive grade having the foundation and skills needed to succeed there. Such alignment can reduce unnecessary repetition in instruction and allow for coverage of more instructional topics. A successful Pre-K-3 learning community aligns standards with a sequenced, coherent curriculum that describes what should be taught in each grade and in each subject and makes clear what mastery of each subject means and how it looks.

Improving teaching and learning in the early grades requires that principals help to organize what can be a set of disjointed activities and structures into a coherent and comprehensive system for learning. This requires a coordinated effort from school leaders to provide the strategy, structure and support that can enable effective teaching practice at the classroom level.

Effective principals know that getting a good start in schools should not be a matter of chance. First and foremost, school leaders need to insist on high-quality developmentally-appropriate instruction, linked to rigorous and ambitious standards for children from age three to grade three. They must work with district leaders to ensure that Pre-K-3 standards and curriculum are aligned through upper primary grades and into secondary grades. Principals must also make curricular decisions surrounding the integration of important content that provides children with a well-rounded education. Children learn best when they are engaged in dynamic ways to learn foundational subject matter. Standards and curriculum should be identified to provide children with ways to tap into and develop their creativity. The National Core Art Standards were developed to provide to educators a process to integrate arts education for students in Pre-K through high school.

Such a curriculum can address the amount of time that is likely needed to teach each subject, taking into account individual student needs and what is required to learn fundamental math and reading skills. The curriculum should also be focused on integrating content that is foundational in supporting student achievement. The Foundation for Child Development writes that when schools link prekindergarten learning with that in the elementary grades, creating a common organizational structure and coherent sets of academic and social goals, the gains that children make early on in high-quality Pre-K programs are more likely to persist.

Effective instructional leaders continually work with teachers to monitor student progress in learning and use frequent formative and other assessments based on the curriculum. Effective instructional leaders then apply these findings to staff discussions about teaching strategy, seeking to determine which concepts might need to be retaught and to identify which instructional strategies, tools and materials are working.

Effective instructional leaders practice this cycle of instruct-assess-instruct over and over again, helping teachers respond quickly to student needs, including social and emotional needs, keeping parents informed of progress, and making mid-course and mid-year corrections as needed to ensure that children are indeed building the fundamental skills and knowledge they will need later on.

Effective principals pay attention not only to the specific elements within this system but also to how the system functions overall. For instance, when the school district makes changes to Pre-K-3 standards or assessments, effective instructional leaders work closely with teachers, coaches, parents and other members of their learning community

to adjust all individual elements of the system to ensure continued coherence so that students are not lost in the process.

Provide a comprehensive curriculum inclusive of, but not limited to, language arts and math.

Effective Pre-K-3 instructional leaders know that a child's knowledge can be activated in the later grades only if the foundation of prior knowledge has been built in the early grades. Learning is cumulative: Early learning facilitates later learning, and children who already know something about a particular topic often have an easier time learning more about it. Early exposure to knowledge—through experiential learning that is engaging and dynamic—can also stimulate a child to want to learn more.

> **Learning is cumulative: Early learning facilitates later learning, and children who already know something about a particular topic often have an easier time learning more about it. Early exposure to knowledge—through experiential learning that is engaging and dynamic— can also stimulate a child to want to learn more.**

This is especially true in the foundational subjects. No one disputes that learning to read in the early grades is a predictor of later success. Effective instructional leaders support two specific early reading abilities: decoding and comprehension. Decoding is the ability to identify the words on a page; comprehension is the ability to understand what those words mean. An American College Testing policy brief on early reading states that decoding is the main constraint on reading ability for young readers.

Effective decoding requires that children master letter-sound relationships and become familiar with spelling patterns. Instructional leaders ensure that teachers help children decode well by using activities and methods in preschool, kindergarten and first grade that develop children's phonological (sound) awareness and their knowledge of the relationship between letters and sounds.

Instructional leaders support teaching that builds comprehension through read-alouds in prekindergarten, kindergarten and first grade, which help children to build knowledge and vocabulary. Because oral language and vocabulary are so connected to reading comprehension, disadvantaged children face increased challenges in learning to read. Recent research findings from Stanford University affirm earlier studies that show a substantial "vocabulary gap" exists between advantaged and disadvantaged students. Because professional parents speak so much more to their children, these children hear 30 million more words by age three than do children from low-income households.

In addition to reading skills, effective instructional leaders work to build children's numeracy skills, as the building blocks of later math learning. Research indicates that children who are able to do simple arithmetic problems and who can place numbers on a number line by the end of first grade perform better in math in the fifth grade. Principals who support instruction that includes playing, counting, and foundational mathematics games in prekindergarten and kindergarten are helping children avoid deficiencies later on. When staffing prekindergarten and kindergarten classrooms, however, principals should recognize that a great many early childhood teachers have the expertise to teach early literacy skills, but that the expertise in early mathematics instruction may require greater acquisition of content knowledge and corresponding instructional shifts.

But learning math and reading skills is not enough to ensure later success. Effective Pre-K-3 instructional leaders know that to be successful in a variety of subjects in middle and high school, students also need to build a basis of prior knowledge in science, history, civics, the arts, physical education and social-emotional learning. Further, there is growing demand for mastery of communications, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity skills to adequately equip students beyond the "3 R's."

Principals must work to develop not only students' academic skills but also their social behaviors, as well as their ability to manage communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity. In addition, behaviors such as paying attention, completing assignments, persisting in difficult tasks and thinking before one acts—often referred to as executive functions. Executive function plays a large role in children's success in school and in relationships throughout their lives (see sidebar). Principals can help teachers create a climate in which these functions are outlined early on— in prekindergarten, kindergarten and first grade—and reinforced in the primary grades.

Work with teachers and teacher leaders to develop an interactive, relevant and engaging early learning curriculum.

Effective principals are continually working to develop their own understanding of developmentally-appropriate curricula and instruction as well as that of their entire learning community. They know that student engagement is essential and that significant learning happens through exploration and play, particularly in prekindergarten and kindergarten. Strategies used to ensure understanding of key content and concepts will, however, change as children progress from grade to grade. For instance, once children enter first and second grade, effective principals know that these strategies shift to more direct instruction, integrated into engaging and dynamic learning opportunities.

Throughout the Pre-K-3 continuum, effective instructional leaders support teachers who do more than simply cover the curriculum by working to foster engagement in learning, asking open-ended questions and helping children pose and solve new problems that matter to them. Effective Pre-K-3 instructional leaders support teaching that encourages higher-order thinking and advanced language skills.

Principals know that effective instruction in the early grades requires that teachers take time for children to move and play—building these activities into the life of the classroom. Effective principals work with teachers to help children transition from one activity to another, and they take time to help children learn how to "do school." This is especially important in classrooms where children are unsure of what

is expected of them or lack experience with the kinds of work and concepts that are used in school. As teachers introduce new learning activities, effective instructional leaders look to make sure that children understand not only what they have to do but also why they are doing it. It is important that children understand their goals and can talk about their learning.

Effective principals also help teachers keep classrooms running smoothly. They know that when teachers devote time to establishing classroom routines—especially when they do so in the early weeks of the school year and then reinforce these routines throughout the year—they help to create a stable environment where children know what to expect day to day. Research shows that the practices associated with well-organized classrooms are linked with gains in school readiness and achievement.

Create professional communities of practice to empower teachers to learn from each other and to improve instruction.

Like many K-12 teachers, most Pre-K-3 teachers work in isolation from one another. According to the Foundation for Child Development, Pre-K-3 teachers typically undergo widely varying preparation and training, work in different buildings, report to different supervisors and have few (if any) opportunities to work together.

Effective Pre-K-3 instructional leaders do not reward their teachers by leaving them alone. Instead, they engage teachers in a process of collaborative inquiry around shared standards of practice. They know that when teachers collaborate and cooperate horizontally (within-grade) as well as vertically (cross-grade), the links between lessons and school years become clearer to students, which benefits student learning. In essence, effective Pre-K-3 instructional leaders work to redefine the profession of teaching as a collaborative, not individual, endeavor.

Principals know that when frequent and collaborative discussions about student work and growth take place, teachers have the best chance of improving their instructional practices. Effective principals get out from behind their own closed office doors to conduct walk-throughs of various classrooms, observe lessons and student work, and facilitate authentic discussions among teachers about student growth and development.

This can be particularly challenging for leaders of smaller schools. Finding common planning time for grade-level professional learning communities can be a particular challenge in a small school. But even if common planning

time is hard to come by at the grade level, creative principals can often create common planning time for multi-grade professional learning communities. Working with teachers, effective leaders in both small and larger schools ensure that professional learning communities find time and ways to collaborate during the school day.

This collaboration approach requires principals to commit to a new culture in schools. It requires new kinds of relationships between principals and teachers—and among teachers: one that is based on mutual accountability and respect, not the "gotcha" culture of high-stakes assessment.

Research points to several discrete strategies that support teachers' professional growth and development. First, to sustain achievement gains over time, instructional leaders must provide opportunities for horizontal communication as well as vertical communications. Such continued communication can reduce variation in instructional experiences. For example, principals can create regular common planning times built into the school's master schedule, allowing teachers time to discuss their students' learning in an environment of collaboration and trust.

In essence, effective Pre-K-3 instructional leaders work to redefine the profession of teaching as a collaborative, not individual, endeavor.

Second, teacher preparation and professional development must be aligned and collaborative. Teacher professional development should be inclusive of the entire Pre-K-3 continuum and aligned with planning and consultations regarding important student transitions at each grade level.

Finally, principals should use data to guide discussions about student and teacher learning growth. The New America Foundation found that successful Pre-K-3 principals regularly analyze data with teachers and support them in collecting and using data to monitor student progress and to evaluate and improve instructional approaches. Principals should make decisions regarding teacher assignment based on data, predicated on teacher readiness.

The Seven Essential Life Skills

All of these life skills are based, in one way or another, in the prefrontal cortex of the brain and involve what child development researchers call "executive functions" of the brain. They are called executive functions because we use them to "manage" our attention, our emotions and our behavior in order to reach our goals.

As Adele Diamond of the University of British Columbia, a leading researcher whose work is featured in *Mind in the Making*, says: "If you look at what predicts how well children will do later in school, more and more evidence is showing that executive functions … actually predict success better than IQ tests."

1 **Focus/Self-Control.** Children need this skill in order to achieve their goals, especially in a world filled with distractions and information overload. It involves paying attention, remembering the rules, thinking flexibly and exercising self-control.

2 **Perspective Taking.** Perspective goes far beyond empathy: It involves figuring out what others think and feel, and it forms the basis of children understanding the intentions of their parents, teachers and friends. Children who can understand others' perspectives are also much less likely to get involved in conflicts.

3 **Communicating.** Communicating is much more than understanding language, speaking, reading and writing. It is the skill of determining what one wants to communicate and understanding how others will understand our communications. It is the skill that teachers and employers feel is most lacking today.

4 **Making Connections.** Making connections is at the heart of learning—figuring out what's the same and what's different and sorting these things into categories. Making unusual connections is at the core of creativity. In a world where people can use Google to find just about anything, those who can see connections are the ones who will go from knowing information to using this information well.

5 **Critical Thinking.** Critical thinking is the ongoing search for valid and reliable knowledge to guide beliefs, decisions and actions.

6 **Taking on Challenges.** Life is full of stresses and challenges. Children who are willing to take on challenges (instead of avoiding them or simply coping with them) do better in school and in life.

7 **Self-Directed Engaged Learning.** It is through learning that we can realize our potential. As the world changes, so can we, for as long as we live—as long as we learn.

Galinsky, Ellen. Mind in the making: the seven essential life skills every child needs. New York: HarperStudio, 2010.

What Does Quality Pre-K-3 Literacy Look Like?

Teaching children to read is an essential requirement of Pre-K-3 learning environments. Getting your literacy program right means creating a set of cohesive and cumulative learning experiences that build skills and knowledge for young children.

According to the Foundation for Child Development (FCD), effective literacy instruction:

Spans preschool through elementary years and responds to developmental needs of students

This requires a coordinated approach to curriculum that provides:

- A shared framework for meeting young readers' needs across grades
- Balancing the learning needs of students with their developmental needs
- A match between children's cognitive and social/emotional needs and ages
- Some play-based activities to build skills
- Some direct instruction in phonics and reading practice using texts aligned to the current unit's theme
- Increased complexity and difficulty as children mature, allowing for differentiation of individual needs
- Continuity from prekindergarten through primary grades

Organizes classroom learning around content-based thematic units of study

This requires a framework to address standards and development of skills and knowledge with:

- Content learning through thematic units of study
- Systematic, organized instructional plan, based on multifaceted academic topics that lend themselves to big questions without easy answers

- Opportunities to develop oral language and vocabulary and apply skills and strategies to literature and informational trade books
- Process and practice writing modeled by a teacher
- Small-group book discussions

Integrates skill-based and knowledge-based instruction

This requires learning opportunities that:

- Promote skill-building and language—and knowledge-building
- Are supported by a coordinated approach to curriculum—one that provides the framework and resources teachers need to address skills and knowledge instruction
- Are always building and changing as children develop these skills
- Combine purposeful, explicit opportunities for developing knowledge-based competencies and systematic and explicit instruction that targets skills-based competencies

Fosters a combination of direct instruction and inquiry-based learning

This requires an approach that:

- Creates a literacy-enriched learning environment that is structured, interactive and engaging
- Provides a plan for teaching and learning
- Features direct, explicit developmentally sound instruction
- Provides a classroom arrangement plan with literacy-enriched learning centers, featuring a wide variety of books and visuals
- Engages all children in structured learning tasks and routes that promote interactive play and inquiry

COMPETENCIES FOR EFFECTIVE PRINCIPAL PRACTICE

Spotlight on
Effective Practice

Ensure Developmentally-appropriate Teaching
Branch Brook Elementary School, Newark, NJ

Principal Joseph Cullen has worked hard over the past few years to build a strong foundation of supports for children attending the Branch Brook Elementary School. Consequently, staff members of this Pre-K-4 National Blue Ribbon School have developed a deeper understanding of appropriate teaching practices that help children be engaged and successful learners.

The Pre-K program at Branch Brook is funded by state dollars. New Jersey began funding public prekindergarten programs as a result of a 1998 mandate from the New Jersey Supreme Court. Publicly funded Pre-K programs must meet a rigorous set of standards around curriculum, instruction and assessments. However, at Branch Brook, staff members integrate their own balanced combination of small group work, large group work and independent thinking into The Creative Curriculum.

Principal Cullen recognizes the importance of teachers allowing for differentiated learning, as "the students become empowered to choose for themselves" and it "really drives the class." With the growing body of research around the importance of personalized and interactive learning, the kindergarten through fourth grade Branch Brook staff members strive to incorporate this interest-driven, small group instruction style into their own classrooms.

Embracing a more personalized learning model was a change for the K-4 teachers. Teachers work together during planning time to ensure a differentiated approach to all learning and that independent and small group learning is aligned to their broader Common Core and district curriculum.

To make certain that staff members are comfortable with these flexible learning styles, collaboration is encouraged among classrooms and across grade levels. Teachers also participate in professional learning communities, and some mentor incoming teachers.

Principal Cullen credits New Jersey's statewide Pre-K-3 pipeline trainings for the shift in both his own and the school's perspective around coordinated but ambitious instruction across the Pre-K–4 education continuum. The trainings, which were coordinated by the Advocates for Children of NJ, also helped Principal Cullen and his staff to move past the mindset that Pre-K and kindergarten instruction should be thought of as separate and apart from early elementary grades. While it has been a challenge to incorporate this high level of alignment throughout the school, Principal Cullen says his role at Branch Brook is to help staff recognize the value in the system.

A Focus on Special Education
Wayne Township Preschool, Indianapolis, IN

Ensuring developmentally-appropriate teaching practices is important in the early grades, and even more so when working with students with special needs. Wayne Township Preschool in Indianapolis, Indiana, is home to a diverse student body where 62 percent of students receive special education services. Principal Kathryn Raasch and her staff strive to provide a quality early education to all of the school's students.

Wayne Township Preschool serves children ages three to five and offers both childcare classrooms as well as a comprehensive Pre-K program. Students are placed in one of two types of Pre-K classroom settings dependent upon the level of support needed to be successful learners. Students needing a higher level of support participate in development classes while students able to learn more independently participate in community classes. Following the concept of least restrictive environments, the learning environment changes along with a child's learning needs.

In the development classes, the abilities of the students range. Some require limited special education services while others require significant supports. Higher functioning special education students are directed to the community classes, as they may just need speech and language supports or the assistance of an aide.

Wayne Township Preschool utilizes the *High Scope Curriculum* for all students, which is aligned with the *Indiana Foundations for Young Children* and addresses language acquisition, literacy and communication, social and emotional development, physical development, health and well-being, math, science, technology, social students and arts and sciences.

To ensure that staff members are able to support the varying abilities and needs of their students, they are trained around self-regulation skills, autism supports and verbal de-escalation skills. Principal Raasch also encourages a "teacher-teaching-teacher" professional development model in order to promote the sharing of best practices and ensure the progress of their students.

Principal Raasch sees her role at the school as an "advocate for high-quality early education" and a "champion for children three to five." She feels that remediation is not always the answer but that early intervention services and parental engagement programs can best help to identify the ways that a child needs to be supported.

Questions for Reflection

Align ambitious standards, curriculum, instruction and assessments so that they create a consistent framework for learning from age three to grade three. Does our school have a shared language about student learning? Are our instructional practices aligned with a developmentally-appropriate curriculum and differentiated to meet individual student needs? Are we using formative assessments to inform our instruction? How present is the instruct-assess-instruct cycle in our school? Do I demonstrate knowledge of instructional needs for the full Pre-K-3 continuum in my interactions with teachers?

Provide a comprehensive curriculum inclusive of, but not limited to, language arts and math. What more can we be doing to improve children's decoding, comprehension and vocabulary skills? What additional instructional strategies should we consider to increase student's numeracy skills? How do we know that the children in our school are building their executive function capacities? What strategies are we using to ensure that special needs children are developing to their best abilities? Are we providing rigorous inquiry-based instruction in subjects beyond reading and math, such as science, social studies and visual and performing arts?

Work with teachers and teacher leaders to develop an interactive and engaging early learning curriculum. How am I supporting teachers in improving their instructional practice? How often do we offer release time or other supports for teachers to plan together, observe each other's classrooms or attend professional development? What additional innovative strategies might we use to support efforts to build teacher capacity and thus improve instruction? What evidence are we using to assess whether teacher instruction and effectiveness are improving over time?

Create professional communities of practice to empower teachers to learn from each other and to improve instruction. Am I "rewarding" teachers by leaving them alone? How often am I present in classrooms? How often are other teachers present in each other's classrooms? How often are coaches present in each other's classrooms? Are our observations about teacher practice and student work linked to professional development? Are we sharing data across classrooms and grades to discuss student learning needs? How are we identifying and communicating teacher's individual professional development needs? Have I identified and supported a teacher leader in Pre-K-3?

Notes Type your notes below.

COMPETENCIES FOR EFFECTIVE PRINCIPAL PRACTICE

Self-Assessment Tool

Use the Questions for Further Reflection to help you think about and rate the degree to which each Competency Two strategy is evident in your school or in your practice as school leader. Use the checkboxes below to note your ratings.

1 Not evident in my school/practice.

2 Somewhat evident in my school/practice.

3 Consistently evident in my school/practice.

4 Consistently evident, with practices that elaborate upon or exceed expectations.

Self-Assessment: Beginning of the Year	1	2	3	4
Align ambitious standards, curriculum, instruction and assessments so that they create a consistent framework for learning from age three to grade three.				
Provide a comprehensive curriculum inclusive of, but not limited to, language arts and math.				
Work with teachers and teacher leaders to develop an interactive and engaging early learning curriculum.				
Create professional communities of practice to empower teachers to learn from each other and to improve instruction.				

Self-Assessment: Middle of the Year	1	2	3	4
Align ambitious standards, curriculum, instruction and assessments so that they create a consistent framework for learning from age three to grade three.				
Provide a comprehensive curriculum inclusive of, but not limited to, language arts and math.				
Work with teachers and teacher leaders to develop an interactive and engaging early learning curriculum.				
Create professional communities of practice to empower teachers to learn from each other and to improve instruction.				

Self-Assessment: Beginning of the Year	1	2	3	4
Align ambitious standards, curriculum, instruction and assessments so that they create a consistent framework for learning from age three to grade three.				
Provide a comprehensive curriculum inclusive of, but not limited to, language arts and math.				
Work with teachers and teacher leaders to develop an interactive and engaging early learning curriculum.				
Create professional communities of practice to empower teachers to learn from each other and to improve instruction.				

Resources To Help You Learn and Do More

Websites

www.learningforward.org | **Learning Forward** is the only association devoted exclusively to advancing professional learning for student success. The organization has developed standards for professional learning.

www.naeyc.org | **National Association for the Education of Young Children** is the world's largest organization working on behalf of young children.

www.playworks.org | **Playworks** believes in the power of play to bring out the best in every kid. Playworks sends well-trained full-time program coordinators into low-income schools to become part of the academic community through play.

Relevant Research

ACT Research and Policy. (2013). *College and Career Readiness: The Importance of Early Learning.* Iowa City, IA: ACT Research and Policy.

Carey, Bjorn. "Language gap between rich and poor children begins in infancy, Stanford psychologist finds." Stanford News, Sept. 25, 2013.

Lesaux, Nonie K. (2013). *PreK-3rd: Getting Literacy Instruction Right.* New York, NY: Foundation for Child Development.

Lonigan, Christopher J. and Timothy Shanahan. (2008). *Developing Early Literacy: Report of the National Early Literacy Panel.* Washington, DC:National Institute for Literacy.

Marietta, Geoff and Sky Marietta. (2013). *PreK-3rd's Lasting Architecture: Successfully Serving Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Students in Union City, New Jersey.* New York, NY: Foundation for Child Development.

Shore, Rima. (2009). *PreK-3rd: Teacher Quality Matters.* New York, NY: Foundation for Child Development.

Takanishi, Ruby. (2004). "Leveling the Playing Field: Supporting Immigrant Children from Birth to Eight." The Future of the Children 14(2). Princeton, NJ: The Future of Children.

COMPETENCIES FOR EFFECTIVE PRINCIPAL PRACTICE

Provide Personalized Blended Learning Environments

Effective principals provide welcoming, collaborative learning environments that support personalized learning, including the effective use of technology.

Leaders of effective Pre-K-3 learning communities know that children and adults perform best in learning environments that reflect the children in them, as well as the culture and language of their families and neighborhoods. The most supportive and effective learning environments create a welcoming physical and emotional climate that is safe, nurturing and developmentally-appropriate. Such an environment promotes wellness, positive interactions and supportive relationships for the children and adults within them. Leaders of effective learning environments promote collaboration, where all members of the learning community are actively engaged in learning experiences across a wide array of learning settings.

Effective leaders also promote constructivist learning—enabling children not only to acquire knowledge but also to create it—through active, reflective, collaborative and contextual learning that results in authentic tasks and products. Pedagogical practices in constructivist learning environments focus on the learner, with teachers supporting student exploration as guides and facilitators.

Children in such environments are regarded as learners with individual needs, each with different skills and interests, working at their own pace, practicing and refining as much as they like, and moving to mastery of different competencies at different rates. This individualized learning is also known as personalized learning, and it is sometimes tied to technology integration in schools.

Active learning in personalized environments requires effective utilization of a variety of learning tools, including an intentional application of technology to the curriculum, in ways that add relevance and sense-making to children's learning. Young children, who are active users of technology at home and with their families, are already adept at incorporating smartphones, tablets and laptops into play. And research indicates that technology can enhance student engagement, persistence and the development of a variety of emergent literacy skills.

Strategies/indicators of the competency in practice

- Promote environments that blend face-to-face and technology-enhanced learning and that are rigorous, developmentally-appropriate and support individual learning.
- Facilitate the use of technology tools for learning and provide instructional leadership in schools on how to use technology effectively.
- Support instructional use of appropriate technology and interactive media to support learning and development—through work and play—in school, at home and in community settings.
- Integrate technology directly and intentionally into curriculum and student learning outcomes.
- Help teachers develop their understanding and ability to use technology effectively to individualize and differentiate instruction for each student.

Promote environments that blend face-to-face and technology-enhanced learning and that are rigorous, developmentally-appropriate and support individual learning.

Leaders of effective Pre-K-3 learning environments understand the complexity of children's individual characteristics and know that effective learning requires the application of developmentally-appropriate strategies and tools that support children's individual growth.

Effective principals recognize that teaching is a complex enterprise, and they support a variety of instructional strategies, curriculum models, tools and settings, to align to children's ages, backgrounds and personalities. They understand that children construct knowledge through hands-on, engaging experiences with people and materials. They support play as a vehicle of learning. And they nurture positive and respectful relationships that meet the needs of a diverse group of children. They understand how emerging technology tools provide new ways to support student learning objectives, but don't use technology for technology's sake.

Knowledge of child development—and the importance of each child's individuality in terms of personality, developmental level, temperament, learning styles and ability—provides a leadership foundation for constructing developmentally-appropriate and meaningful learning environments. Competent leaders understand that an inclusive environment benefits both children with and without special needs.

Foundational to all other elements of an effective learning environment is ensuring the health, safety and wellness of young children. For children, being healthy means more than just the absence of illness or injury; it means that children are safe and have access to nutritious meals and opportunities for physical fitness. Safety and privacy also extend to using Internet-based learning resources. Keeping children safe means that leaders must ensure both their physical and emotional safety, which requires that leaders be ready to respond to emergencies. In addition, effective principals must stay up to date on state and federal regulations and research related to children's safety and health.

Effective leaders insist on a culture of professionalism, using ethical guidelines and professional standards related to early learning. They are committed to continuous, collaborative learning and to their own and others' professional growth. They value input, feedback and diverse perspectives, using a variety of data points to make informed decisions that can continually improve the learning environment for both children and adults.

Facilitate the power of technology tools for learning and provide instructional leadership in schools to use technology effectively.

Effective principals know that learning is not linear and that personalized learning requires differentiating approaches based on the needs of individual learners. A variety of research findings support the use of technology in the curriculum for children age three to grade three as a strategy to strengthen and deepen personalized instruction through work and play. This approach of integrating technology into the curriculum is often referred to as blended learning because it blends face-to-face and technology-enhanced learning. Edutopia defines blended learning as classrooms that use technology appropriately, use technology every day, and have access to a variety of technology tools that can be leveraged to best support the task at hand and to connect to student learning outcomes.

> **"Personalized learning means to me that I am teaching a child where they are and what they need in order to be successful. It means I am not just teaching the curriculum but teaching the child."**
> —*Principal*

Effective leaders facilitate the appropriate use of technology in early learning environments as a means to extend and support a child-centric curriculum. They know that technology can support a play-based curriculum and can extend hands-on learning, in the same way that other manipulatives, such as paints, wooden blocks and colored pencils, are used. Effective principals know that integrating technology into the curriculum can help teachers individualize and tailor lesson plans for each student. They know that play can be effective in supporting student engagement and persistence in tasks.

Research indicates that most learning environments for students age three to grade three already incorporate some form of technology, and that hand-held devices, in particular, are well-suited for children age three to grade three. Thus, the issue for early learning instruction is not *whether* to use technology but *how* to use it most effectively.

Children vary significantly from age three to grade three in their cognitive and physical development, such as reading proficiency, attention span and fine motor skills. Effective leaders promote the benefits of a blended instruction

COMPETENCIES FOR EFFECTIVE PRINCIPAL PRACTICE

approach in Pre-K-3 classrooms as a support to young learners in their active participation in learning and as a tool to scaffold support to children who need it. Effective leaders of blended learning environments strive to put children in control of their own learning, and they use technology to feed children's curiosity and create meaning.

Thus, the issue for early learning instruction is not *whether* to use technology but *how* to use it most effectively.

Effective Pre-K-3 leaders support teachers who adapt the use of technology to the curriculum and not the other way around. For instance, research suggests that on-screen text and keyboard use should be adapted to a child's reading and writing proficiency. A child's attention span and distractibility should be factored into screen time for specific activities. In addition, appropriate user interfaces and the type of mouse should be determined by a child's hand-eye coordination.

Support instructional use of appropriate technology and interactive media to support learning and development—through play and work—in school, at home and in community settings.

Studies of the use of new technologies in the home confirm that young children engage in a wide range of digital practices. These include the use of computer games, drawing tools, streaming video, gaming technologies, the Internet, mobile phones, tablets and texting—with computer games being the most popular activity. Such studies confirm that young children are engaged with technology in acquiring a variety of literacy practices from very early ages.

While young children's literacy practices out of school rely on a variety of digital technologies, such devices remain limited in many early learning classrooms, as they do throughout primary, secondary and higher education. Indeed, many school systems prevent students from bringing personal technology devices to school or using them there. Larry Cuban found that technology is often a "benign addition" to literacy instruction, an accessory for entertainment or supplementary activities that's not used in the main curriculum. Leaders of effective Pre-K-3 learning environments encourage both the use of technologies in school and the use of technologies that children bring to school, which are often more state-of-art than those in the school, rather than locking them up in backpacks for use at recess or after school.

When technology is used in literacy instruction, researchers argue, it is often used to teach phonics or handle conventional alphabetic print texts to develop comprehension skills rather than to generate new content or knowledge. A number of researchers refer to this as the "old wine in new skins" syndrome, using technology to focus on the development of print-based knowledge and skills rather than to create something new, such as a YouTube clip or a website.

As compared to print, which enables students to acquire knowledge, digital technologies open a variety of opportunities for students to create new content and new knowledge. While the tendency may be for teachers to use technology applications for drill and skill exercises, vast possibilities exist to support and extend student learning.

As compared to print, which enables students to acquire knowledge, digital technologies open a variety of opportunities for students to create new content and new knowledge.

Effective principals also leverage technology to create school-home connections, communicating a student's progress regularly. Through transparent sharing of student data, sometimes referred to as "digital backpacks," or by encouraging teachers to communicate with parents through email or other secure messaging platforms, teachers in the Pre-K-3 learning community can be empowered to make important connections to parents and homes at the click of a mouse.

Effective leaders understand that technology is a tool to build emerging literacy skills and that technology tools present a variety of opportunities to make meaning with visual and embodied literacies. Effective leaders support teachers in helping children develop operational, cultural and critical dimensions of what is known as digital literacy. Digital literacy is the ability to effectively and critically navigate, evaluate and create information using a range of digital technologies.

Literacy 1.0 and 2.0 Paradigms

Literacy 1.0	Literacy 2.0
single reader/writer working	multiple designers playing
with an original text or artifact	with a shared activity
using print to craft personal narrative	using actions to communicate as much information as images; print is almost absent
writing mediated by peers and teachers	playing to sustain a fluid and reactive text
within a supportive writing workshop	within a participatory environment with interactive media
individual production	sustained collaboration
personal creativity	collective cohesion

Literacy 1.0 is defined as an individual interacting with text to learn content.
Literacy 2.0 assumes multiuser interaction to create content.

Wohlwend, Karen E. (2010). A Is for Avatar: Young Children in Literacy 2.0 Schools and Literacy 1.0 Schools. Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English.

Integrate technology directly into curriculum and student learning outcomes.

Now more than ever, Pre-K-3 learning communities are finding a "third way" to support children's learning: creating learning environments where children are able to develop and maintain relationships through face-to-face and/or cyber interactions.

What matters most is how teachers choose to use technology. Effective leaders know that technology cannot stand alone; it exists as part of a system that includes students, teachers and curricula. Here are some common ideas, validated by research: Young children use computers most effectively when supported by teachers. Teachers are essential to successful inquiry-based learning across grade levels and particularly important to structuring and guiding inquiry for early learners. Teachers intervene when a child experiences problems or frustration during technology-enhanced inquiry learning; they scaffold children's learning with prompts, cues and instruction, as needed.

Effective leaders work to blur the distinction between traditional and new learning environments. They understand that children use whatever is at hand and do not make distinctions between the new (digital) and the old (print and other modes). Effective leaders do not create a divide in learning environments between the old and new. Instead, they allow children to experience and use various technologies in ways that harness out-of-school literacy practices and support instruction that encompasses and adds to understanding in authentic ways.

Effective leaders of personalized learning environments do not use technology as an add-on to develop or practice isolated language skills. Instead, they situate the development of literacies in and around participation in practices, helping young children to become experts at things that matter to them. This is possible, for example, when young children examine and record aspects of their own daily lives using digital media or when teachers and students engage with online texts that relate to popular culture. This approach includes acquisition and knowledge of print, and use of print-based texts, as equally as knowledge of and use of digital cameras, computers and editing software.

While technology tools have the potential to support children's individualized learning, they are not ends in themselves, nor should they replace other learning tools. Technology is not a substitute for good instruction. Effective learning environments integrate technology into their lessons to engage diverse learning styles and abilities in the classroom.

COMPETENCIES FOR EFFECTIVE PRINCIPAL PRACTICE

Help teachers develop their understanding and ability to use technology effectively to individualize and differentiate instruction for each student.

In addition to ensuring that the school has a robust technology infrastructure, leadership is essential to ensuring that technology is a part of the school culture. The growing presence of technology in Pre-K-3 learning communities suggests a need for teachers who are competent users of technology and are facile in applying technology tools to their curriculum. An overarching goal for leaders of personalized learning environments is to ensure that teachers throughout the learning community are comfortable in their ability to work with appropriate technology tools and can pass on technology skills to the children they teach.

Effective leaders should both support teachers who are innovative in their use of technology and help other teachers learn to do so as well.

Blum's research found that early childhood teachers need to:

- Understand how to use research-based instructional strategies
- Understand why a specific technology tool is important for young children (curricular competence)
- Demonstrate ability to use the technology tools (operational competence)
- Apply technology tools in the classroom (functional competence)

Effective leaders of Pre-3-K learning environments know that teachers need to develop curricular and instructional competence with technology, as well as functional and operational competence. They know that without all four competencies, they are likely to see inadequate uses and unsustainable technology practices in their learning communities.

Effective leaders capitalize on the data and information that technology provides. Often technology tools provide teachers and principals with on-demand real-time data regarding student outcomes. When carefully selected and aligned, game-based tools can be used to extend student learning and provide fun, engaging and self-paced opportunities to practice new concepts and skills.

Effective leaders know that many teachers are wary of using technology in the classroom, and leaders can help teachers start slowly and provide them with coaching, including from other teachers who are more comfortable using technology. Over time, principals and school leaders should become advocates for pre-service and in-service training that supports teacher facility in understanding which technology tools to use, how to use them, and how to design developmentally-appropriate opportunities to use those tools in order to support high-quality, engaging instruction.

Technology is not a substitute for good instruction. Effective learning environments integrate technology into their lessons to engage diverse learning styles and abilities in the classroom.

Spotlight on
Effective Practice

Leveraging Technology to Create a Personalized Learning Environment Walker Elementary School, West Allis, WI

West Allis-West Milwaukee Schools are at the forefront of Next Generation Learning (NxGL) initiatives, and Walker Elementary School is no exception.

Six years ago the school adopted a new community vision, one in which every student will be a competent, independent 21st-century learner. Students work on personalized learning plans in multiage/mixed-ability groups. Learning is student-driven and competency-based, rather than teacher-driven. Classes use a blended learning approach, leveraging technology to personalize learning. All students have iPads, and classrooms are equipped with Smartboards, AppleTVs and webcams.

Teachers at Walker Elementary admit that the shift from a traditional classroom with rows of desks, seating charts and direct instruction to one where students spend their day as autonomous learners with voice and choice about what they learn, where they learn and how they learn was challenging. However, a team-teaching approach and abundant opportunities for training and collaboration have smoothed the transition to a hands-on, minds-on grade one through three community of learners.

Principal Tracy Fischer-Tubbs offers training and "appy hours" as needed at the school to help teachers become comfortable integrating technology and new applications into curricular units. There is also a technology integrator at the school who meets with teachers individually or as a team to support seamless integration of technology over the course of the day and year.

Even the youngest students use iPads as a tool to support their learning. Students use Google Earth to study geography, DropBox to store and share classwork, post-its to mark important passages they read and a dictionary app to define and check the spelling of unfamiliar words. In the hands of students at Walker Elementary, technology is a notebook, collection of reference books, classroom textbook and worksheet all in one.

Even though teachers have seamlessly integrated tablets into their classrooms, technology is not the only approach for personalizing learning. Principal Fischer-Tubbs ensures her team makes developmentally-appropriate decisions about when and how a student uses technology. She advocates "seeing what individual students are ready for and balancing technology with actual manipulatives."

Provide Personalized Blended Learning Environments Cumberland Trace Elementary School, Bowling Green, KY

Principal Mary Evans and the Pre-K-6 Cumberland Trace Elementary School work hard to improve supportive and creative learning opportunities for all students through the use of technology and digital learning opportunities. Principal Evans and her staff see blended learning as a way to help empower students to become responsible for their own academic and personal learning.

At Cumberland Trace, blended learning is a combination of teacher instruction and supplemental technology that is meant to "reach and teach all students effectively." Digital opportunities allow students to be their own "leader of lessons" and provide differentiated and adaptive learning structures to meet individual needs.

As Kentucky does not currently have state funding for technology, Cumberland Trace works with local businesses and its Parent Teacher Association (PTA) to provide digital devices to students. Younger students are then able to utilize technology in the development of their basic skills, while the older grades focus on creating, researching and developing projects. Students also use classroom iPads and laptops to share assignments via Google Drive and receive instant feedback from their teachers and colleagues.

To further its blended learning initiatives, Cumberland Trace has developed a partnership with VINCI Education and has taken part in a pilot project around student-driven, game-based learning with real-time data. The ClassVINCI pilot has provided students with additional child-friendly curriculum content that help to keep classrooms on pace with changing learning requirements and standards. Teachers have been given access to ClassVINCI Learning Management which was specifically designed for early childhood, collecting real-time data and delivering reports. Children eagerly engage in the learning.

Principal Evans sees blended learning as a necessity for Cumberland Trace, as it "is the way children learn today," and she works to model the use of technology in the school by setting expectations and celebrating the successes of the students. Principal Evans also communicates the importance of technology to parents and identifies the resources that the school needs in order to be successful with these initiatives.

To support staff in integrating technology into the classrooms, Cumberland Trace provides differentiated professional development opportunities and teacher-driven learning communities. Staff members are encouraged to model technology use for their peers and lead workshops around using Google Drive and other areas of interest. Principal Evans feels that it is important for both staff and students to feel excited about and comfortable with blended learning.

Questions for Reflection

Effective principals provide welcoming, collaborative learning environments that support personalized learning, including the effective use of technology.

Promote environments that are rigorous, developmentally-appropriate and support individual learning. How can we promote understanding of developmental stages of growth throughout the learning community? What are we doing to help children not just acquire skills but also create meaning and construct new knowledge? How do we know our learning community is child-centric? What more can we do to support the learning of children with special needs? Does the entire learning community understand our emergency and other safety procedures? What more can we do to promote the professional growth of the adults in our learning community?

Facilitate the use of technology tools for learning and provide instructional leadership in schools to use technology effectively. What are we doing as a learning community to understand the individual needs of each child in our school? What additional tools, materials and physical settings (both indoor and out) do we need in order to support personalized instructional approaches? How does technology support the play-based curriculum in our school? How are we tailoring technology use to individual abilities and proficiencies? How could we improve our use of technology to communicate with parents and others in the school community?

Support instructional use of appropriate technology and interactive media to support learning and development—through work and play. Are those throughout our learning community allowing students to use digital devices that they bring from home in the classroom? What would make us more comfortable to do so? How does technology support literacy development in our school? How do we know that children in our school are developing digital learning skills? Are we building digital literacy skills among the adults and children in our learning community? How do we know these skills are increasing?

Integrate technology directly into curriculum, student learning and outcomes. How are children in our school developing both face-to-face and cyber interactions with people and resources that can help them learn? How are teachers interacting with children to support their use of technology as a means of inquiry-based learning? How are we integrating old and new technologies and tools to promote literacy? How do we know our technology use is more than an add-on to the curriculum? What are the indicators that our students are creating new knowledge?

Help teachers develop their understanding and ability to use technology effectively to individualize and differentiate instruction for each student. How comfortable are each of our teachers in using— and applying—technology in the classroom? What additional professional development is needed to increase our teachers' understanding and appropriate use of technology? Are we using coaches effectively to build technology skills among teachers? What more can we do to advocate for improved Pre-service and in-service professional development related to technology integration?

Notes Type your notes below.

Self-Assessment Tool

Use the Questions for Further Reflection to help you think about and rate the degree to which each Competency Three strategy is evident in your school or in your practice as school leader. Use the checkboxes below to note your ratings.

1 Not evident in my school/practice.

2 Somewhat evident in my school/practice.

3 Consistently evident in my school/practice.

4 Consistently evident, with practices that elaborate upon or exceed expectations.

Self-Assessment: Beginning of the Year	1	2	3	4
Promote environments that are rigorous, developmentally-appropriate and support individual learning.				
Facilitate the use of technology tools for learning and provide instructional leadership in schools to use technology effectively.				
Support instructional use of appropriate technology and interactive media to support learning and development—through work and play.				
Integrate technology directly into curriculum, student learning and outcomes.				
Help teachers develop their understanding and ability to use technology effectively to individualize and differentiate instruction for each student.				

Self-Assessment: Middle of the Year	1	2	3	4
Promote environments that are rigorous, developmentally-appropriate and support individual learning.				
Facilitate the use of technology tools for learning and provide instructional leadership in schools to use technology effectively.				
Support instructional use of appropriate technology and interactive media to support learning and development—through work and play.				
Integrate technology directly into curriculum, student learning and outcomes.				
Help teachers develop their understanding and ability to use technology effectively to individualize and differentiate instruction for each student.				

COMPETENCIES FOR EFFECTIVE PRINCIPAL PRACTICE

Self-Assessment: Middle of the Year	1	2	3	4
Promote environments that are rigorous, developmentally-appropriate and support individual learning.				
Facilitate the use of technology tools for learning and provide instructional leadership in schools to use technology effectively.				
Support instructional use of appropriate technology and interactive media to support learning and development—through work and play.				
Integrate technology directly into curriculum, student learning and outcomes.				
Help teachers develop their understanding and ability to use technology effectively to individualize and differentiate instruction for each student.				

Resources To Help You Learn and Do More

Websites

www.digitalpromise.org | **Digital Promise** is an independent, bipartisan nonprofit organization authorized by Congress to spur innovation in education. Digital Promise supports comprehensive research and development to increase opportunities for lifelong learners and equip Americans with skills needed for the global economy.

www.inacol.org | **iNACOL**, the International Association for K-12 Online Learning, works to ensure all students have access to a world-class education and quality blended and online learning opportunities that prepare them for a lifetime of success.

www.iste.org | **ISTE**, the International Society of Technology in Education, is the premier nonprofit organization serving educators and education leaders committed to empowering connected learners in a connected world.

www.naeyc.org | **National Association for the Education of Young Children** is the world's largest organization working on behalf of young children.

www.teccenter@erikson.edu | **TEC Center at Erikso** empowers early childhood educators to thoughtfully and appropriately use technology in the classroom.

Relevant Research

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Use Multiple Measures of Assessment To Guide Growth in Student Learning

Effective principals use multiples measures to assess student progress and support student learning growth.

Above all, principals know that the goal of assessment must be to improve teaching and learning.

In a context of high-stakes accountability, principals continue to manage the demands related to demonstrating higher gains in student achievement, often measured by a single test score at a single point in time. Principals warn against a narrowing of the curriculum in their schools that takes time away from robust learning experiences and devotes it instead to preparing students to perform well on a battery of accountability exams that do not provide the full portrait of a student's success. Principals also argue for a broader perspective of educator effectiveness, as teacher and principal evaluations are continually tied to student test score data.

The goal of assessment must be to improve teaching and learning.

Principals encourage and support state and local assessments that include growth models and multiple measures of student performance (both formative and summative) to accurately gauge social and emotional development, language fluency and comprehension, creativity, adaptability, critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Assessment data should be used to inform instruction and should be used fairly, flexibly and authentically to support progress toward academic proficiency. Research shows that teachers spend one-quarter to one-third of their professional time on assessment-related activities. Still, most do so without the know-how and understanding of how to assess students effectively. Thus, the *assessment literacy* of educators, defined as understanding the purposes and use of various kinds of assessments for learning and growth, is an area of interest and a professional development need for educators and all members of a Pre-K-3 learning community.

Perhaps most illusive in Pre-K-3 learning communities is an understanding of how to use assessment effectively for our earliest learners. Some states have instituted annual kindergarten accountability testing, tying funding of early learning programs to student test performance. Others are attempting to link testing in kindergarten to performance of state-funded Pre-K performance during the previous years.

Strategies/indicators of the competency in practice

- Build understanding throughout the learning community of the various purposes and appropriate uses of different student assessments to improve teaching and learning.
- Support teachers in using multiple forms of assessments, along with observation, portfolios and anecdotal records, to guide student learning and growth all along the Pre-K-3 continuum.
- Support open and collaborative discussions about assessment data with parents and community.
- Share information about program effectiveness among schools and other providers

COMPETENCIES FOR EFFECTIVE PRINCIPAL PRACTICE

Build understanding throughout the learning community of the various purposes and appropriate uses of different student assessments to improve teaching and learning.

Perhaps the single most effective way for principals to enhance learning in the Pre-K-3 continuum is by developing a better understanding and use of assessment appropriate in the education of young children. Yet, despite its importance to the culture of schooling and its potential to affect student learning, assessment literacy is often overlooked and undervalued in Pre-K-3 learning communities.

Being assessment literate means that educators are expert in learners and learning, not in statistical measurement or analysis.

Assessment literacy is the understanding of how to use assessment to measure student learning and support student growth. Being assessment literate means that educators are expert in learners and learning, not in statistical measurement or analysis. It means that educators know how to use assessment as a teaching tool to promote student growth.

Four fundamental categories of assessment are used in the classroom: diagnostic, formative, interim/benchmark and summative.

Diagnostic assessment is normally not graded and often precedes instruction. It is used to check students' prior knowledge and skill levels, to create a profile of learner interests and to identify student misconceptions. Diagnostic assessment, often referred to as Pre-testing, can be used to provide information to assist teacher planning and guide personalized instruction in ways that maximize learning time.

Formative assessment is ongoing and occurs concurrently with instruction. It provides specific feedback to teachers and students for the purpose of guiding teaching and improving learning. Formative assessments can be both formal and informal, including quizzes, oral questioning, teacher observation, draft work, self-assessment and peer assessment. Results are not factored into summative evaluations or grading.

Interim/benchmark assessment is administered at different intervals throughout the year to evaluate knowledge and skills relative to a specific set of academic goals. Results are used to inform instruction and decision making at the classroom, school and district level and can be used to measure student growth over time.

Summative assessment summarizes what students have learned and often is used at the end of a course or a school year, but it often comes too late to affect instruction. Summative assessment is evaluative and is reported as a score or grade. Results of summative assessments count: They appear on report cards (for students and schools) and on transcripts.

Used alone, a summative assessment is an insufficient tool for maximizing student learning. Effective principals know that formative and interim assessments have greater positive impact on teaching and learning than do summative assessments. So principals work to encourage and support the expanded use of formative and interim assessments across the Pre-K-3 continuum to provide greater positive impact on instruction and track student growth over time.

Support teachers in using multiple forms of assessments, along with observation, portfolios and anecdotal records, to guide student learning and growth all along the Pre-K-3 continuum.

When educators, policymakers, researchers or parents call for the use of multiple measures of assessment, what they often are asking for is a holistic picture of what a student knows and can do, based on a review of various sources of student performance, of various kinds, across various subjects, conducted at different points in time.

Types of multiple measures can include projects, teacher observations, presentations, portfolios, demonstrations, papers, essays, performances and other examples of student work, whether created individually or in a group. How many measures, and what kinds, often differ; what's uniform is the desire to use more than a single test score to make decisions about retention, promotion, teacher qualifications or program success.

No one particular test is a "high-stakes" test; how that test is used—to reward or sanction children, educators or programs—is what raises the stakes.

Effective principals help those throughout their Pre-K-3 learning community understand that no one particular test is a "high-stakes" test; how that test is used—to reward or sanction children, educators or programs—is what raises

RTI is defined by the National Association of Elementary School Principals as a comprehensive early detection approach designed to identify and support students before they fall behind. RTI approaches also help principals to report back to parents on academic and social-emotional components of learning.

Effective principals know that the goal of RTI is not to find a single intervention that works for every child but to apply multiple interventions based on the needs of the individual child.

Support open and collaborative discussions about assessment data with parents and community.

How do we know if a child is ready for kindergarten? If he or she is ready for first grade? If he or she is on track for fourth grade? These may be common questions, but the answers are not so easy. As discussed throughout this guide, the domains of early child development are multifaceted. They include cognition, general knowledge, language, literacy, numeracy, motor and physical development, social-emotional development and a child's approach to learning.

Understanding the complexity, effective principals reframe the dialogue and ask a second question: *How do we know this child is learning?* Despite policymakers' tendencies to try to apply uniform responses to the complex questions of child development, principals know that communicating effectively with parents, childcare providers and others throughout the Pre-K-3 learning community is an ongoing and broad-ranging dialogue. Effective principals share multiple forms of data of a child's progress and examples of a child's work. They talk continually with teachers, parents and providers outside of school about how to support a child's growth.

One way to do this is through a process known as "data talks," where principals share multiple forms of data and talk with parents and their children about what the data means and how to make meaning of it. These talks are often not only a way to share information with families but also a way to build families' understanding of different assessments, a training of sorts on the purposes and uses of assessments, including their limitations.

Effective principals know that "test" is not just another four-letter word. When tests are used to help educators identify where a child is on his or her personal learning path, and to guide discussion of the instructional strategies needed to ensure future growth, assessment data can be a very powerful tool indeed.

the stakes. Standardized assessment scores must never be used as the sole or primary criterion to measure student performance; to rate, grade or rank principal, teacher, or school effectiveness; to allocate funds; or to take punitive measures against schools and/or school personnel.

Principals know that there are significant issues in applying high-stakes consequences to tests taken by the youngest learners. Non-paper-and-pencil tasks can be valid assessments for young learners, with some caveats. For one, young children can, quite simply, be relied on to be developmentally unreliable test takers: Young children have a limited ability to comprehend traditional testing cues; they may not be able to read the instructions or manage the technology; they get bored, tired, hungry, anxious; and they have trouble sitting still.

A number of multiple measures systems are used across the country for children age three to grade three, including the Work Sampling System (WSS). It is designed for students age three to eight and facilitates the collection and evaluation of observations and examples of student work. The WSS has been demonstrated to have both strong validity (meaning that the measure is accurate) and good reliability (meaning the measure is consistent, regardless of who does the measuring).

Effective leaders of Pre-K-3 learning communities work with teachers to use assessments and assessment data to understand a student's specific challenges and needs, to help identify learning barriers, and to guide and inform instruction that can help children learn. One strategy principals use to help tailor instruction to a child's individual needs is a response to intervention (RTI) framework.

Share information about program effectiveness among schools and other providers.

Beyond looking at the individual progress of students and using data from multiple forms of assessment to measure student performance and inform instruction that can guide that growth, principals play an important role in collecting and sharing data that assesses the effectiveness of Pre-K-3 programs overall.

Discrepancies exist across the Pre-K-3 early education system, as standards and measurement tools are different for teachers working in the K-12 system and those working in childcare and Pre-K programs. For instance, for programs serving children up to age five, many states use Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS), which identify, rate and enhance the quality of programs based on a wide array of criteria, such as adult-child ratios and how well teachers respond to student needs. Once a child gets into kindergarten and first, second and third grades, and thus is no longer considered to be in a preschool "program," the quality of instruction is evaluated by the school system, which is likely to use a combination of measures of teachers' abilities, including credentials, portfolios and, increasingly as discussed above, student test scores.

"To lift the quality of education for all our nation's students and to narrow the persistent achievement gaps, teacher observation has to move to a more prominent place in education policy."
— New America Foundation

The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) measures interactions in three domains (emotional climate, classroom organization and instructional support). CLASS uses a seven-point scale, with a score of one indicating that teachers are providing only rudimentary responses to children's questions, and a score of seven indicating that the teacher is pushing new levels of understanding, tapping into the child's curiosity.

Other tools for early childhood settings (most often those outside of schools) focus on how rooms are arranged for play and privacy; how many books are available at a child's level; how many staff members greet children and parents; the amount of time allotted to individual and group work; and informal use of language. These tools, known as environmental rating scales, are often used as measures of safe, healthy and productive environments for young children. Some go further and focus on children's growth, development and general well-being, including attention to physical activity and nutrition.

No matter which evaluation tool principals use to assess their Pre-K-3 learning environments and the strength of teaching within them, principals should share the results with all stakeholders in the learning community. And, they should dig deep into the results with teachers to discuss how to align professional development and coaching supports in ways that can increase the effectiveness of teaching at all levels.

Whether in one school or multiple settings, principals should also work along the Pre-K-3 continuum to provide a continuous loop of feedback to support improved practice. Like the instruct-assess-instruct cycle outlined as a way to promote student improvement in Competency Two, a cycle of observation-implement new strategies-more observation is needed to promote teacher development and improved instructional practice.

Seven Assessment Skills Educators Need

1 How to define clear learning goals, which are the basis of developing or choosing ways to assess student learning.

2 How to make use of a variety of assessment methods to gather evidence of student learning.

3 How to analyze achievement data (both quantitative and qualitative) and make good inferences from the data gathered.

4 How to provide appropriate feedback to students.

5 How to make appropriate instructional modifications to help students improve.

6 How to involve students in the assessment process (e.g., self and peer assessment) and effectively communicate results.

7 And, most important, how to engineer an effective classroom assessment environment that boosts student motivation to learn.

SERVE Center, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2004.

Spotlight on
Effective Practice

Use Multiple Measures of Assessment to Guide Growth in Student Learning Delaware Office of Early Learning, Wilmington, DE

Through its 2012 Race to the Top–Early Learning Challenge Grant, the Delaware Office of Early Learning has created a comprehensive system for implementing a statewide Early Learner Survey to reach all children and close the school readiness gap.

The Delaware Early Learner Survey, or the kindergarten entry assessment, is conducted within a child's first 30 days of entering school and assesses the following five domains: language and literacy development; cognition and general knowledge; approaches towards learning; physical well-being and motor development; and social and emotional development. The teacher-administered survey has been adapted from Teaching Strategies GOLD and aligned with Early Learning Foundations and the Common Core.

The assessment not only informs individualized instruction, services and interventions throughout the early grades, but it also provides aggregate data for state and local policymakers as they make decisions regarding resource allocations.

To help prepare educators to be successful in administering the Early Learning Survey, the Office of Early Learning has created a professional development system that includes a combination of in-person collective trainings and peer-to-peer supports offered during the months of April to August. A few school districts have even moved to a staggered kindergarten school year start to help support teachers in assessing all incoming students.

The state provides stipends to teachers to act as "ELS Advisors" throughout the school year and assist or mentor new teachers utilizing the assessment. It is also encouraged for districts to identify a communications team to create an open dialogue around the survey process between the state and school leaders. Administrator trainings and webinars are offered to ensure that principals, superintendents and curriculum coordinators understand the process that their teachers are implementing.

The first cohort of 100 teachers assessed over 1,000 children across the state in 14 out of Delaware's 15 school districts, with the second cohort growing to 325 (or 60 percent) of the classrooms across the state. To sustain the work after the completion of the grant, the state has passed legislation, authorized by 2012 House Bill 317, mandating statewide school participation in the Delaware Early Learner Survey by the 2015-2016 school year.

Shifting to a Learner-Centered Model
Henry L. Cottrell Elementary School, Monmouth, ME

Five years ago, Principal Deborah Emery led a fundamental change in the way teachers and students interact at Henry L. Cottrell Elementary School. The school shifted its focus from teacher-centered to learner-centered instruction. The impact on the school community has been significant.

A proficiency-based approach to demonstrating learning is at the center of this environment. Teachers and students work collaboratively to learn concepts and processes laid out in a continuum of learning targets across subject areas and grades. Students let teachers know when they are ready to demonstrate proficiency in a learning target. This collaborative approach to learning "takes the secrecy out of student grades and progress" and celebrates everyday learning, according to third grade teacher Jana Armstrong.

Assessment is an ongoing process at Henry L. Cottrell. Teachers introduce a new learning target through direct instruction. Students work in small groups, individually, with technology or with the teacher to build understanding and proficiency in a particular learning target. Regular formative assessments indicate the student's level of proficiency—the goal being to demonstrating complex understanding of targeted ideas and concepts. When a student has demonstrated this level of proficiency he takes a summative assessment.

Through the process, students have voice and choice in how they learn a target, and how the target is assessed. Teacher and student share ownership in the strategies they adopt to learn and assess each learning target. Teachers note that they feel differently about student success, or lack of success, in their classrooms. "We became so responsible for their learning," said one teacher.

According to Principal Deborah Emery, "everything tells us something about student learning." When she visits a classroom, she's looking for clear evidence of the standard students are working on, opportunities for students to accelerate their learning, points in the learning to demonstrate voice and choice and indicators of whether the environment is engaging, with all students busy learning.

Implementing a learner-centered, proficiency-based approach to instruction at Henry L. Cottrell Elementary School has been a challenging but rewarding experience that has energized the entire community.

COMPETENCIES FOR EFFECTIVE PRINCIPAL PRACTICE

Questions for Reflection

Build understanding throughout the learning community of the various purposes and appropriate uses of different student assessments to improve teaching and learning. Is everyone in our learning community assessment literate? Does our learning community have a common understanding of the types of assessments we are using in our classrooms and their purposes? Are we using the assessments as they are intended? Are we using diagnostic testing consistently to identify learner gaps and interests? What more can we do to use formative assessments to drive improvements in our instructional strategies? How are we using data from interim/benchmark assessments as a way to help us identify barriers to learning? Are we using summative assessment results appropriately, and supplementing the results with other evidence of student learning?

Support teachers in using multiple forms of assessments, along with observation, portfolios and anecdotal records, to guide student learning and growth all along the Pre-K-3 continuum. Are we using assessment data to monitor and improve individual assessment, school wide learning and teaching practices? What supports do our teachers need in using common and consistent diagnostic and screening assessments, across age/grade levels, to identify children who need extra help or extra challenge? What more can I do to help teachers use common and consistent formative and summative child assessments as a tool for reflection that can help them improve their teaching practice?

Support open and collaborative discussions about assessment data with parents and community. Have we built assessment loops in which data is shared between early learning programs and schools? Am I communicating not only with early learning program leaders but also the schools my third-graders will go into? What more can I do to encourage families to participate in assessment efforts where they can provide and receive honest, accurate and regular information about their child's progress across multiple domains of learning?

Share information about program effectiveness among schools and other providers. What kinds of data and information am I sharing regularly about our Pre-K-3 program with schools and community members? How am I creating transparency and dialogue about what is working and what more can be done to improve learning for all students? How am I helping to build the community's understanding of what a quality Pre-K-3 program looks like? How much are our data results influencing our decisions about professional development and continual improvement?

Notes Type your notes below.

Self-Assessment Tool

Use the Questions for Further Reflection to help you think about and rate the degree to which each Competency Four strategy is evident in your school or in your practice as school leader. Use the checkboxes below to note your ratings.

1 Not evident in my school/practice.

2 Somewhat evident in my school/practice.

3 Consistently evident in my school/practice.

4 Consistently evident, with practices that elaborate upon or exceed expectations.

Self-Assessment: Beginning of the Year	1	2	3	4
Build understanding throughout the learning community of the various purposes and appropriate uses of different student assessments to improve teaching and learning.				
Support teachers in using multiple forms of assessments, along with observation, portfolios and anecdotal records, to guide student learning and growth all along the Pre-K-3 continuum.				
Support open and collaborative discussions about assessment data with parents and community.				
Share information about program effectiveness among schools and other providers.				

Self-Assessment: Middle of the Year	1	2	3	4
Build understanding throughout the learning community of the various purposes and appropriate uses of different student assessments to improve teaching and learning.				
Support teachers in using multiple forms of assessments, along with observation, portfolios and anecdotal records, to guide student learning and growth all along the Pre-K-3 continuum.				
Support open and collaborative discussions about assessment data with parents and community.				
Share information about program effectiveness among schools and other providers.				

COMPETENCIES FOR EFFECTIVE PRINCIPAL PRACTICE

Self-Assessment: Beginning of the Year	1	2	3	4
Build understanding throughout the learning community of the various purposes and appropriate uses of different student assessments to improve teaching and learning.				
Support teachers in using multiple forms of assessments, along with observation, portfolios and anecdotal records, to guide student learning and growth all along the Pre-K-3 continuum.				
Support open and collaborative discussions about assessment data with parents and community.				
Share information about program effectiveness among schools and other providers.				

Resources To Help You Learn and Do More

Websites

www.assessmentliteracy.org | **Northwest Evaluation Association** is a resource intended to build the understanding and responsible use of assessment data across educators and the public.

www.erikson.edu | **Erikson Institute** is the nation's premier graduate school in child development, working to improve the care and education of children from birth to age 8.

Relevant Research

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Meisels, Samuel J. (2006). *Accountability in Early Childhood: No Easy Answers.* Chicago, IL: Herr Research Center for Children and Social Policy at Erikson Institute.

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Stevenson-Garcia, Judi, Shannon Riley-Ayers and Ellen Frede. "Looking at Student Work: Using Peer-to-Peer Teacher Workgroups to Establish Accuracy and Usefulness of Child Observations." Presentation at the National Association for the Education of Young Children Annual Conference, Orlando, FL, Nov. 2-5, 2011.

Snow, Catherine E. and Susan B. Van Hemel., eds. (2008). *Early Childhood Assessment: Why, What, and How?* Washington, DC: National Research Council of the National Academies.

Build Professional Capacity Across the Learning Community

Effective principals build collaborative working environments that support the professional growth of all who work in them.

Effective leaders know that in order to improve the learning of children, every member of the learning community must be continually learning, including all teachers—and principals themselves.

In order to ensure that every child receives a high-quality Pre-K-3 education, principals and the entire learning community must have the will and capability to implement it. While many principals across the country want to add and align Pre-K programs, their districts or schools often don't have the resources or capacity. Many communities are faced with budget cuts, disjointed early education systems and lack of knowledge about how to make Pre-K-3 work.

Stacie Goffin's research states that of more than 50 self-reported early childhood education leadership development programs, only one—the University of Kentucky's Educational Leadership Studies graduate program—describes itself as targeting individuals in or aspiring to leadership positions in educational organizations serving children and youth (early childhood through postsecondary). Only four programs self-identified as addressing development of a Pre-K-3 continuum:

Pennsylvania and New Jersey's state education agencies and the P-3 Education Policy & Leadership Program in the College of Education at the University of Washington. These programs include participants from both the birth to five and K-3 systems and address both content knowledge and leadership. Connecticut's early childhood office is developing a leadership program for elementary school principals.

Strategies/indicators of the competency in practice

- Build principal professional knowledge about what is age- and developmentally-appropriate across the continuum.
- Support ongoing, job-embedded professional learning opportunities for teachers all along the continuum.
- Support professional learning communities that focus on authentic work.

Build principal professional knowledge about what is age- and developmentally-appropriate across the continuum.

Principal leadership is an essential element of a successful Pre-K-3 program. Despite the importance of leadership development to ensuring Pre-K-3 success, the preparation and professional development of principals has not been a key focus of the workforce development for the Pre-K-3 continuum. Indeed, as of the time of this writing, little attention is being paid to the leadership development in Pre-K-3. A survey of early childhood leadership development programs suggests that the field does not fully recognize the potential of leadership to serve as a change catalyst, although there is increasing evidence on the topic.

Principals who streamline the core elements of teaching and learning, and who pay special attention to grade-level transitions, are taking steps toward effective Pre-K-3 alignment. Principals can do this by integrating standards and curricula to ensure that what is taught in one grade leads seamlessly into the next. Doing so enables them to work closely with teachers to support children in knowing and

What and *how* teachers learn is more important than simply attending a number of professional development workshops or courses that may have no meaning for them in their classrooms. *Job-embedded professional development*, when conducted correctly, is more effective than traditional professional development because it better addresses the needs of the adult learners.

Job-embedded professional development is defined as teacher learning that is grounded in day-to-day practice and designed to enhance teachers' content-specific instructional practices with the intent of improving student learning.

Principals who support job-embedded professional development know that it requires a direct connection between learning and application in daily practice, thereby requiring active teacher involvement in cooperative, inquiry-based work. According to the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, there are three primary characteristics of job-embedded professional development:

- Takes place in the classroom, in real time, with current students, and is centered on issues of actual practice;
- Takes place in the classroom, in nearly real time, away from students, and is centered on issues of actual practice; and
- Takes place in the school, shortly before or after instruction, away from students, and is centered on issues of actual practice.

What is not job-embedded professional development? Professional learning that is removed from instruction currently going on in the classroom, conducted away from students and centered on issues not likely in practice.

Principals can support job-embedded professional development through activities that include the development and review of case studies and action research based on observations of their teachers. They can also support teacher practice in schools through individual teacher learning plans and the development of teacher portfolios of work used directly in the classroom. In addition, principals can also incorporate professional learning into the teachers' workday by encouraging and supporting teachers to work in collaborative teams, both horizontally and vertically to improve instruction and effectiveness in the classroom. This might include forming critical peer groups where teachers discuss each other's work or creating data teams that analyze assessment results and discuss teaching strategies to address them. Or, a principal might convene sessions where teachers come together to examine student work.

doing what they should at each stage of development—and assuring that they master each step.

Beyond just supporting and advocating for a Pre-K-3 vision, principals must understand child development themselves and apply that knowledge to support effective teaching, classroom management and professional development. Principals must also focus on conducting appropriate and meaningful classroom observations and teacher evaluations. With an understanding of the different stages of child development, principals can also be more effective in explaining to parents what they should expect at certain ages and work with them to help children make progress socially and emotionally. Knowledge of appropriate practice also enables principals to have better understanding of how to structure the learning day and to have an influence on the physical structure of classrooms and, where possible, even their school campuses.

Support ongoing, job-embedded professional learning opportunities for teachers all along the continuum.

Substantial research shows that meaningful professional development has a measurable positive effect on student achievement. Teachers who have access to professional learning experiences tailored to meet their students' needs will engage regularly in their own learning.

Effective principals ensure that the majority of teachers' annual professional development is informed by current research and student-based data. Such data should be focused on effective instruction, and structured to build collaborative relationships among teachers.

When principals provide coaching or mentoring teacher on how to implement content-rich and engaging curricula, they often see substantial progress in ensuring improved instruction. Such coaching and mentoring involves modeling positive instructional approaches and providing feedback on the teacher's implementation in a way that sets goals but is also supportive. This can occur either directly in the classroom or through the web-based exchange of video clips.

Support professional learning communities that focus on authentic work.

Principals must create a collaborative professional learning environment where all members believe that working together is the best way to achieve a collective purpose. Knowing that evidence indicates that working collaboratively represents best practice, effective principals work to create structures to promote a collaborative culture.

Effective principals create learning communities within schools that ensure that adults have many opportunities to work and learn together—whether sharing ideas and knowledge, developing and testing new approaches, or studying and analyzing student data. Teachers and administrators continuously seek and share learning and then act on what they learn. The goal of their actions is to enhance their effectiveness as professionals so that students benefit.

According to Rick DuFour, the powerful collaboration that characterizes professional learning communities is a systematic process in which teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice. Teachers work in teams, engaging in an ongoing cycle of questions that promote deep team learning. This process, in turn, leads to higher levels of student achievement.
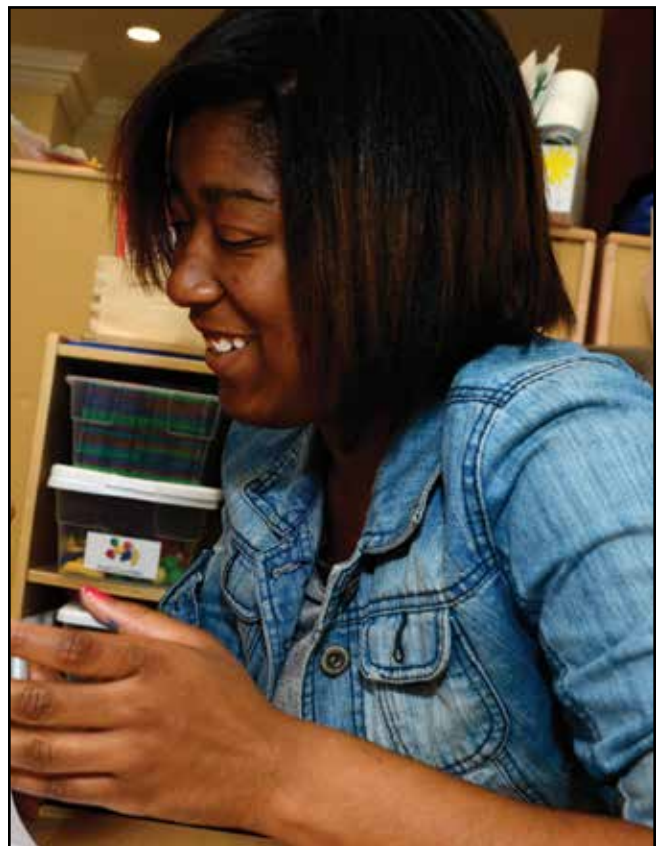
The professional learning community is seen as a powerful staff development approach and a potent strategy for school change and improvement. Over the past 25 years, research on teacher workplace factors in teaching quality has held that teachers who feel supported in their own ongoing learning and classroom practice were more committed and effective than those who did not. Teachers with a high sense of their own efficacy were more likely to adopt new classroom behaviors and also more likely to stay in the profession.

The term learning community has come to mean different things to different people. It is sometimes used to mean extending classroom practice into the community and bringing community personnel into the school to enhance the curriculum and learning tasks for students. Sometimes it means engaging students, teachers and administrators simultaneously in learning.

Effective principals can help build a context conducive to change and improvement by reducing staff isolation, increasing staff capacity, supporting a caring and productive environment, and improving the quality of the school's programs for students.

Principals can support conditions for professional learning communities by providing time, structures and opportunities for adults to plan work, reflect and celebrate to improve practice. To share learning and knowledge across the learning community, effective leaders create information and administrative systems that align schedules, budgets, facilities, communications, transportation and human resources functions to instruction.

Effective principals also recognize that time is a resource. Meeting and talking requires time, a precious commodity in schools, as in most organizations. Time can be a supportive factor for staffs engaging in school improvement.

Spotlight on
Effective Practice

Build Professional Capacity Across the Learning Community Hawaii P-3 Initiative, Honolulu, HI

The statewide Hawaii P-3 Initiative is dedicated to establishing and supporting local partnerships that promote a cohesive and aligned continuum of services for children birth through age eight. The Initiative is a specific program of the Hawaii P-20 Partnerships for Education, which is led by the Executive Office of Early Learning, the Hawaii State Department of Education and the University of Hawaii System.

Through funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Harold K.L. Castle Foundation, the Samuel N. and Mary Castle Foundation and the Kamehameha Schools, the Hawaii P-3 Initiative supports five demonstration sites across the islands. These sites develop a "spider web" of early childhood and elementary school partnerships focused on the goal of improving access to quality educational experiences and supporting students to read on grade level by third grade.

All demonstration sites focus on seven areas of improvement: leadership in literacy; standards, curriculum and assessment; instruction; teacher professional development; comprehensive early learning services; family and school partnerships; and data. As the P-3 Demonstration Project Coordinator of the Windward District stated, "This was something that we knew we needed to do and weren't able to fully do until we were given this opportunity."

To strengthen the alignment of practices, standards and assessments from preschool to grade three, demonstration sites provide extensive technical assistance and professional development opportunities to both educators and principals. Educator professional development opportunities often include: CLASS trainings and coaching; transition conferences for Pre-K and kindergarten teachers; and best practices workshops.

Sites have also provided specific technical assistance for principals around the importance of building preschool to grade three communities. Opportunities have included: quarterly meetings; symposiums with preschool directors around early learning initiatives; workshops around effective practices to support grade level reading; and conferences to build awareness and understanding around effective leadership.

Build Professional Capacity Across the Learning Community University of Illinois in Chicago, College of Education Carson Elementary School, Chicago, IL

Research, practice and common sense point to the importance of supporting Pre-K-3 leaders in their efforts to build professional and practical knowledge about how best to structure and manage a school environment that embraces and respects early learners and early learning. Buoyed by the implementation of universal preschool in Illinois, Steve Tozer and his colleagues at the University of Illinois in Chicago (UIC) partnered with Chicago Public Schools (CPS) to create a unique principal certification program.

What is the biggest takeaway from Tozer's learning as he has implemented the UIC program? Principals are well-served by taking the same approach to developing teachers and staff as they do to engaging students— meeting teachers where they are in their development, and supporting their trajectory of growth, whatever that may be.

That is the philosophy that was implemented by Kathleen Mayer during her 16 years as principal of the Pre-K-8 CPS Carson Elementary School. Mayer supported her staff through a combination of vertical and horizontal teacher-led trainings and outside professional development opportunities. Staff members participated in child development trainings, earned their master's degrees and became certified in bilingual education.

She also helped lead her staff in designing the school's Pre-K program, the development of a specific Pre-K-3 school building and the integration of Reggio Emilia practices into student learning. At the time of her retirement, Carson Elementary School had a 97 percent attendance rate.

As Mayer stated, "It's not enough to know what good early childhood or early elementary looks like; it's about being able to believe it and do it in spite of the ups and downs of whatever is going on nationally or locally."

Questions for Reflection

Build principal professional knowledge about what is age—and developmentally-appropriate. Are my expectations for grade-level performance, particularly in prekindergarten and kindergarten, realistic based on the child development research? What changes to instruction are needed in our learning community based on the child's perspective? What changes are needed in classroom observations and management?

Support ongoing, job-embedded professional learning opportunities for teachers all along the continuum. Can I demonstrate innovative efforts to create and standardize time for school- and community-based teachers to work together across different daily, weekly, quarterly and school year calendars? Is there evidence that teacher instruction and effectiveness are improving over time? Do we use observational tools to assess teacher practice and effectiveness? Do teachers tell me they feel I support them in improving their practices? Do we provide release time and other supports for teachers to observe each other's classrooms?

Support professional learning communities that focus on authentic work. How do we know that teachers feel supported in their work? Do we provide time for teachers to meet and discuss each other's and student work? How are we bringing community resources into the learning community? What additional changes can we make to align schedules, budgets and other resources with engaging staff in how to support effective learning?

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Self-Assessment Tool

Use the Questions for Further Reflection to help you think about and rate the degree to which each Competency Five strategy is evident in your school or in your practice as school leader. Use the checkboxes below to note your ratings.

1 Not evident in my school/practice.

2 Somewhat evident in my school/practice.

3 Consistently evident in my school/practice.

4 Consistently evident, with practices that elaborate upon or exceed expectations.

Self-Assessment: Beginning of the Year	1	2	3	4
Build principal professional knowledge about what is age- and developmentally-appropriate.				
Support ongoing, job-embedded professional learning opportunities for teachers all along the continuum.				
Support professional learning communities that focus on authentic work.				

Self-Assessment: Middle of the Year	1	2	3	4
Build principal professional knowledge about what is age- and developmentally-appropriate.				
Support ongoing, job-embedded professional learning opportunities for teachers all along the continuum.				
Support professional learning communities that focus on authentic work.				

Self-Assessment: End of the Year	1	2	3	4
Build principal professional knowledge about what is age- and developmentally-appropriate.				
Support ongoing, job-embedded professional learning opportunities for teachers all along the continuum.				
Support professional learning communities that focus on authentic work.				

Resources To Help You Learn and Do More

Websites

www.ceelo.org | **Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes** is one of 22 comprehensive centers funded by the U.S. Department of Education. CEELO has designed an Early Education Leadership Academy for early learning and K-3 for state and local education agency administrators.

www.learningforward.org | **Learning Forward** advances educator effectiveness and student results through standards-based professional learning.

www.schoolreadiness consulting.com | **School Readiness Consulting** promotes capacity building in early childhood education through practice, policy and evaluation services.

Relevant Research

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National Governors Association. (2013). *Leading for Early Success: Building School Principals' Capacity to Lead High-Quality Early Education.* Washington, DC: National Governors Association.

Rice, Cynthia C. and Nonie Lesaux. (2012). *Early Learning Instructional Leaders and Strong PreK-3rd Student Assessment Systems: The New Jersey Story.* Newark, NJ: Advocates for Children of New Jersey.

Additional Tools

The Framework for Planning, Implementing and Evaluating Pre-K-3rd Grade Approaches, developed by Kristie Kauerz at the University of Washington and Julia Coffman at the Center for Evaluation Innovation, contains eight categories of effort and is designed to help users understand how their own strategies fit into a comprehensive and systemic Pre-K-3 frame.

COMPETENCIES FOR EFFECTIVE PRINCIPAL PRACTICE

Make Your School a Hub of Pre-K-3 Learning for Families and Communities

Effective principals work with families, prekindergarten programs and community organizations to build strong Pre-K-3 linkages.

Principals who have an understanding of both elementary and early childhood education are able to develop creative and impactful strategies for ensuring effective learning from age three to grade three. When a principal's knowledge is supported by the commitment and skills to create meaningful partnerships—within and outside the learning community—that principal is poised to bring every available resource to bear in ensuring that those strategies are implemented effectively across the Pre-K-3 continuum.

Linking early learning and elementary learning can help children and families experience smooth transitions and continuity of practice across early care and elementary schools settings so that children thrive all through the early elementary years. To achieve this goal, effective principals engage a number of partners in meeting the social, emotional, academic and physical needs of their students and their families. Such connections are not all that common, but effective principals see them as a natural extension of a school's work.

By recognizing the important role of these multiple players, effective principals redefine a *child's readiness* for kindergarten as an issue of *child, family and school readiness.* This requires that principals help their learning communities shift their thinking, dialogue and practice to support all three components. Foremost, principals must create a school culture in which parents and community members feel a sense of belonging and know that they help to form a child's learning network and thus are regarded as essential to the school learning community.

Successful principals engage families in regular, intentional and meaningful two-way communications. Families are essential members of school leadership teams. Authentic family engagement is a core priority to effective principals.

Broadening the focus from the child to include both family

and community also means that principals recognize that learning occurs beyond the school walls, in a variety of settings and beyond the traditional hours of the school day. Principals look for afterschool and summer opportunities to enrich and enhance learning opportunities for children throughout the Pre-K-3 continuum.

Strategies/indicators of the competency in practice

- Develop a welcoming environment and sense of belonging and cultivate a shared responsibility for children's learning from age three to grade three.
- Provide meaningful transitions between preschool and elementary school.
- Develop out-of-school and summer learning opportunities for children from age three to grade three.
- Blend and braid funding to maximize resource opportunities.

Develop a welcoming environment and sense of belonging and cultivate a shared responsibility for children's learning from age three to grade three.

Principals who refer to learning across the Pre-K-3 continuum as the collective work of educators, parents, community members and students themselves help to create shared responsibility for those efforts. Principals can cultivate shared responsibility by deepening the dialogue about learning, which in turn helps to build mutual respect among multiple players. The result is often improved practice for everyone in the learning community.

Getting to a culture of shared responsibility for student learning starts with developing an open and welcoming climate in schools for parents, early care providers and others throughout the community. Leaders of such learning communities practice two-way communications: sharing good news as well as not-so-good news with parents and community members through a variety of communications vehicles, while listening to and learning from parents' ideas. Studies of parent engagement show that most outreach to parents can be simply characterized as too little, too late. In short, schools wait too long and do too little to connect with families and children.

Studies find that the negative effects of poverty on the home environment are mediated through school-based parent involvement. Principals can develop meaningful and collaborative relationships with parents and community partners by bringing them into the school and building understanding of Pre-K-3 learning in safe and non-threatening ways.

Effective early learning programs focus on creating numerous interactions and interventions designed to fit family needs. So, in addition to encouraging parents to come into school, principals can develop relationships and trust by encouraging their teachers and staff to make home visits. Training teams in cultural competency and family-centered approaches can help to ensure that these visits are of appropriate intensity and duration. When schools carefully and conscientiously participate in home visiting, results have shown improved parenting practices, the creation for more stable and suitable learning environments at home and increased parent engagement in schools. Outcomes for children include increases in both cognitive and social-emotional competence.

According to a June 2014 NAESP survey of Pre-K through eighth-grade principals, many principals identify and work with teacher leaders in Pre-K-3 to help drive professional development and collaborative structures within the school to support instruction. It is important that principals look for qualities that strong teacher leaders demonstrate, such as strong communication and professional skills, content knowledge, ability to develop relationships, coaching and mentoring knowledge, pedagogical skills, credibility, strategic planning, acceptance of accountability, being a team member, and outcomes-oriented. When teacher leaders play a vital part in decision-making, there is personal motive and buy-in to make sure student achievement and school targets are met. Teacher leaders motivate and collaborate with other teachers to foster teamwork, and, working hand-in-hand with a skilled principal, is a winning formula for continuous school improvement. . Yet, the primary responsibility and direction for improvement and change must come from the principal.

Getting to a culture of shared responsibility for student learning starts with developing an open and welcoming climate in schools.

Research shows that students are most successful academically and socially when their parents are involved and engaged in their learning. While the quality of teaching is paramount, adding the value of an engaged parent is the equivalent of contributing jet fuel propulsion to a child's education. Indeed, study after study suggests that improving parental engagement can help turn around the nation's achievement problems. Support parents in their role as teachers and learning coaches by sharing with them data on student progress, academic goals and instructional resources.

By strengthening family involvement, effective principals create opportunities—before and after school and in the summer—for parents to learn new skills to effectively support their children in school. Strategies that cross language and cultural barriers in such programs can help clear up misunderstandings and misinformation.

Effective principals understand the benefits of a clear commitment to communicating with parents and families about student learning progress, including ideas for how parents can help support their child's learning. These principals know that ensuring that parents are clear about what their child knows and is able to do advances the chances of parents helping their child progress.

Provide meaningful transitions between preschool and elementary school.

The potential of a child's development is not predetermined. It's not set by socio-economic status, the origin of one's birth or the attributes or frailties of one's parents. Nor does

a child develop in a trajectory that continues to move upward in a straight line. Instead, children are influenced by each of the multiple environments and personalities they encounter, and their growth is a complex, dynamic interplay of all of their experiences.

Not surprisingly then, research shows that children have a smoother transition into elementary school when their schools and families are connected and when preschool learning and elementary practices are linked. Studies also show that kindergarten children whose teachers engage in the specific practices intended to support a smooth transition (like meeting with parents well before kindergarten starts or talking with an early childhood teacher to understand a child's learning needs) have better learning outcomes, including more positive social and academic competencies. Put simply: It's better for children when the adults around them form a network to understand and support them.

It's better for children when the adults around them form a network to understand and support them.

Particularly as principals implement higher state academic standards and other policies designed to promote coherence among and between educational programs, key transitions become more important—including the transition from prekindergarten to kindergarten and third to fourth

grade. The same is true for the needs of the whole child.

Effective principals provide an approach to early learning that spans preschool through third grade and that includes intentional efforts to promote smooth transitions into elementary schools.

Research shows that making explicit connections between developmental contexts, especially during critical transition points (such as increasing the connections across home and school environments when a child is moving to a new school setting) can help smooth out developmental transitions and guard against stressful and detrimental outcomes for young children. When principals act as a bridge between early and elementary learning contexts, they help to support and sustain children's development of new skills.

A review of research focusing on children's transition to kindergarten highlights promising practices for schools. These include developing partnerships between children, parents and teachers; setting the stage for the parent's role within their child's education; and promoting teacher professional development.

Principals can create effective partnerships between their schools, preschools and parents by:

- Using orientations, meetings, surveys and ongoing communications throughout the year to keep families informed
- Inviting families into classrooms, regularly and for special events
- Using a kindergarten registration day that comes well before the first day of school
- Communicating with parents personally rather than through form letters
- Donating books to families to support the building of home libraries
- Co-creating student portfolios and examples of student work with preschool teachers and sharing ' with teachers and families
- Bringing preschool children into school setting to familiarize them with new settings, including classrooms and lunchrooms
- Bringing in local leaders to support preschool and elementary learning and building their understanding of the importance of transitions
- Reporting performance data and discussing the results

Develop out-of-school and summer learning opportunities for children from age three to grade three.

Principals who want to close achievement gaps invest in out-of-school time and summer learning activities. Research finds that elementary school-age children who participate in structured afterschool programs have better academic and motivational outcomes than their peers who participate in other forms of out-of-school time care, such as parent care, sibling care, or informal adult supervision.

Effective principals also understand that many parents are relieved to know that their children are safe and productively engaged during regular work hours. By connecting students to family learning programs in the school before school, after school and during the summer, effective principals are able to create a relationship with children and their families as early as age three and develop that relationship through the elementary years. This can have a powerful impact on family satisfaction, which can lead to a child's success in school.

Research released by the C.S. Mott Foundation in 2013 demonstrates that more time spent by an elementary school child in afterschool programs leads to better work habits, improved academic performance, gains in self-efficacy, improved grade-point average and increased attendance/reduced absences. Conversely, unstructured time that a child spends with his or her peers after school is associated with more school absences, lower grades, greater misconduct and reductions in work habits and self-efficacy.

Likewise, research proves categorically that students lose ground academically when they are out of school for the summer. For low-income students who do not spend their summers traveling, reading, or participating in the engaging camps or other enriched activities that their more affluent peers experience during the same period, summer learning loss is even more acute. According to the Campaign for Grade Level Reading, low-income students lose an average of more than two months in reading achievement in the summer, which slows their progress toward third grade reading proficiency and widens the achievement gap with their middle-class peers.

Principals can close the achievement gap and narrow learning loss by offering or supporting quality programs that engage more children in afterschool and summer learning opportunities. Principals know that exposing children to engaging academic and project-based learning, combined with a mix of sports, arts and technology, can create a set of meaningful learning experiences that accelerates achievement, wards off learning losses, and keeps children meaningfully and safely engaged while developing supportive relationships.

Blend and braid funding to maximize resource opportunities.

It seems that budgets are always tight and getting tighter. That doesn't stop principals from needing access to funds for capital improvements, professional learning and other resources to support an effective age three to grade three continuum. For instance, prekindergarten programs require staffing, supplies and materials of instruction, but they often also require some capital investment to ensure classrooms meet the needs of younger learners.

Many school districts pay for Pre-K-3 programs by real-locating dollars already in the system. Forty states and the District of Columbia provide funding for prekindergarten for four-year-old children. The agencies that administer this funding vary by state. In some cases, funding augments Head Start and early childhood funding; in other states, the funding augments kindergarten and prekindergarten programs. While the majority of states have increased their investment in prekindergarten programs, not all of them focus on supporting universal high-quality programs.

Even as public funding for early learning has grown, resources remain so limited that only a fraction of children and families have access to the services they need. This has led some principals to work with community partners to take another look at a variety of federal, state and school district general funds—and sometimes even private funding—to support their goals. This innovative strategy, known as "blending" and "braiding," involves a process of

COMPETENCIES FOR EFFECTIVE PRINCIPAL PRACTICE

pooling resources and sharing programs in one setting.

According to the nonprofit organization Ounce of Prevention, blended funding combines funds from two or more separate funding sources and wraps them together within one full program budget to pay for a unified set of program services to a group of children. When blended, costs are not necessarily allocated and tracked by individual funding source. In braided funding, two or more funding sources are coordinated to support the total costs of services to individual children, but revenues are allocated and expenditures are tracked by categorical funding source. In braiding, cost allocation is required to assure there is no duplicate funding of service costs and that each source of funding is charged its fair share of program and administrative costs. Some states use other terms for these practices, referring to them as layering, using collaborative funds, cost sharing or engaging in coordinated resource sharing.

As more schools use Title I funding for Pre-K, effective principals are building their understanding of where and how it can be used effectively. In many cases, effective principals find that using Title I funds earlier will reduce gaps that need to be closed later.

There are plenty of reasons principals can find for not stepping into this complex work. But leaders know that changes do not occur unless forward-thinking champions, with knowledge of the barriers and needs, step up to make connections and build bridges where they do not currently exist.

By the Numbers

2
Age by which poor children are already behind their peers in listening, counting and other skills essential to literacy.

3
Age by which a child's vocabulary can predict third grade reading achievement.

22
Number of letters a typical middle-class child recognizes by age five, compared to nine for a child from a low-income family.

61
Percent of low-income children who have no children's books at home.

30,000,000
Number of fewer words poor children hear as compared to their more-affluent peers.

Source: Campaign for Grade-Level Reading website, www.gradelevelreading.net.

Spotlight on
Effective Practice

Make Your School a Hub of Pre-K-3 Learning for Families and Communities Ericka Guynes, Earl Boyles Elementary School, Portland, OR

As principal of the Pre-K-5 Earl Boyles Elementary School, Ericka Guynes has continued to build relevancy around the importance of integrating early learning into K-12 education and developing meaningful opportunities of collaboration for both families and the broader community. In partnership with the Children's Institute and the Early Works Initiative, Principal Guynes and her staff have created a clear vision for what they call a "seamless system" between the early learning program and the K-5 classrooms.

In the early stages of planning, Principal Guynes conducted a community needs assessment with Portland State University to determine gaps in services, identify parental priority areas and develop short- and long-term strategies for implementation. The assessment helped the Earl Boyles staff to establish a common vision around what early learning looks like in a K-12 system and to engage early childhood experts throughout the process.

Principal Guynes also worked with the district Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN) coordinator to create culturally specific parent focus groups. These informal "cafés" provided parents with bilingual opportunities to share barriers and challenges to engagement and offer their own areas of interest. Principal Guynes knew that "parents are partners and that we have a lot to learn from them."

Parents have continued to engage in school activities even after the completion of the focus groups, creating a structured "Parents United" group to drive community services and advocate for issues at the city and state levels. With the help of the parents group, Earl Boyles is now in the process of creating an Early Learning Wing/Neighborhood Center at the school, which will serve as a community-centered hub of supports, resources and information focused on helping children to arrive better prepared for kindergarten.

Principal Guynes, who was named 2013 Oregon Elementary School Principal of the Year, recognized that "if we shift our resources earlier and really partner with our parents sooner, we can have an impact on our children."

As a result of its hard work, Earl Boyles has been chosen as an Early Works Initiative demonstration site for early childhood integration and recognized for the strong community presence in its goals and vision.

Make School a Hub of Pre-K Learning for Families and Communities Grove Early Childhood Center, Grove, OK

Imagine you are a four-year-old about to enter a new school. It is a big, scary place. There are lots of other children, teachers and school staff members. There are rules and procedures and lots to learn. The transition from home to school for the first time is a huge one. This is why Julie Bloss, principal of Grove Early Childhood Center, put so much thought into the design of her school building and how she engages community members.

Principal Bloss worked with teachers and an architect for young children to design her school, known as the "land of the little people." Grove Early Childhood Center is a physically welcoming place, where 200-gallon fish tanks are embedded in the walls of the main hallway. There are pictures and symbols hidden in the school's tile floors. Every classroom has a kitchen where students make snacks and play dough, and teachers are encouraged to do messy activities with their classes.

The school is also a welcoming place for families and community members. Grove, Oklahoma, is a rural community that celebrates its heritage and residents. Principal Bloss taps into this strong sense of community by taking every opportunity possible to make her students and school volunteers stars. She is active on social media, where she shares regular news about student and school success. The school's website features interactive pages for each classroom where teachers post lesson plans, classroom photos and other school and classroom information. The town newspaper posts photos of students and volunteers throughout the year.

Principal Bloss and the students of Grove Early Childhood Center are also television stars. Through a partnership with the local cable television company, the school hosts a daily live-news broadcast. Children receive character awards, talk about school activities and get to share important daily events on the air. According to Principal Bloss "the community loves to see the children being successful."

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Questions for Reflection

Develop a welcoming environment and sense of belonging and cultivate a shared responsibility for children's learning from age three to grade three. Are there dedicated spaces in our school where families can gather and where parents and community members can meet with teachers and the principal? Is family and community engagement part of our expected job descriptions? Is it incorporated into our professional evaluations? What specific professional learning support are we offering teachers to effectively improve our capacity to communicate with and engage families? Do we allocate specific time in the school calendar on a regular basis to meet with parents and families? Are we providing a variety of ongoing opportunities (face to face and via technology) to engage families in understanding and supporting their children's progress?

Provide meaningful transitions between preschool and elementary school. How am I serving as a bridge between early learning services (childcare, preschool and home care) and my elementary school? Are we working across the school to link families to support resources (health, social services, adult literacy and learning) to foster collaborations across the community and increase parent capacity to support their child's learning? Do we initiate new opportunities with potential community partners to help create bridges between early learning and elementary school settings?

Develop out-of-school and summer learning opportunities for children from age three to grade three. Am I articulating the value of afterschool and summer learning to student achievement and social growth to my teachers, parents and students? Have we mapped the afterschool and summer learning opportunities available to children in our school and made parents aware of them? Are we acting as active brokers to ensure that all children, especially those from disadvantaged households, have access to extended learning opportunities? Is there more we can do to create additional out-of-school activities at our school?

Blend and braid funding to maximize resource opportunities. To what extent am I actively seeking to create new partnerships and find new funding streams to create new opportunities to support children's learning? Has our school designated teams of teachers, administrators and families to think creatively and innovatively about what's needed to improve our learning community, based on staff and community input?

Notes Type your notes below.

Self-Assessment Tool

Use the Questions for Further Reflection to help you think about and rate the degree to which each Competency Six strategy is evident in your school or in your practice as school leader. Use the checkboxes below to note your ratings.

KEY

1 Not evident in my school/practice.
2 Somewhat evident in my school/practice.
3 Consistently evident in my school/practice.
4 Consistently evident, with practices that elaborate upon or exceed expectations.

Self-Assessment: Beginning of the Year	1	2	3	4
Develop a welcoming environment and sense of belonging and cultivate a shared responsibility for children's learning from age three to grade three.				
Provide meaningful transitions between preschool and elementary school.				
Develop out-of-school and summer learning opportunities for children from age three to grade three.				
Blend and braid funding to maximize resource opportunities.				

Self-Assessment: Middle of the Year	1	2	3	4
Develop a welcoming environment and sense of belonging and cultivate a shared responsibility for children's learning from age three to grade three.				
Provide meaningful transitions between preschool and elementary school.				
Develop out-of-school and summer learning opportunities for children from age three to grade three.				
Blend and braid funding to maximize resource opportunities.				

Self-Assessment: End of the Year	1	2	3	4
Develop a welcoming environment and sense of belonging and cultivate a shared responsibility for children's learning from age three to grade three.				
Provide meaningful transitions between preschool and elementary school.				
Develop out-of-school and summer learning opportunities for children from age three to grade three.				
Blend and braid funding to maximize resource opportunities.				

COMPETENCIES FOR EFFECTIVE PRINCIPAL PRACTICE

Resources To Help You Learn and Do More

Websites

www.attendanceworks.org | **Attendance Works** is a national and state initiative that promotes better policy and practice around school attendance.

www.gradelevelreading.net | **Campaign for Grade-Level Reading** is a collaborative of foundations, nonprofits, states and communities focused on third grade reading as the No. 1 predictor of school success.

www.childrensaidsociety.org | **The Children's Aid Society** helps children in poverty to succeed and thrive.

www.expandinglearning.org | **Expanded Learning and Afterschool** can connect you with research, resources and best practices for building affordable and sustainable approaches to expanding learning in your community.

www.familiesandwork.org | **Families and Work Institute** is a nonprofit center dedicated to providing research for living in today's changing workplace, family and community.

www.hfrp.org | **Harvard Family Research Project** conducts research and provides educator and practitioner resources in family involvement, out-of-school time, early childhood education and program evaluation.

www.ounceofprevention.org | **Ounce of Prevention Fund** () is a national organization that develops early childhood programs, trains providers and advocates for policies.

www.zerotothree.org | **Zero to Three** supports the healthy development and well-being of infants, toddlers and their families.

Relevant Research

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Patton, Christine and Justina Wang. (2012). *Ready for Success: Creating Collaborative and Thoughtful Transitions into Kindergarten.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project.

Peterson, Terry, ed. (2013). *Expanding Minds and Opportunities: Levering the Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success.* Washington, DC: Collaborative Communications Group.

Tout, Kathryn, Tamara Halle, Sarah Daily and Ladia Albertson-Junkans. (2013). *Child Trends: The Research Base for a Birth through Age Eight State Policy Framework.* Leawood, KS: Alliance for Early Success.

Tools

The Head Start Parent, Family and Community Engagement Framework: Promoting Family and School Readiness, Prenatal to Age 8 (https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/standards/im/2011/pfce-framework.pdf) was created by The National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement in 2011. The framework provides a research-based approach to promoting family engagement and children's learning.

Glossary of Terms

NAESP compiled the following glossary of terms with the early childhood education experts at School Readiness Consulting, an organization that provides practice-based support, policy and systems consultation, and program evaluation in early learning.

Accreditation—Accreditation indicates a level of quality above a program license that a state may require for program operations. Some early childhood accreditation bodies are early childhood specific (e.g., National Association for the Education of Young Children), and some accredit early childhood programs as part of the larger school community (e.g., Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools). Many early childhood programs choose to pursue accreditation from a neutral accrediting body. See also: Quality rating and improvement system.

Assessment literacy—Assessment literacy is the knowledge and understanding of the purposes and uses of various types of assessments for learning and growth. Assessment types include the following:

- *Diagnostic assessments* are normally not graded and often precede instruction. They are used to check students' prior knowledge and skill levels, to create a profile of learner interests and to identify student misconceptions.
- *Formative assessments* are ongoing and occur concurrently with instruction. They provide specific feedback to teachers and students for the purpose of guiding teaching and improving learning.
- *Interim/benchmark assessments* are administered at different intervals throughout the year to evaluate knowledge and skills relative to a specific set of academic goals. Results are used to inform instruction and decision-making at the classroom, school and district level and can be used to measure student growth over time.
- *Summative assessments* summarize what students have learned and often are used at the end of a course or a school year. Summative assessments are evaluative and are reported as a score or grade.

An additional aspect of assessment literacy is the ability to judge its quality using two measures:

- *Validity:* the assessment is accurate; and
- *Reliability:* the assessment provides consistent results, regardless of who grades or administers it.

Blended learning—A blended learning environment seamlessly integrates technology into classroom activities. Students spend time engaged in a variety of settings and learning experiences during the school day, including whole-group direct instruction, small group and cooperative practice and individual practice.

Braided and blended funding—These are two strategies for leveraging multiple funding streams to support a single program. When braiding funding, leaders leverage multiple funding streams to support a single program but administer them as separate funding streams. When blending funding, leaders mix together multiple funding streams to support a single program and some administrative requirements are waived.

Child development—Child development refers to the physical, cognitive and emotional changes that occur in children over time. High-quality teaching ensures that teaching practices and approaches align to developmental ages and stages.

Child, family and school readiness—Child, family and school readiness speaks to the readiness of all partners to fully participate in a classroom and school environment. Children must be cognitively, physically and emotionally ready to perform academically and to establish supportive relationships at school. Families must understand academic, social and behavior expectations of the school their children are entering. Schools must understand the experiences and abilities of the children and the background of the families entering school.

Classroom environment—The classroom environment includes physical layout and materials and equipment available to children. The environment should evolve and change as children progress along the Pre-K-3 learning continuum. The environment should be designed to accommodate a developmentally-appropriate balance of teacher-directed instruction compared with child-directed learning opportunities, individual versus group learning time, and active versus quiet learning.

Center-based learning—prekindergarten and kindergarten classrooms are arranged into a number of well-defined learning centers with logically organized group materials, where children can access materials for self-directed or teacher-directed activities. Typical learning centers include: art, library, writing, math/manipulatives, science/discovery, blocks, dramatic play, music and movement, cooking, computer and outdoor activities. In early childhood, a large proportion of the classroom day is spent in learning centers and therefore those centers would be expected to take up the majority of space within the classroom.

Comprehensive curricula—Comprehensive curricula addresses all areas of development *(See child development)*. This means it includes all content areas and is age appropriate, culturally sensitive and evidence-based. Comprehensive curricula can be grouped by philosophy, approach or published curriculum.

Some well-known curricular approaches include:

Constructivist—This approach is based on experiential learning theory, where through real-life experiences, children "construct" new knowledge. Learning is mostly hands-on and often uses a project-based approach.
Co-constructed learning—Teachers and children are partners in this approach. To ensure progress, formative assessments are used to identify starting points for ongoing work.
Reggio Emilia—Created in Northern Italy in the 1940s, this approach is based on the principle that children are capable of creating their own learning, which occurs through interactions with the environment and with other peers and adults. Teachers observe and provide guidance to advance learning. Parents are actively engaged, and documentation to illustrate understanding and progress is used extensively.
Montessori—Created by Maria Montessori, this approach is child-centered and designed to support development in a well-prepared environment where children make choices within a prescribed range of options, by working with specially designed learning materials and moving from investigation to mastery. Montessori-trained teachers guide and support children's activities.

Developmentally-appropriate assessment strategies (also referred to as measuring/assessing school readiness)—These strategies involve the use of assessment measures, including observation tools, to determine what children know and can do at the beginning of kindergarten. Most appropriate measures assess development across all domains.

Developmentally-appropriate practice (or DAP)—This approach to teaching meets children where they are, ensuring that teaching practices, strategies and content align developmentally to the classroom and to individual abilities and cultures. Such practice holds that teachers should individualize and differentiate instruction to meet the needs of each student, as defined below:

Individualized instruction—Instruction designed to meet the unique needs and interests of individual children.
Differentiated instruction—Instruction designed to address the variety of learning styles, abilities and interests within a classroom, by offering learning options of pathways and varying levels of challenge.

Developmental domains—Pre-K programs should address all five developmental domains: physical, social, emotional, language and cognitive.

Developmental science—Knowledge regarding how the brain develops through early childhood has advanced significantly. Research now shows that children's social-emotional and cognitive functioning is adversely affected by factors such as pervasive poverty, poor nutrition, inconsistent parenting and other stressors.

Digital backpack—This is a strategy for the transparent sharing of student data using technology. It encourages teachers to communicate with parents through email to create home-school connections and share student's progress regularly.

Digital literacy—Digital literacy is the ability to effectively and critically navigate, evaluate and create information using a range of digital technologies.

Domains of learning and assessment—Early learners develop rapidly in multiple domains. Multiple methods and authentic assessment must be leveraged to provide a comprehensive picture of the learner. Pre-K teachers should use assessment tools and strategies that provide a picture of children's emerging cognitive skills in literacy and numeracy as well as development in non-academic areas, such as physical skills, executive function and social-emotional competency.

Early intervention (health and developmental)—Early intervention is the systematic use of screening instruments and further testing for the identification of developmental delays and the delivery of subsequent services and supports.

Environmental rating scales—These scales are assessment tools that evaluate the quality of programs serving children and youth. The scales examine a program's progress toward measures of quality across several domains, including classroom environment, curriculum, student-teacher interactions and parent and community engagement, among others.

Executive function/self-regulation—Executive function is a child's ability to filter and balance knowledge and action. It relies upon a child's working memory, inhibitory control and mental flexibility to take an appropriate course of action or behave within culturally or socially appropriate norms.

Foundational skills—These are the core skills in literacy and mathematics that a child must master to learn increasingly complex information.

Horizontal alignment—Horizontal alignment is the intentional linking of standards, curricula and learning across a number of classrooms of the same grade in a single school or among schools in a district.

Inclusive practice—In an inclusive instructional approach, all students, with and without identified learning needs, benefit. Inclusive practices include: adaptive technologies, early childhood interventions, flexible curriculum and prevention strategies.

Integrated curriculum—This theme-based approach to teaching breaks down barriers between subjects to make learning more meaningful and relevant.

Job-embedded professional development—Job-embedded professional development takes place within a school and is focused on improving the quality of instruction and student achievement.

Knowledge, skills and dispositions—This is a framework for thinking about how to teach and reinforce foundational skills. As an example, students may have learned that being a good listener is a desirable skill but lack concrete knowledge about what listening looks like. Teachers of young children must teach foundational skills, such as active listening, and provide coaching and feedback so that children develop the disposition, or habit, of good listening. Dispositions can be considered essential to the habits of mind that support academic success.

Mixed-age grouping—Mixed-group settings are classrooms, or settings within classrooms, where children of different ages learn together.

Mixed delivery system—These Pre-K programs combine several different program types. Mixed delivery systems are frequently created to leverage funding streams and to provide all-day/all-year services to children and families.

Examples of mixed-delivery systems include:

- Head Start and Early Head Start;
- Home visiting services;
- Prekindergarten;
- Kindergarten;
- Nursery school; and
- Childcare.

The mix of funding a program receives should not differentiate quality. For example, a publicly funded Head Start program could—and should—provide the same comprehensive curriculum and experiences as a tuition-based prekinder-

garten would be expected to provide. Simply put, a quality program is a quality program, no matter where it occurs.

Personalized learning—A personalized learning environment regards children as individual learners with different skills and interests, working at their own pace, practicing and refining as much as they like and moving to mastery of different competencies at different rates.

Play-based learning—Play-based learning takes place through hands-on experience in developing scripts and scenarios and cooperatively applying them in real-life contexts. This approach holds that through play, children develop social and cognitive skills, increase language and vocabulary, mature emotionally and develop confidence in themselves as learners.

Program design—Program design refers to school structures such as the length of the day, ratio of teachers to children, overall schedule for learning experiences, and routines (such as resting, meals and snacks, bathroom breaks, arrivals and departures). In an elementary school, differential program design for prekindergarten and early grades is typical.

Program Quality Assessment (PQA)—PQA is an evaluation tool that measures the overall quality of a prekindergarten classroom or program. A PQA is comprised of a list of indicators that research has shown to correlate with positive outcomes and growth across developmental domains.

Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)—This state-administered system is designed to measure and communicate the quality of programs serving young children. Trained staff assess programs and classrooms using a scale or rubric that uses childcare or school licensing regulations as a base. Scores are often translated to a star or numerical rating akin to restaurant or hotel grading systems to communicate quality in a quick and transparent manner to families.

Social emotional development—This type of development refers to a child's ability to form and maintain lasting relationships, behave appropriately in a variety of situations, manage and demonstrate emotions and develop a healthy sense of self.

Teacher-directed instruction—This is an instructional strategy used to teach specific skills, knowledge and concepts to children via a method planned and conducted by the teacher.

Vertical alignment—This is the intentional linking of standards, curricula and learning from one to another, "up the hallway" in a single school or among schools in a district, so learning builds and expands from grade to grade.

COMPETENCIES FOR EFFECTIVE PRINCIPAL PRACTICE

Call To Action: Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Over the past ten years, there has been considerable expansion of early childhood education policy and programming at the federal, state and local levels given both the return on investment and the profound impact high-quality early learning experiences have in a child's life. As more prekindergarten and early childhood programs are connected to schools to ensure that children have an opportunity to learn foundational skills that will help them succeed academically and in life, over sixty percent of elementary principals are now leading prekindergarten programs either connected to their school or located in their district. In many districts, one principal of an elementary school is responsible for overseeing multiple early childhood education program centers throughout the district.

As states and districts continue to expand early childhood education programs, particularly connected to local elementary schools, it is imperative that federal programs, state systems and local structures both recognize and build the capacity of elementary principal leadership within a Pre-K-3 continuum.

Recent federal policy and initiatives, such as reforms enacted as part of Head Start reauthorization, the implementation of the Early Learning Challenge Fund and the Preschool Development grant program, as well as the introduction of the bipartisan Strong Start for America's Children Act in November 2013—have brought renewed attention to the promise of high-quality prekindergarten. The initiatives also lay out greater connectivity between early childhood programs—community-based, public and private —to public schools in the K-12 systems as a strategy for closing the achievement gap.

The implications are clear: policymakers at all levels of government must take action to strengthen and improve the knowledge and practice of elementary principals leading a Pre-K-3 continuum. Despite the importance of leadership development, the issue of developing and supporting Pre-K-3 leadership success through high-quality preparation and professional development opportunities has been overlooked.

Research from the Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes states that of more than 50 self-reported early childhood education leadership development programs,

only a handful are targeted at individuals who hold, or aspire to, leadership positions in educational organizations serving children and youth (early childhood through postsecondary). And, as limited as the number of programs is, the impact is lessened further by the fact that only a few of the principals working in this country actually participate in these programs.

A survey of practicing elementary principals conducted by NAESP in April 2014 reveals that all principals serving Pre-K-3 students are in need of additional professional development and resources to address developmentally-appropriate practice and leading a continuum of early learning to the third grade.

Ten years after the publication of *Leading Early Childhood Learning Communities*, most principal knowledge of child development and the Pre-K-3 learning continuum remains largely self-taught,

> **As states and districts continue to expand early childhood education programs, particularly connected to local elementary schools, it is imperative that federal programs, state systems and local structures both recognize and build the capacity of elementary principal leadership within a Pre-K-3 continuum.**

We must do more to address this situation through concerted policies at the federal, state and local levels to build the capacity of principals.

Strong principal leadership is a constant in strong early learning systems. Indeed, research shows that principal's strong instructional leadership is second only to high-quality teaching in ensuring successful learning environments. Research also demonstrates that a principal's impact is greatest in schools with the most needs. When principals understand coordination and alignment of early childhood education programs with traditional K-12 systems and programs, they can have a dramatic influence on the quality

of those programs and the learning outcomes of children. To create an integrated system of learning from prekindergarten through the early elementary years, NAESP recommends action at the federal, state and local levels to align policy and funding structures to directly support the elementary principal's role.

The following are eight areas for policy action at the local, state and federal levels to ensure a high-quality Pre-K-3 system in the United States:

1.   **Federal and state resources must be allocated to provide universal access for children to attend high-quality Pre-K-3 programs.** All states must provide universal access to high-quality Pre-K programs and full-day kindergarten, where early childhood education programs are connected to schools and operate in a continuous system with K-12 education. This includes greater flexibility to align federal, state and local funds, such as preschool development grants, Head Start, Early Head Start, Title I, and early literacy programs to create a unified Pre-K-3 learning system.

2.   **States and districts must recognize the authority of principals in schools serving children from Pre-K through the elementary years, and reinforce their role as a critical component of a Pre-K-3 learning system.** State and district leaders must recognize the important leadership role of principals as they work to address the learning needs of students across early learning and K-12 systems in order to create intentional focus on alignment of Pre-K-3 programmatic and instructional activities. Principals must be afforded greater resources and tools to engage communities to embrace a Pre-K-3 continuum and to shift programs accordingly.

3.   **States and districts must adopt standards of practice for principals working in Pre-K-3 learning systems.** Research and practice surrounding the Pre-K-3 continuum call for states and districts to incorporate and align existing leadership standards, such as ISLLC, to the competencies that principals must demonstrate to lead effective Pre-K-3 learning communities.

4.   **Federal, state and local resources must be directed to invest in principal preparation programs that help principals create a seamless continuum of Pre-K-3 learning.** Too few existing principal preparation programs include a focus on helping principals understand high-quality early childhood education, developmentally-appropriate practices and settings for young children and how to create systems of effective Pre-K-3 learning. Preparation programs are needed to build principals' understanding of effective Pre-K-3 teaching practices,

appropriate assessment, and use of data to improve teaching and learning. This requires strong partnerships between districts and universities (and other appropriate providers) to recognize the unique instructional leadership skills that principals must have before going to schools that serve students in the earliest years through the third grade. In addition, residency, mentoring and induction programs must focus on supporting principals to master competencies in setting a strong Pre-K-3 continuum.

5.   **Federal, state and local resources should be allocated to provide opportunities to principals for job-embedded professional learning and growth to create and set effective Pre-K-3 learning conditions in schools.** In-service principals must increase their knowledge of developmentally-appropriate practices and related instructional leadership competencies needed to support and sustain effective Pre-K-3 learning environments.

6.   **Federal, state and local resources must be directed to provide opportunities for teachers for job-embedded professional learning and growth along the K-3 continuum.** Greater investment is needed at the federal, state and local levels to increase job-embedded professional learning that helps to increase knowledge of educators of early childhood development in all domains. This includes language arts and literacy, mathematics, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, physical development, science and creative arts. It also includes emphasis on the continuity of standards and high-quality curriculum and teaching practices from preschool to third grade, with emphasis on the needs of children with special needs, English-language learners, and children from low-income families.

7.   **State technology plans must address the unique needs of students in a Pre-K-3 continuum.** As schools continue to transition to blended learning environments, consideration must be given to what is developmentally-appropriate as well as the technology needs to support learning. Standards for the use of technology in the early years are also needed, as is support for effective use of technology by educators.

8.   **Provide support for principals and teachers to build parent understanding and capacity to participate more effectively in their child's learning from age three to grade three.** We know that effective Pre-K-3 learning communities consider parents as a welcome member of their community, practicing candid two-way communications between school and parents and other community members. Teachers and principals must have expanded resources and tools to engage parents in productive discussions regarding their child's progress from Pre-K to the third grade.

Methodology

The National Association of Elementary School Principals and Collaborative Communications Group, Inc., first teamed up in 2001 to produce the landmark publication *Leading Learning Communities: Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able To Do*, which was updated in 2008. Other publications in the series have included *Leading Afterschool Learning Communities* (2004), *Leading Early Childhood Learning Communities* (2005) and findings from the *Task Force on Pre-K Alignment* (2010).

Last year, NAESP turned again to Collaborative Communications to conduct a rigorous examination of the research and literature on early learning—age three to grade three—and to engage principals, policymakers, academics—and individuals in related professional organizations concerned with early learning to update and refresh the 2005 publication.

Over the past 10 months, that process has included:

Literature review. A review of more than 80 relevant research documents was conducted in winter 2013-14 to provide the basis for the competencies and strategies outlined in this guide. The research included studies and reports on the fundamental rationale for the Pre-K-3 approach, and the economic, social and educational benefits of that approach. We looked at federal, university, state, philanthropic and district- and organization-driven research on all aspects of Pre-K-3 learning environments. These include teaching and learning, physical structures and environments, standards and assessments, the changing nature of technology and its influence on early learning, community-based supports for early learning and childcare, the role of parents, family and community, and advocacy recommendations at the federal, state and district level. The substantial literature review is scheduled to be released as a separate document in fall 2014.

Focus groups. Principals at NAESP's National Leadership Conference in Arlington, Virginia, in February 2014 participated in two focus groups and provided insights on their efforts to align standards, curriculum, assessment and learning environments for young learners, including the significant need for improved engagement with families and community-based organizations. Principals in the focus groups also identified critical gaps in principal and learning community knowledge about child development and identified key opportunities and challenges in improving teaching and learning for children from age three to grade three.

Discovery interviews. Thought leaders in policy, research, associations and practice provided significant perspective with regard to recent federal and state policy efforts for children from age three to grade three and context of where early learning fits in the current discussions of implementing new standards and assessments. These interviews also provided important leads with regard to key organizations, research and practical examples of effective practice. Each interview was audio-recorded.

Pre-K-3 Education Committee. Principals were nominated to the Committee from individual geographic zones within the NAESP governance structure, for their experience and leadership in early learning, prekindergarten through third grade. The Committee met four times throughout the process of developing this guide, including a two-day meeting in Arlington, Virginia, in March 2014, where they helped to create the competencies and shape the guide. Over the next four months, they reviewed various drafts of the guide, one-on-one and in group webinars. The committee also contributed to ideas on research and examples of effective practice.

Interviews with principals and school teams. Each of the short case studies, or vignettes, that appears in this publication was developed from a separate telephone interview with the principal of that school, who was often accompanied by additional members of his or her school staff. Individual interview protocols were created, and the interviews were audio-recorded.

Peer review of drafts. NAESP leadership and staff, every member of the Pre-K-3 Education Committee and various external peers from professional organizations with like interests provided candid feedback that helped to ensure currency, relevance, accuracy, credibility and meaning. Their input was invaluable to this process.

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