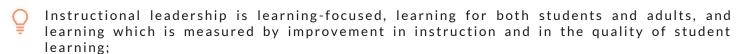
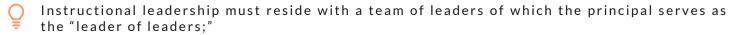
## **Instructional Leadership**

A critical component of the principal's role as leader of their school is as its instructional leader, where they hold responsibility for the school's curriculum, instruction, and monitoring and developing teacher practice, in addition to their non-instructional responsibilities. 1 Broadly, leadership comprises "teacher observation and evaluation, feedback and coaching, and the establishment of a data-driven instructional program." 2 The Center for Educational Leadership at the University of Washington offers the following belief statements that comprise a framework for instructional leadership:<sup>3</sup>

The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) provides school leaders with an Instructional Leadership Tool that includes strategies for providing expectations for implementing the Virginia Standards of Learning and Curriculum Framework, monitoring and providing feedback to teachers on the curriculum, monitoring assessment for standards alignment, and providing teachers with opportunities for collaboration and professional learning.





- A culture of public practice and reflective practice is essential for effective instructional leadership and the improvement of instructional practice;
- Instructional leadership addresses the cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic and learning diversity in the school community; and
- Instructional leadership focuses upon the effective management of resources and of people recruiting, hiring, developing, evaluating - particularly in changing environments.

To be an effective instructional leader, principals must develop a range of expertise in curriculum planning, instructional delivery, high-quality instruction, standards alignment, teacher evaluation and feedback for improving teaching and learning, and data-based decision-making to inform instruction.4 Instructional leaders are also models for their school who establish a culture of respect, high expectations, and collaboration to promote equity. 5 Figure A below highlights the habits of highly-effectively instructional leaders.

Figure A: Seven Habits of Highly-Effective Instructional Leaders			
HABIT	DESCRIPTION		
Understand Neuroscience	Principals are knowledgeable in neuroscience, and they provide professional development opportunities and resources to ensure routines, expectations, learning experiences, and assignments are developmentally appropriate for students, while simultaneously fostering healthy brain development.		
Are Connected "Lead Learners"	As society and education policy change, student and teacher needs change. Education is an evolving entity, and it is imperative that principals evolve as well. To remain current, they should model and demonstrate the importance of continued learning via involvement in professional organizations, attendance at conferences, and completion of professional development, both alongside and independent of their staff. These opportunities provide continued growth, collaboration, and networking with others in and outside of their districts and maximize their resources and learning capacity.		
Support Content and Comprehension Instruction	Principals understand that effective teaching is difficult. Thus, they support teachers in developing strategies and tools to address the outcomes outlined in content-area standards and help students achieve depth and breadth of knowledge to fully comprehend content concepts and develop relevant skills.		

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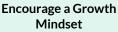
Principals develop instructional leadership capacity in others by investing the time and effort to meet with novices and veterans to clarify what is needed for success to occur. They also provide the necessary resources and support to encourage continual growth.



Principals provide teachers with opportunities for peer coaching, observation, reflection, and growth. They facilitate such opportunities to provide low-stakes, collegial mechanisms—independent of formal performance evaluation protocols—for teachers to gather and analyze data about classroom practice and then support peers' growth.



Principals foster a growth mindset in colleagues by modeling and practicing reflection (e.g., examining student attainment of objectives, assessing differentiation of instruction, looking for weaknesses in school programming based on data). They help teachers reflect on what works and what does not and then use that data to guide their thinking and instruction.



**Based on Need** 

Principals coach teachers to develop goals and provide proper support based on their individual needs. They help teachers craft personalized professional learning plans that include learning experiences, training, and mentoring. Realizing the need to differentiate, a principal adjusts support based on a teacher's will and skill levels to increase effectiveness.



Source: Association for Middle Level Education<sup>6</sup>

The following sections synthesize the literature backing the VDOE's priority areas of curriculum and instructional alignment and implantation, assessment, and supporting educators through feedback and opportunities for collaboration.

## Facilitate Curriculum Implementation and Instruction

As instructional leaders of their school, principals are responsible for setting clear expectations for learning and instruction for teachers and students and supporting the development of positive learning environments. Learning Forward, a professional association dedicated to planning, implementing, and measuring high-quality educator professional learning, recommends that principals communicate their expectations for implementing state standards through a vision for academic success. This vision reinforces "strong coherence exists among curriculum, assessment, instruction, and learning environment" and builds common understanding around expectations for instruction. When developing and communicating their vision of expectations for instruction and student success, principals should engage in the following actions:<sup>8</sup>

- Deepen their own understanding of the Common Core standards and engage faculty, students, parents, and community members to understand the standards and the vision of academic success aligned to college- and career-readiness;
- Meet one-on-one, in teams, and as a whole faculty to reinforce high expectations for students and staff, develop plans to achieve the vision and new standards, review with evidence progress toward the goals, and identify exemplars of the vision in action and barriers to it;
- Establish and communicate non-negotiables related to teaching and learning in intellectually stimulating ways that promote application of learning;
- Challenge beliefs and practices that interfere with achieving the vision;
- Demonstrate through daily decisions and actions that the school's priority is academic success for every student; and
- Serve as the cheerleader, coach, and standard bearer for the vision.

To set expectations for and support teachers in designing lessons that align with state standards, principals must understand their state and local learning standards. Instructional leaders who do not understand the standards for their school's grades and subjects lack an understanding of "what students should know and be able to do at each grade level" and in each subject area. Likewise, gaps in knowledge about standards will inhibit principals from aiding their teachers in developing

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impactful curricula based on the academic standards inherent in their assigned subject area and grade level. Thus, Figure B below describes the qualities of standards and curricula that principals should understand in order to support teachers.

# Figure B: What Principals Should Understand About Curriculum, Instruction, and Learning Standards

#### Know the "Big Ideas"



• Principals should recognize the "big ideas" of the core curriculum (e.g., science, mathematics, social studies, English language arts) and other courses (e.g., fine arts, foreign language, career and technical education). They do not need to be experts, but they should be able to determine if students are taught the understandings and skills that they are expected to learn in specific disciplines and courses.

## Help Teachers Prioritize



• Principals should know enough about state and national standards to help teachers identify the most important standards. In other words, principals need to know that "covering everything and learning nothing" does not work. They need to be able to help teachers identify the things that students should learn in greater depth.

#### **Distinguish Courses**



• Principals need to know how to distinguish between courses in the same discipline that occur at different grade levels (e.g., Secondary Mathematics I vs. Secondary Mathematics II) and that are targeted at different intensities (e.g., Advanced Placement courses vs. honors courses).

#### **Comprehend Literacy Principles**



• Principals must understand literacy. Reading, writing, speaking, and listening are essential across all subject areas, and principals should recognize whether teachers are advancing students' literacy skills and requiring students to use these skills to learn in all courses.

#### **Link Standards and Assessments**



• Principals need to know what students are supposed to learn and the standards they are supposed to meet in determining whether teachers' exams and assessment guides are appropriate to measure student performance at all levels. Principals should also know enough about assessment to lead teams of teachers who are working together to develop grading guides and common exams.

Source: IssueLab, Foundation Center<sup>12</sup>

Clear expectations and a vision for standards-based instruction and lesson plans require that teachers understand the standards and design lesson plans that teach the standards. Accordingly, after developing their own understanding of standards, principals must ensure that teachers understand the standards. Learning Forward recommends that principals increase teacher understanding of how to apply state standards through professional learning such as book studies, instructional rounds where teachers implement the standards, dialogue, and studying a video of an exemplary classroom. Additionally, as part of executing their vision and expectations, principals should provide educators with dedicated time for developing lesson plans that align with state standards. 4

#### Monitor Assessment Results

A critical component of principals' roles as instructional leaders is also as an assessment leader for their school, teaching staff, and students. Assessment leadership involves ensuring assessment

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quality and alignment, as well as assessment literacy. As assessment leaders, principals should ensure that they are assessment literate themselves, offer support and opportunities for their teachers and staff to become assessment literate, and "remove barriers to teachers' assessment literacy." Assessment literacy for principals includes the following five principles:

Appropriate achievement expectations for students

Assessment that serves instructional purposes

Accurately serving the intended purpose

A broad scope of student performances to permit confident conclusions

Elimination of bias that can affect the accuracy of results

Assessment leaders are responsible for setting assessment priorities and culture for their school, developing clear and specific achievement targets, and monitoring assessment results. <sup>16</sup> Figure C below outlines characteristics of schools that can facilitate or constrain assessment leadership for school leaders. While the researchers developed this list from research in rural school settings, the lessons are broadly applicable across school settings.

Figure C: Facets that Facilitate and Constrain Assessment Leadership

#### **Facets that Facilitate Assessment Leadership**

- •Small school populations present an opportunity for enhanced knowledge of students, leading to greater individualized attention to student learning and assessment needs:
- More intimate, familial professional cohorts present greater opportunity for the creation of collaborative professional cultures within the school, focused on teaching strategies, assessment literacy and school-wide data-driven decision-making;

#### Facets that Constrain Assessment Leadership

- Community politics;
- Distance from central office and associated isolation of inschool leaders and classroom professionals from sources of support when dealing with challenging instructional and assessment issues;
- •Volume of expectations, paperwork etc
- Lack of collegial support for in-school administrators;
- Lack of mentorship for new in-school administrators;
- Difficulties experienced by principals in balancing the multiple roles and expectations of teaching, administration, and instructional leadership/supervision.

Source: The Rural Educator<sup>17</sup>

Characteristics of high-quality assessment practices include that the school uses a mix of assessment types, so that not all assessments are high-stakes for students, teachers, and the school. Assessment should also be objective and support learning by providing teachers and students with actionable data about student learning. <sup>18</sup> Effective assessments must also align with the curriculum and instruction; accordingly, assessments should reflect learning objectives from teachers' lessons. <sup>19</sup> As assessment leaders, principals can promote quality assessment practices by ensuring that school assessment tools align with state standards and the local curriculum, and purchase or oversee the development of aligned interim assessments. Principals can also enable quality assessment practices by providing teachers with professional development and time for developing aligned assessments. <sup>20</sup> To ensure continued alignment, principals should regularly monitor and review student data and assessment outcomes, assessment types and instruments, and learning targets. <sup>21</sup>

As assessment can serve to further educational inequities and replicate disadvantages, principals "have an important role in promoting the widespread and effective use of assessment for learning as a lever for equity in schools." <sup>22</sup> Equitable assessment cultures are assessment literate, understand how to use assessments to further learning, include structures for replicating successful assessment practices, and make data-based decisions. Figure D below examines actionable strategies principals can use to establish a culture of equitable assessment use within their school.

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## Figure D: Strategies for Building an Equitable Culture of Assessment Use

- Educate teachers about the types of assessment (i.e., formative and summative), their different purposes, and their features.
- Communicate the importance of using assessments to promote learning, and ensure that the types of assessment used in classrooms are balanced. One way is to conduct classroom inventories of the assessments used over short periods of time (e.g., two-week intervals), and have teachers describe how they used these assessments.
- Create conditions to support the effective, knowledgeable use of assessments for learning as a lever for equity. Teachers should be expected to learn from their practice and teach for equity, and be supported in that goal. Action steps:
  - Establish structures (e.g., regular times and spaces) in which teachers look at artifacts of instructional practice (e.g., samples of student work, videotaped segments of instruction, examples of assessments for learning they use) together for evidence of student learning.
  - Develop professional routines for sharing assessment practices (e.g., communicating clear learning goals and indicators of successful performance to students or sharing ways to offer feedback) to dismantle the culture of teaching as a private practice and replace it with a culture of teaching as collaborative inquiry.
  - Examine institutional (school, grade-level, and classroom) structures and belief systems to see whether they advantage certain groups of students and disadvantage others. Look at groups of students who are not succeeding and ways those students might experience systemic disadvantages that prevent or hinder them from having the same opportunities to learn and succeed as other students. Determine what steps can be taken—and by whom—to break down systems of advantage and disadvantage, and take action to change biased institutional practices, procedures, and policies.

Source: Principal<sup>23</sup>

## Support Teacher Development, Collaboration, and Professional Learning

As the school's instructional leader, principals are responsible for supporting the professional development of instructional staff.<sup>24</sup> Accordingly, the following subsections offer guidance for school leaders on providing feedback to teachers and providing collaborative professional learning opportunities.

#### Provide Feedback

Through their role in supporting teachers' practices and professional development, principals are responsible for monitoring teachers and providing feedback to further positive outcomes. Providing teachers with feedback on their teaching practice contributes to a positive, trusting school culture; shows teachers that their principal cares about and is committed to their professional performance and growth; and can shape improvements to teaching and student learning. Accordingly, Talking with staff members about their work—where they feel they are effective, where they struggle, what challenges them—is a way to build powerful, trusting relationships with your staff. Quality feedback is also critical to teacher evaluation systems and processes and it enables school leaders and educators to collaboratively act upon evaluation data, playing into the theory of action in Figure E.<sup>27</sup>

Figure E: Improving Student Outcomes through Teacher Feedback



Source: Education First<sup>28</sup>

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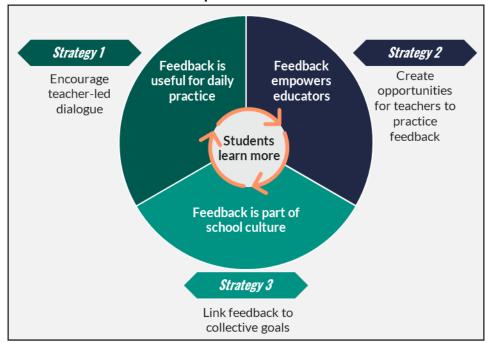
When evaluating and providing feedback to teachers, principals should focus on improving educators' teaching practice and student outcomes, rather than accountability purposes. Feedback based on the belief that teachers have the potential to grow and improve professionally builds trust and creates the conditions for feedback to lead to improved practices. <sup>29</sup> Feedback can also result in better professional learning when based on multiple data sources. <sup>30</sup> When possible, principals should aim to provide feedback that targets a specific area of practice. <sup>31</sup> Furthermore, high-quality teacher feedback embodies the following characteristics: <sup>32</sup>



For feedback to successfully impact teacher practice or student outcomes, it must occur within a school culture and environment that values receiving feedback.<sup>34</sup> To facilitate this environment, the principal should set a vision, tone, and expectations that providing and receiving feedback is part of the professional learning process for improving teaching practices.<sup>35</sup> Principals can

demonstrate this vision and bу regularly expectations observes teachers and conducts visits.<sup>36</sup> classroom When providing feedback, principals should focus on the teacher's strengths and frame areas for improvement in terms of the teacher's continuous development. Next, principals should encourage teachers to use feedback to establish goals and then focus future observations and feedback on the teacher's progress towards these goals.<sup>37</sup> Figure F includes these recommendations and more as critical conditions and strategies for creating a culture effective feedback. Additionally, as providing feedback quality is skill, developable principals should reflect on their own professional learning and capacity for improving their feedback skills.38

Figure F: Conditions and Strategies for Effective Feedback and Improved Outcomes



Source: Southern Regional Education Board<sup>33</sup>



## **Enable Collaboration and Professional Learning Communities**

As collaboration benefits teacher practice and learning, instructional leaders must facilitate staff development and ensure that teachers have time and space to collaborate. Such teacher support requires leaders to possess strong time management skills. When principals create the conditions for teachers to communicate and discuss student data, teachers may build confidence, relationships, and a school culture that encourages learning while engaging in the following tasks: 39

Identify the problems and strengths of student learning and support;

Engage in collaborative reflection:

Problem-solve; and

Leverage strategies.

Professional learning communities (PLCs) offer educators a method for engaging in professional learning through collaboration with their grade or subject-area colleagues. In PLCs, small groups of teachers regularly meet with the goal to collaboratively increase learning and support the implementation of new skills.40 According to Learning Forward, teachers in PLCs "engage in continuous dialog and examination of their practice and student performance to develop and enact more effective instructional practices." 41 PLCs can be district or school-based and comprise teachers from similar grade levels or content areas. 42 By working collaboratively, teachers learn from their colleagues, share their knowledge and expertise, practice new techniques, and address problems and challenges. Successful PLCs successfully collaborate to improve teacher and student learning. PLCs require teachers to engage in reflective dialog about their practices and student learning and to critically examine what is working and what is not working.<sup>43</sup>

Collaboration is fundamental to the success of PLCs and requires that teachers share successes and failures.44 Unlike traditional models where teachers act in isolation from one another, in PLCs teachers share their practices and goals to improve their teaching and student learning. A culture that champions collaboration can increase teachers' sense of self-efficacy and confidence, influencing them to "believe in their ability to influence student learning and make a difference in student outcomes and achievement." 45 Figure G below offers additional strategies for supporting collaboration through professional learning communities.

Figure G: Approaches to Support Strong Professional Learning Communities and Broader Collaboration

APPROACH	DESCRIPTION
Emphasize that Teachers Succeed Together	Principals lay the groundwork for PLCs and broader collaborative efforts by telling teachers they have the expertise to make student learning happen. They clearly state their expectation that teachers will pool that expertise to advance one another's instructional competencies. Likewise, principals communicate the benefits of collaboration over working in isolation to plan and deliver effective instruction.
Expect Teachers to Stay Current	Principals communicate to teachers the expectation that they keep their skills up-to-date with research and policy guidance through collaborative study. Principals ask teachers to embrace the expectation that professionals subscribe to a codified body of knowledge and commit to monitoring the latest information and skills to increase their effectiveness.

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Guide Communities Toward Self-Governance



Make Data Accessible



Teach Discussion and Decision-Making Skills



Show Teachers the Research



Principals know effective PLCs are democratic and participatory. Although they may take the lead in arranging meetings at first, over time, principals should urge community members to assume prominent roles. They share authority and decision-making from the beginning and gradually prepare other members to take the lead. Self-governance will both help sustain PLCs and boost teachers' feelings of professionalism.

One element of an effective PLC is skill in using data for instructional decision making. Thus, principals should ensure that an array of data on student performance is available in a format that teachers find understandable and that invites interpretation. Principals may need to help staff members acquire the skills needed to interpret data before they can do so independently.

Principals should help teachers develop skills in talking through and making decisions together, especially if collaboration is new in their school. They should explain the different modes of dialogue and discussion and the role of each mode in advancing the community's practice. Principals should help PLCs learn and apply different strategies for finalizing decisions, including voting and consensus-building.

Principals should share research around PLCS and collaboration in general. Research indicates that teachers reap such benefits as collective responsibility for student success, increased understanding of their roles in helping students achieve, feedback and assistance from peers, and professional renewal. Research also shows that learning in a social context is deeper than independent learning.

Principals should work to build mutual trust between themselves and their faculty and among teachers themselves. Teachers will never openly express themselves if they fear their colleagues. Giving teachers guided practice in conducting appropriate conversations, making decisions, and managing conflict will help strengthen trust, as will keeping the focus on student and teacher learning.

Source: Educational Leadership<sup>46</sup>

Principals play an important role in supporting and enabling successful PLCs by setting a clear vision for PLCs within the school and creating a professional culture among staff that values collaboration and PLCs. 47 Principals should publicly communicate a vision of PLCs as a tool for using student data and teacher collaboration to improve teaching and learning. 48 This vision should include high expectations for teaching quality and student learning and encourage a mindset of continual improvement. Additionally, principals can actively support PLCs by sharing PLC goals and celebrating PLC successes during faculty meetings. 49 Overall, principals strengthen PLCs through:50

- Ownership and support: Districts must involve teachers and administrators in developing and leading the PLC process;
- **Professional development**: Districts must teach administrators and teachers how to work together effectively in PLCs;
- Improvement process: Districts must show how PLCs fit into the district's improvement process so that each PLC's work fits into an overall plan; and
- **Differentiated support**: Districts must support schools according to their unique needs in order to help them move to the next step in their PLC growth.

Furthermore, the roles of principals and administrators include supporting PLCs by providing and managing resources. Principals are responsible for ensuring that PLCs have time to meet, space to meet, and the resources, tools, and technology to aid instructional improvement through collaboration. Frincipals and other administrators can also enable PLCs by providing additional expertise, either from themselves or other specialists. For example, PLCs rely on analyzing and studying student data, and school leaders can help make data more user-friendly when necessary. Principals can also provide PLCs with assistance from curriculum specialists or other school staff who can aid with instructional strategies, standards, or analyzing student work.

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# **Supplemental Resources**

The following resources provide additional information on effective strategies and procedures for principals beyond that already included in this info-brief.

Figure H: Resources on Instructional Leadership

Figure H: Resources on Instructional Leadership						
Resource	Publisher	SHORTENED URL	QR CODE			
"Ambitious Leadership: How Principals Lead Schools to College and Career Readiness" <sup>54</sup>	New Leaders	https://qrgo.page.link/fbAHy				
"How Principals Affect Students and Schools: A Systematic Synthesis of Two Decades of Research" 55	The Wallace Foundation	https://qrgo.page.link/m6yEF				
"Instructional Leadership & Coaching" 56	Digital Promise	https://qrgo.page.link/MbPcu				
"Instructional Leadership: Supporting Best Practice" <sup>57</sup>	ASCD	https://qrgo.page.link/yDRRw				
"Principals as Instructional Leaders"58	The School Superintendents Association (AASA)	https://qrgo.page.link/6LonT				
"Seven Keys to Effective Feedback" <sup>59</sup>	Educational Leadership, ASCD	https://qrgo.page.link/BWjy				
"The Impact of Providing Performance Feedback to Teachers and Principals" <sup>60</sup>	American Institutes for Research	https://qrgo.page.link/zqe6N				
"The Principal as Assessment Leader"61	Solution Tree Press	https://qrgo.page.link/8xxSr				
"The Principal's Role in Personalization" 62	Principal Leadership	https://qrgo.page.link/8hvwL				
"The Standards-Based Teaching and Learning Cycle" 63	The Colorado Coalition of Standards-Based Education	https://qrgo.page.link/y3KJZ				
"Tips From Dr. Marzano Collaborative Teams That Transform Schools" 64	Marzano Resources	https://qrgo.page.link/yYf6Z				

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