

Invest in Educators Series

SREB

School Leader Induction Framework

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Southern
Regional
Education
Board

[SREB.org](https://www.sreb.org)



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This guidance document was produced by the Southern Regional Education Board as part of SREB's comprehensive support focus for the educator workforce in the South and around the U.S. Authors and contributors include: Amanda Merritt, division director of development and innovation; Debbie Barnett, leadership coach; Megan Boren, program director of educator workforce; Connie Luper, senior leadership coach; Richard Morrison, leadership coach; Carita Venable, senior leadership coach; and Aimee Wyatt, director of leadership and strategic initiatives. SREB facilitated a review of this framework by external partners, including New Teacher Center, Policy Studies Associates, Carolina Teacher Induction Program and several state and district education leaders in the SREB region.

SREB's School Leader Induction Framework

Effective induction support helps novice school leaders become better educators and change agents for schools. To assist states and districts in building comprehensive support systems, the SREB School Leader Induction Framework identifies four components and elements of success for each, backed by evidence from research.

Invest in Educators Through Induction

Every student deserves a great teacher and a safe, positive school environment. For this to exist, there must be a great school leadership team. Educators in all roles prepare the next generation of entrepreneurs, leaders and workers to sustain state and local economies. All educators need the proper tools and support to do this well.

Strong school leaders make or break school culture, staff retention and overall student achievement.

Properly preparing and guiding new building leaders at the start of their leadership journey is an essential and foundational element for school success. The Southern Regional Education Board is committed to helping states, districts and schools increase student learning through developing and supporting the entire educator workforce.

SREB's School Leader Induction Framework provides a guide for district leaders as they design and implement a comprehensive induction program that targets the unique needs of their new principals and assistant principals. In addition to this framework, SREB offers additional resources to help districts and schools put this framework into action.



What is school leader induction?

SREB defines school leader induction as a strategic and extensive support system designed to help new assistant principals and principals transition into their new roles and develop their capacity as highly effective school-based leaders who foster a positive and productive learning environment. Successful leader induction is designed to help leaders create positive school cultures, develop the skills to provide meaningful support to teachers and understand the basis of distributive leadership — which will lead to stronger teacher instruction, improved teacher retention and ultimately higher student outcomes.

The objectives of school leader induction systems are to ensure school leaders succeed and remain in the leadership pipeline, as well as to develop their skills as both instructional and operational leaders. Leader induction programs should result in improved outcomes for teachers and students — including positive school cultures, more effective teachers, better teacher retention and higher student achievement.

At least 23 states in the nation require districts to provide some level of support for novice principals and assistant principals through an induction program, according to 2021 research by Rogers and VanGronigen.

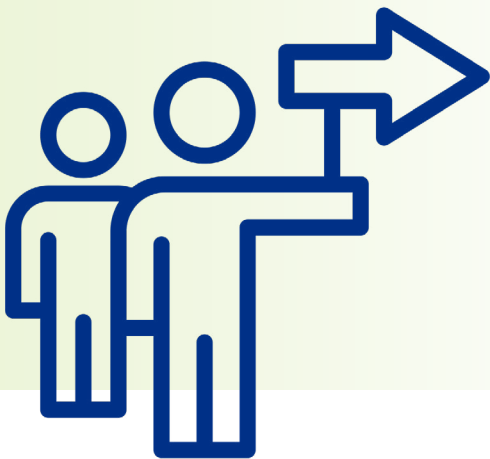
The Difference Between Teacher Induction and School Leader Induction

Effective teacher and school leader induction systems consider the specific needs of the novice educators in those roles. However, districts should use more flexibility in designing school leader induction. For example, mentors who support novice teachers should be in a non-evaluative role, whereas leader mentors might serve as both mentors and supervisors for a new principal or assistant principal.

Collaborative networks for novice teachers should always include school-based teachers; however, those networks for novice principals and assistant principals should always include leaders in other schools. SREB recommends that leader networks also include leaders from other districts.

Though both teacher induction and leader induction should be designed to help novice educators acclimate to their new roles, teacher induction should place a heavy emphasis on individual classroom practices, while leader induction should focus on a systems approach to schoolwide leadership.

Find more SREB resources to help districts and schools with induction and other systems of support for teachers and leaders at [SREB.org/Induction](https://www.sreb.org/induction).



Why is school leader induction important?

Early-career principals and assistant principals — those with less than five years in these positions — need multi-layered support to help them acclimate to their new roles as building-level leaders. Novice principals can often feel isolated in their new role (Bauer et al., 2019), and novice assistant principals can experience a sense of overwhelming responsibilities, particularly when they are tasked with handling student discipline and receive limited support in how to serve as an instructional leader (Clayton & Bingham, 2018). An effective induction program provides a network that includes veteran educators and peers to help solve problems related to both the schoolwide instructional program and the operational management of the building and staff.

School leaders who participate in induction (such as mentoring, coaching or professional learning) are more likely to increase their confidence as leaders, as well as their understanding of district policies and procedures (Peeples et al., 2022). They also report higher self-efficacy, improved work-life balance and a desire to remain in the position (Peeples et al., 2022).

Students and teachers also benefit from well-supported school leaders. Student achievement, teacher effectiveness and teacher retention increase when principals receive targeted induction support during their first two years in their head leadership role of a school (Steinberg & Haisheng, 2022).

Induction is more than an orientation meeting with a sprinkling of checkpoints throughout the school year. Effective induction programs are designed as an ongoing process that begins with succession planning and continues through in-service development once someone is in the school leadership role (Bush, 2018).



The Challenge of Recruiting and Retaining Principals

Principal recruitment remains a significant challenge for many districts. The role is often a tough sell due to grueling workloads, high-stakes accountability and compensation that is often not commensurate with the increased responsibilities. Consequently, many school systems rely heavily on grow-your-own strategies to develop internal talent, driven by budget constraints and a history of limited success with external candidates who may struggle to adapt to local district culture.

While forward-thinking districts have implemented standardized, competency-based selection processes and rubrics to reduce the influence of subjectivity, recruitment efforts often remain passive — relying on job postings, rather than active talent scouting (Doyle & Locke, 2014; SREB, 2025). Furthermore, systemic barriers — such as access to affordable and high-quality educator preparation programs, licensure testing and the cost of testing — continue to hinder representation in the school leader pipeline. Black, Hispanic or Latino, Asian and native educators represent only 22% of the nation's principals, despite students of color making up 54% of the K-12 population (Gran & Ahmed, 2023).

Comparing Principal and Teacher Demographics in the South: Race and Ethnicity

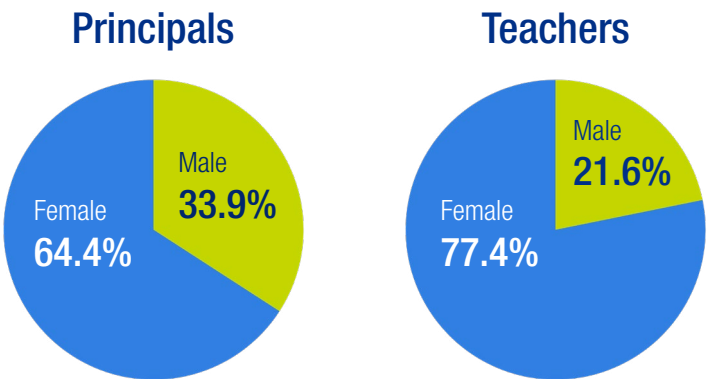
2023-24

	White	Black	Asian	Native American, Native Alaskan, Native Hawaiian	Hispanic	Multi-Racial
Principals	66.6%	24.4%	0.4%	2.1%	5.9%	0.6%
Teachers	73.3%	16.3%	1.4%	1.0%	5.7%	1.1%

Sources: SREB Educator Workforce data collection, using publicly available state data. Note that school leader data was not reported by all states in the region.

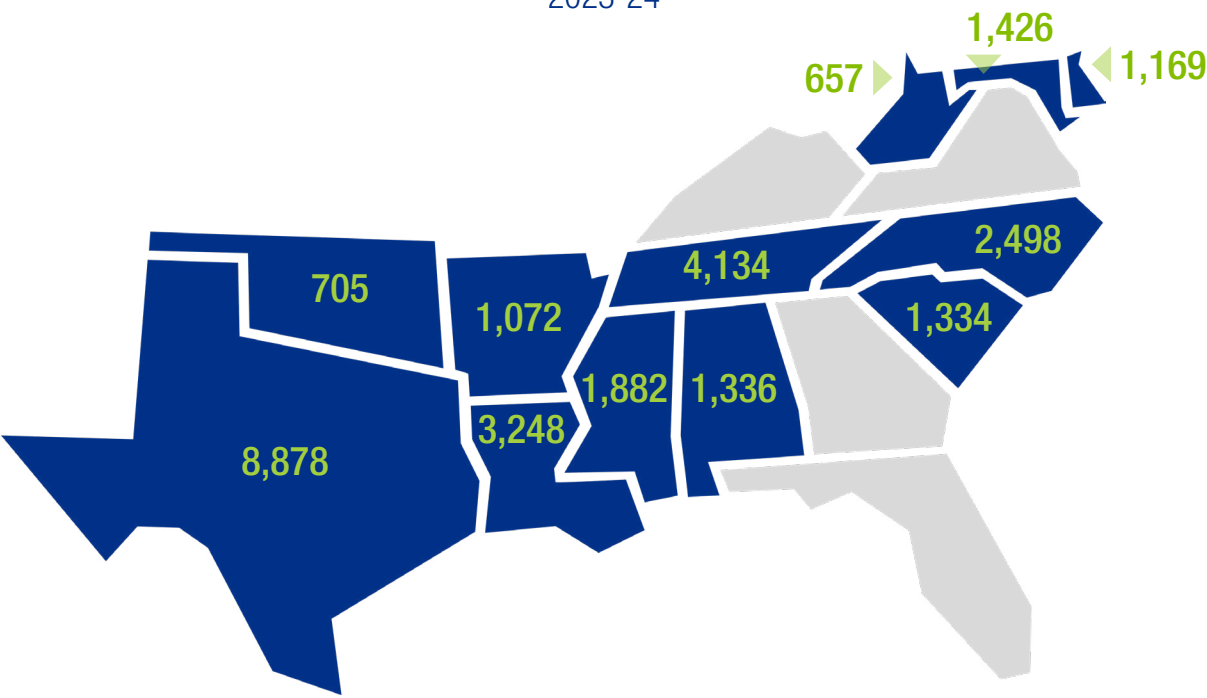
The school leader workforce in the South is predominantly female — but less so than the teacher workforce.

2023-24



Number of Principals/School Leaders Reported by SREB States

2023-24



Sources: SREB Educator Workforce data collection, using publicly available state data. Note that school leader data was not reported by all states in the region.

Retention data indicates a serious instability in school leadership: Nationally, annual turnover rates are estimated to be between 18% and 20% over the last five to seven years, double pre-pandemic rates. In national surveys, around 40% of school leaders express a desire to leave their position (Gates et al., 2019; Jones & Bradley, 2024; Levin et al., 2019).

The primary drivers for this attrition include insufficient salaries that sometimes fail to exceed those of veteran teachers, a lack of autonomy in decision-making, and high levels of stress from managing student trauma and parent expectations (Doyle & Locke, 2014; Levin et al., 2019).

Comprehensive principal pipelines — which integrate rigorous standards, selective hiring and continuous on-the-job support — have been shown to reduce turnover by nearly eight losses per 100 principals (Gates et al., 2019). Strengthening retention requires supportive working conditions, such as robust mentorship programs, administrative teams that protect work-life balance and evaluation systems that prioritize formative feedback over simple compliance (Levin & Bradley, 2019; SREB, 2025).

15%
Average school leader turnover rate in the South in 2024

SREB's School Leader Induction Framework

Core Components and Elements for Success

New building leaders are likely to encounter unforeseen challenges from the beginning of their new roles. High-quality induction ensures they have a supportive network to lean on through tough situations. SREB's school leader induction framework helps states and districts build comprehensive systems to support novice principals and assistant principals.

SREB's school leader induction framework identifies four evidence-based components of effective leader induction programs, with elements for success in each:

- A tiered support system for school leaders
- Professional learning for leader growth and development
- Instructional leadership support for positive teacher and student outcomes
- Operational leadership support for schoolwide safety and success



Tiered Support System for School Leaders
Comprehensive support that fosters professional growth for novice principals and assistant principals.



PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Leader Growth & Development

Targeted professional learning that fosters personalized and collective leader growth.



INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Support for Positive Teacher & Student Outcomes

Cultivation of strong instructional leadership skills with a focus on student learning.



OPERATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Support for Schoolwide Safety & Success

School and district instructional leadership that nurtures, grows and empowers teachers.

Continuum of Support

No Support

New school leaders receive no formal guidance from veteran leaders in the district, designated mentors, leadership coaches or other professional support.

Compliance-Driven

As part of a required support program, new school leaders complete required tasks, such as a quarterly meeting with a supervisor. Support is focused on compliance in completing tasks, rather than growth of leadership skills.

Problem-Driven

Support structures and learning activities are linked to specific challenges that new school leaders encounter. Support is intentional but often generalized to a larger group, rather than specific to individual leaders.

People-Driven

District leaders, peer mentors, leadership coaches, targeted professional learning opportunities, communities of practice and other growth strategies collectively support new school leaders' progress in strengthening their leadership skills and capacity.

Induction should help novice principals and assistant principals acclimate to their new roles as the instructional and operational leaders of their schools. From the start, these novice leaders must foster a schoolwide climate and culture focused on high-quality teaching and learning, collaboration, collegiality, positivity, safety and care. Effective induction programs provide these early-career leaders with the support and learning opportunities needed to improve the entire school community. Supports should be intentionally designed to meet the unique needs of novice building-level leaders.

Leadership mentors might serve in the same leadership role as their mentees or a level above. Regardless, they need support in mentoring and guiding their mentees in informal yet formative ways, including ongoing training.

Collaborative networks — whether they are one-on-one relationships with peers or small groups — help reduce feelings of isolation among many novice leaders, whose roles are often singletons in their buildings.

Many districts provide limited, if any, targeted support for novice school leaders. It is often assumed that those in leadership roles already know how to be effective in their jobs. However, just as with novice teachers, novice principals and assistant principals can greatly benefit from the expertise of others through workshops, coaching, mentoring, communities of practice and more. By building the skills and capacity of novice leaders, effective induction programs also indirectly impact all other school stakeholders.



Core Component A Tiered Support System for School Leaders

The transition into school leadership is a high-stakes period where the quality of support directly correlates with leader retention, staff satisfaction and retention, and student achievement. Effective principal induction programs have shifted toward a tiered support model that moves beyond generic orientation to provide differentiated, job-embedded learning (Learning Policy Institute, 2023). This approach is grounded in several critical elements of success, including the alignment of professional learning with rigorous leadership standards and the integration of diverse structural supports, such as individualized coaching, peer networks and applied learning experiences (Grissom et al., 2021).

By tailoring support to the specific developmental stage and school context of the novice leader over a recommended 18-to-24-month duration, districts can mitigate the shock of the role and foster the self-efficacy required for long-term instructional leadership (Bush, 2018; Learning Policy Institute, 2020).

Beyond structural logistics, the sustainability of tiered induction relies on a robust framework of data and accountability to ensure continuous program improvement. Research from the Wallace Foundation (2021) suggests that comprehensive induction — comprising structured mentoring and systemic district coordination — serves as a primary lever for stabilizing school communities and reducing costly turnover.

Successful programs use pre-, mid- and post-measurement tools to assess both program quality and leader growth, enabling a strategic one-stop shop of resources that remains responsive to real-time needs. By integrating a systemic plan for data collection and stakeholder feedback, districts can ensure that induction is not a static event but a dynamic, multi-session professional learning series and set of interactions that empower new building-level leaders to drive schoolwide improvement (Wallace Foundation, 2021).



Core Component A Tiered Support System for School Leaders

Elements for Success

STRUCTURAL SUPPORT

1. Require induction for no less than 18 months. Two years is optimal. Communicate the program schedule to participants, mentors and supervisors at the start of and throughout the program.
2. Develop a structure for leader induction that provides flexible scheduling, individual and collaborative learning, personalized support, cohort networking and job-embedded practice. Determine when new hires will begin the program and establish guidelines for late hire entrance.
3. Develop a plan to ensure continuous improvement and strategic partnerships that sustain and advance the leader induction program.
4. Develop and communicate expectations and processes for leader induction aligned with a clear vision for effective leadership.
5. Launch the program with a required orientation before the school year starts. Introduce novice leaders to the district and school community by providing institutional knowledge and information on protocols, support structures and district initiatives. Collect pre-program data for needs assessments to inform program priorities. Host make-up sessions for those hired after the school year begins. The orientation should develop their understanding of induction and communicate district and state expectations for leader success, with an emphasis on high-leverage leadership practices. This orientation should be the beginning of a multi-session professional learning series.
6. Regularly review leader induction policies (at least once every three years) to ensure alignment with current research and state-level expectations.
7. Schedule regular check-ins for new leaders with quality mentors and direct supervisors, such as weekly meetings or monthly small groups. Topics for these sessions should be based on data and the personalized needs of the novice leader.
8. Organize and share materials and resources so they are easily available. Examples include a one-stop shop, Google Classroom or Canvas.



Core Component A Tiered Support System for School Leaders



Core Component Professional Learning for Leader Growth & Development

Elements for Success

DATA AND ACCOUNTABILITY

1. Collect pre-program data for a needs assessment to inform induction priorities. Consider previous experiences and certification programs when making decisions about content focus areas.
2. Develop pre-, mid- and post-measurement tools to assess the quality and effectiveness of the leader induction program and the development of the participants. Collect and use the data for continuous improvement. Develop a plan for continuous improvement efforts and strategic partnerships that can sustain and advance the leader induction program.
3. Strategically identify a team of district leaders, principal supervisors, principals and external partners or coaches to develop, assess and adapt the leader induction structure. Establish participant expectations, district and supervisor commitments and mentor guidelines.
4. Support new building-level leaders to engage school teams in analyzing relevant and timely school data and using findings to promote a schoolwide mindset of continuous improvement.

Creating a Portrait of a Leader

Districts and even states can lead in the development or adoption of a framework that defines the essential skills, competencies, mindsets and values that help building-level leaders drive systems change, foster positive and collaborative environments and support student success.

Examples of these portraits feature key traits like integrity, resilience, commitment to self-reflection, as well as competencies like building trust, empathy, effective communication and empowerment. These portraits of a leader should align with any existing or future portraits of a teacher and portraits of a graduate to ensure alignment across the system. These portraits can guide the approach schools, districts and other take to staff preparation, hiring, culture, coaching, development, support and more.

Providing administrators with opportunities for personal growth is essential to the development of effective, reflective and adaptive leaders. It is the core mechanism for implementing a tiered system of support for novice leaders as they practice and refine their skills.

Personal growth experiences allow administrators to engage in individualized, job-embedded learning that is responsive to their professional background, leadership context and identified areas for development. Grounded in adult learning theory, personalized learning emphasizes self-direction, relevance, reflection and experiential application — all of which are critical for developing leadership efficacy and professional agency (Daniëls, 2023; Joo & Kim, 2016; Knowles, 1980; Kolb, 1984; Píala, et al., 2024). Professional learning should always be aligned with state and national research-based standards for school leadership like the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (2015).

Targeted professional learning that is tailored to the individual needs of novice principals and assistant principals is a critical component of effective leader induction. New building-level leaders need support that strengthens their core leadership competencies, helps them navigate complex and ambiguous challenges, and builds their confidence in decision-making, while also contributing to their resilience and well-being (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Grissom, Harrington, & Mitani, 2019).

Equally important, collective growth opportunities enable new school administrators to learn collaboratively through shared inquiry, professional dialogue and learning communities. Collective learning reduces professional isolation, fosters relational trust and promotes coherence in leadership practices across schools and systems. Research on professional learning communities and leadership networks demonstrates that collaborative learning strengthens organizational capacity, supports the transfer and scaling of effective practices, and contributes to sustained school improvement (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Leithwood et al., 2020).

Beyond strengthening organizational capacity, collective learning serves as a mechanism for translating individual leadership growth into shared practice and aligned action across schools. By engaging in collective growth, new principals and assistant principals develop shared understandings, align their leadership approaches and build system-wide coherence — all of which are critical to ethical leadership, continuous improvement and the long-term sustainability of leadership practices (Fullan, 2014).





Core Component

Professional Learning for Leader Growth & Development



Core Component

Professional Learning for Leader Growth & Development

Elements for Success

PERSONALIZED GROWTH

1. Customize support for each novice leader to address current, ethical and moral dilemmas as they arise.
2. Routinely engage and share experiences with novice school leaders to develop trusting relationships.
3. Provide ongoing, timely professional learning that addresses the unique needs of novice building-level administrators and incorporates adult learning theory. Topics should align with high-leverage school leadership practices, the school district's strategic plan, and state and district expectations for school leadership.
4. Offer professional learning opportunities for novice build-level administrators that vary in timing, scope (such as full-day workshops, regular coaching, collaborative book studies or panel discussions) and delivery method, such as in person vs. online, or synchronous vs. asynchronous.
5. Provide timely, meaningful, actionable and non-evaluative feedback to new building-level leaders — both formally and informally — on effective leadership practices, such as the art vs. science of school leadership and the ability to "fail forward."
6. Create opportunities for building-level leaders to receive formal and informal feedback from district leaders, their supervisors, mentors, partners and peers that deepens their capacity as instructional and operational leaders.
7. Design professional learning opportunities for novice building-level administrators that emphasize the “why” of a given topic and include time to apply their new knowledge and reflect.
8. Design authentic learning experiences that result in tangible outcomes and usable products, demonstrating new building-level leaders’ understanding of how to address the realities of their new roles.
9. Incorporate feedback on real scenarios to help form connections between theory and practice and grow new leaders' knowledge, skills, and confidence.

10. Provide professional learning that builds the capacity of novice building-level administrators to set appropriate goals for themselves and their school, monitor the progress of personal and schoolwide goals, and adjust their practices to improve outcomes for themselves and their school community.
11. Promote leader wellness through a balanced program that integrates job-embedded learning and recognizes accomplishments.

COLLECTIVE GROWTH

12. Establish and support leadership networks within the induction program to promote the continuous improvement cycle of learning, application and assessment. Networks should foster collegiality, trust, respect and collaboration amongst novice and veteran leaders as they share best practices and resources, expand their thinking and apply strong leadership skills.
13. Assist new building-level leaders with developing their own supportive professional network to regularly consult, advise and provide encouragement.
14. Ensure regular opportunities for new building leaders to share and reflect on educator well-being — both mental and physical. Scheduled meetings should be a combination of face-to-face meetings, virtual meetings and phone calls.
15. Provide opportunities for novice building-level administrators to showcase their new learning in front of their peers and district leaders — for example, creating a case study or presenting on a problem of practice to an educational leader audience.
16. Foster a continuous improvement mindset in new building-level leaders through collaborative, rapid inquiry cycles that engage leaders in thoughtful reflection and feedback. Leverage these cycles as opportunities to help new leaders develop self-awareness and grow their ability to identify and address problems of practice.

Assessing the Needs of Novice School Leaders

Novice principals and assistant principals often come to their new roles with extensive experience in schools. They may understand what high-quality teaching and learning experiences look and sound like and can facilitate a well-run classroom. They may understand adult learning theory, know how to support teachers, and be able to lead data-focused discussions.

It’s also possible that new school leaders struggle in some of these areas. They may struggle to communicate their vision for instruction, improve schoolwide culture or strategically delegate leadership responsibilities amongst a school leadership team.

Every novice school leader deserves targeted support that meets their specific needs. To design induction for individual needs, district leaders can gather important information through need-sensing activities, such as surveys, interviews, focus groups or structured feedback cycles.

District leaders should consider collecting information related to these three areas where school leaders often need support:

1 Reflective Leadership

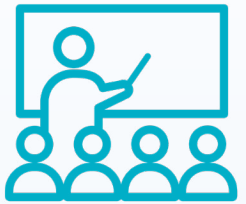
1. Understanding and internalizing the standards of the principalship or assistant principalship
2. Learning who they are as a leader through a validated assessment (such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator)
3. Leveraging different leadership styles, including instructional, distributive or transformational
4. Addressing imposter syndrome
5. Establishing accountability systems for oneself, faculty, staff and students
6. Cultivating a continuous improvement mindset in oneself, faculty, staff and students by engaging in self-reflection
7. Managing conflict
8. Managing change



2

Instructional Leadership

1. Establishing a schoolwide culture focused on learning, collaboration and safety
2. Creating a shared vision for teaching and learning within the school community
3. Building capacity in staff to fulfill the leader’s vision for teaching and learning
4. Ensuring alignment of curriculum and assessments to high-quality, grade-level standards
5. Establishing functional teams, like professional learning communities or communities of practice
6. Leading professional learning for teachers and staff using adult learning theory
7. Conducting classroom walk-throughs, learning walks and instructional rounds
8. Providing meaningful and actionable feedback to teachers and staff
9. Establishing and monitoring a multi-tiered system of support for students
10. Understanding and adhering to state and federal policy for supporting students with disabilities

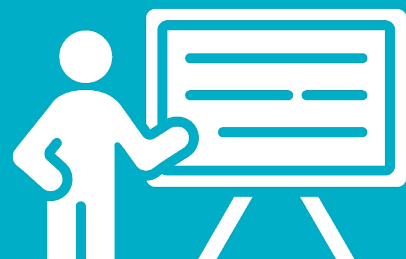


3

Operational Leadership

1. Managing resources, including time
2. Engaging parents and the community
3. Enhancing communication systems with different audiences
 - Internal and external, top down and bottom up
 - Managing conflict and difficult conversations, including documentation
 - Feedback and input mechanisms
4. Selective hiring and placement for teachers and staff
5. Establishing, monitoring and maintaining the schoolwide safety plan
6. Leading meetings with various stakeholder groups — both formal and informal — including the development of agendas and documentation of outcomes
7. Managing the various components of day-to-day school operations, such as student schedules, bell schedules, budgeting and finance, extracurricular activities, student support services, student discipline and documentation
8. Understanding and adhering to state and local laws for employment and pre-K-12 education





Core Component Instructional Leadership Support for Positive Teacher and Student Outcomes

Instructional leadership represents a strategic evolution in school administration — shifting the principal’s role from a traditional instructional manager to a learning leader dedicated to the improvement of teaching and learning. Central to this approach is the creation of a schoolwide culture that balances rigorous academic expectations with a foundation built on safety and trust. The effect principals have on schoolwide culture is a primary driver of the teaching experience, as effective leaders create the environmental conditions necessary for educators to thrive (SREB, 2022).

However, high-quality leadership does not occur in isolation. The Wallace Foundation (2025) emphasizes that a robust principal pipeline is essential to cultivate a reliable flow of effective leaders who can establish relational trust. This trust serves as the social glue that enables staff to collaborate and move toward a shared desire for student success, ultimately transforming the school climate into a productive environment for both adult and student learning (SREB, 2023).

Complementing this cultural foundation is the active management of the instructional program, which demands that leaders possess a high degree of pedagogical literacy. This is achieved through systematic classroom engagement — such as learning walks and instructional rounds, including non-evaluative feedback that is grounded in adult learning theory. These practices allow leaders to gather real-time data and strengthen instructional practices.

By mastering the district evaluation process and articulating their own growth needs, novice leaders can bridge the gap between compliance-based management and meaningful pedagogical growth. This systemic approach ensures that professional development is not a disconnected event but a targeted, integrated response strategy to the specific problems of practice identified within their unique school community (SREB, 2023; Wallace Foundation, 2025).



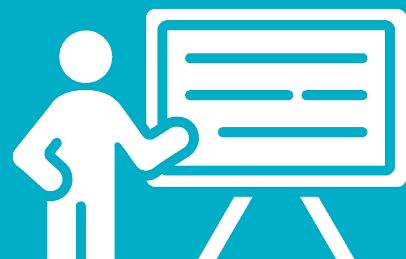
Core Component Instructional Leadership Support for Positive Teacher and Student Outcomes

Elements for Success

CULTURE OF COLLABORATION AND TRUST

1. Guide novice school leaders to create a vision for the school community that includes an emphasis on high-impact teaching and learning, continuous improvement, collaboration, safety and relationships. School leaders’ vision should also align with the superintendent’s expectations and the schoolwide community’s input.
2. Assist novice school leaders with establishing a culture of high expectations for academic performance, respectful relationships and collaboration among the entire schoolwide community.
3. Support novice school leaders with developing expectations and processes that foster strong relationships among faculty and staff founded in trust and a shared desire for student success.
4. Help novice leaders identify and define current problems of practice, conduct research, implement possible solutions and assess their effectiveness.
5. Develop novice school leaders’ ability to provide high-quality, collaborative professional learning for faculty and staff on a variety of relevant topics grounded in adult learning theory, such as workshops, professional learning communities, mentoring or coaching.





Elements for Success

HIGH-IMPACT TEACHING AND LEARNING

1. Support novice leaders in bringing their vision of deep and meaningful learning experiences to life through structured and intentional processes, cooperative learning and a focus on continuous improvement.
2. Create opportunities for new building-level leaders to participate in informal learning walks as a tool to observe instruction, gather insights and provide meaningful feedback to teachers — strengthening teaching practices and increasing overall school success. Help them develop the skills they need to effectively use classrooms observations to offer meaningful, actionable feedback to teachers in a supportive environment.
3. Establish an expectation that new building-level leaders participate in instructional rounds at either the district or school level. These instructional rounds should focus on analyzing instruction across multiple classrooms, collecting classroom observational data, developing district and schoolwide priorities, and implementing strategies to address district and schoolwide challenges.
4. Participate in non-evaluative classroom walkthroughs alongside novice school leaders, engaging them in discussions around high-quality practices, classroom procedures and artifacts. This process should inform novice leaders' vision for high-impact teaching and deepen their development of effective leadership skills.
5. Deliver training to help novice building-level administrators understand the district evaluation process, articulate their own growth needs, and provide effective feedback and support to faculty and staff.



Non-Evaluative Classroom Observations

It is important for novice school leaders to understand the difference between the various types of classroom observations. Each type has a specific purpose and focus, yet the data collected from each should be used by leaders and teachers to make adjustments and improve outcomes for students (City et al., 2009).

Examples of types of non-evaluative classroom observations:



Walkthroughs

Understanding and supporting teaching and learning through frequent, low-stakes snapshots

Walkthroughs are brief classroom visits to monitor instructional practices, learning conditions or implementation of initiatives (Downey et al., 2004). They are typically conducted by school or district leaders and instructional coaches. Data from walkthroughs may be used for coaching conversations, compliance checks or school improvement planning.



Learning Walks

Building shared alignment and learning around a focused, observable practice

Learning walks are short, collaborative classroom visits focused on teacher and student learning, not evaluating individual teachers (Fisher & Frey, 2014). Grounded in a shared look-for — such as student engagement or use of questioning strategies — small groups of educators visit several classrooms. Then, they reflect on what they saw and identify patterns and trends to inform professional learning and instructional improvement.



Instructional Rounds

Scaling strong teaching through collaborative learning and systemwide planning

Instructional rounds are a structured, inquiry-based process in which a team of educators observes multiple classrooms to study a specific problem of practice (City et al., 2009). Observers collect non-judgmental evidence of what students and teachers are doing and analyze patterns across classrooms. Together, they debrief and develop system-level next steps (such as professional learning topics or goals) to improve teaching and learning, rather than to provide feedback to individual teachers.



Core Component Operational Leadership Support for Schoolwide Safety and Success

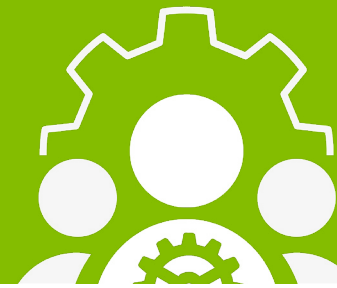
Operational leadership is the essential management of organizational systems, resources, and safety protocols that provide the stability necessary for instructional excellence. Rather than viewing operations as a separate administrative function, modern research identifies it as a core component of effective leadership that directly enables student success. This requires systems thinking — understanding how all parts of a system are connected, identifying the patterns that emerge and taking a comprehensive approach to problem solving that analyzes how individual parts or people interact as a whole.

According to the Wallace Foundation (2023), a high-quality principal pipeline develops leaders who can balance instructional needs with organizational management, ensuring that the school’s infrastructure — from fiscal stability to digital security — remains robust. This functional leadership allows the school to maintain a predictable and safe environment, which is a prerequisite for any meaningful pedagogical work.

Effective operational leaders must balance technical proficiency with the ability to manage complex interpersonal dynamics and organizational logistics. Research by Grissom et al. (2021) found that organizational management — the oversight of internal processes and the mitigation of risks — is one of the four key domains of leadership that strongly correlates with student achievement.

By mastering the nuts and bolts of the institution — including facilities management, budgeting and scheduling — operational leaders create a secure environment where staff and students can thrive. This requires moving beyond a compliance-based approach to becoming strategic managers who align technical resources with the broader mission of the organization (Northouse, 2021; Wallace Foundation, 2025).

Modern operational leadership also necessitates a focus on relational management, the strategic bridge between organizational logistics and those who navigate them. Novice building leaders can evolve into change agents who can articulate a vision for change while also providing the psychological and structural support necessary for the school. By creating opportunities for meaningful input in decision-making and developing the capacity to lead difficult conversations, leaders move from merely operational managers to creating a culture of trust and shared relational leadership.



Core Component Operational Leadership Support for Schoolwide Safety and Success

Elements for Success

SYSTEMS AND BUILDING MANAGEMENT

1. Provide support to novice school leaders on understanding and implementing district policies and practices. Supervisors should provide guidance and approval of implementation plans and feedback through the evaluation process. Mentors should serve as a sounding board for novice leaders throughout the professional learning process and development of their implementation plans.
2. Strengthen novice school leaders’ skills to develop, implement and monitor schoolwide strategic plans and safety plans, including which stakeholders to engage at various points during each process.
3. Deepen novice school leaders’ understanding and skills related to scheduling systems, including how to design master schedules for classes, create a schoolwide calendar for important events and assign faculty and staff to participate in and support various events.
4. Assist novice school leaders in navigating legal policies, statutes and documentation for:
 - District human resources policies — including staffing allotments, hiring practices, personnel management and faculty licensure.
 - Disciplinary challenges involving students, faculty, staff, parents or community members.
5. Support novice school leaders with developing, implementing and monitoring accountability systems for faculty, staff and students related to academic performance, staff and student behavior self-regulation and building management.
6. Assist novice school leaders with understanding district budgeting protocols, maintaining accurate financial records and monitoring bookkeeping staff.



Core Component Operational Leadership Support for Schoolwide Safety and Success

Elements for Success

RELATIONAL MANAGEMENT

1. Empower novice building-level leaders to be change agents in their schools, including learning how to effectively communicate a vision for change and how to develop and implement support structures for various stakeholders as they navigate change as a collective school community.
2. Support novice building-level leaders with creating opportunities for stakeholder input in decision-making, including faculty, staff, students, families and the community.
3. Assist novice building-level leaders with strengthening relationships with various stakeholders, including district leaders, faculty and staff, students, families and the community. Building strong relationships begins with developing and implementing strategic and consistent communication systems.
4. Provide coaching support to novice building-level leaders, focusing on how to document challenges and lead difficult conversations with faculty, staff and families.
5. Assist novice building-level leaders with developing and implementing systems to build instructional and leadership capacity among their faculty and staff.

A Call to Action

District leaders can commit to designing induction systems that are responsive, differentiated and grounded in the lived experiences of novice school leaders. **The investment in time and resources is well worth the impact.**

By intentionally assessing new leaders' needs, district leaders, coaches and principal mentors can identify each novice leaders' strengths, gaps and contextual challenges and tailor support accordingly throughout their first years in a leadership role. Acting on this information ensures induction moves beyond compliance or a set program — and instead, becomes a strategic investment that strengthens leadership practice, improves school culture, and ultimately advances outcomes for teachers, and most importantly, students.



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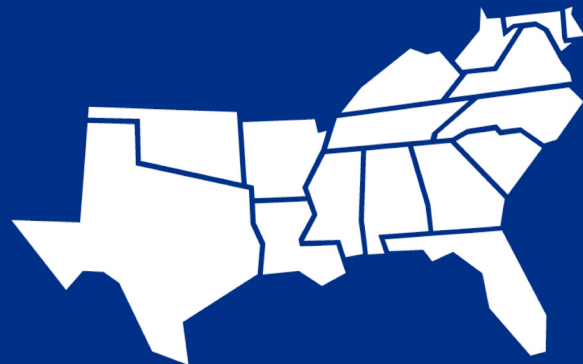
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Southern Regional Education Board
592 10th St., N.W.
Atlanta, GA 30318-5776
(404) 875-9211

SREB.org



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