



ENCORE

GETTING STARTED: 100 TIMELY ACTION STEPS



PREPARING TO LEAD

1. Spend a full day shadowing a successful principal.
2. As you complete your administrative credentialing program, be active in assuming leadership roles as a teacher (e.g., department or grade-level team leader; academic, sports, or extracurricular coach; grant writer; technology coordinator; or mentor to new teachers).
3. Compile signed letters of recommendation that attest to your skills in leadership, innovation, collaboration, and community building.
4. Read articles and books by practitioners and researchers that focus on student learning and staff development.
5. Follow educators on Twitter, blogs, and other professional learning networks (PLNs) to keep abreast of innovations, trends, policy updates, and collaborative possibilities.
6. Identify school leadership positions that are a good fit for you, and apply for them.

- 7. After each job interview you have, write a handwritten thank-you note to the interviewer(s), including at least one specific example of a strength you have that would meet a school need.
- 8. Once you accept a leadership job, write a personal letter to the school community (including students, staff, parents, and community members) that introduces you professionally and personally, briefly states your leadership philosophy, and outlines your goals as a collaborative leader. Distribute the letter and post it to the school website.
- 9. Have your official photo taken, and post it to the school website with a short introductory note. Make sure the photo depicts you as an active, engaged school leader (e.g., holding the entry door open, shaking the hand of a student, or speaking to a group). Do not be photographed sitting at your desk or checking e-mail.



BEGINNING TO LEAD

- 1. Arrange several hour-long meet-and-greets with school stakeholders at which you provide light refreshments, open with a brief introduction (no more than eight minutes), and allow for about 20 minutes of Q & A. Stay afterward to address individual questions and general discussion. Make sure you schedule these events at various days and times to allow for maximum participation.

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- 2. Schedule individual 20-minute meetings with staff members prior to the beginning of the school year. During the meeting, ask the staff member to name one strength of the school, one area in need of improvement, and one additional item he or she would like you to be aware of. Take notes!
 - 3. Work closely with your assigned mentor or collaborative partner to better understand district and school culture, areas that need improvement, challenges, and opportunities. Meet monthly to discuss challenges, successes, opportunities, and learning. Alternate hosting duties, and provide coffee or other refreshment.
 - 4. Closely study the school's summative assessment data, existing goals and benchmarks, and the current school improvement plan.
 - 5. Convene the school improvement team prior to the beginning of the school year to examine data, current goals, and current challenges. Envision how to continue, improve, or replace these goals. Ensure maximum stakeholder input from teams, departments, parents, and students. Review and consider updates to the current handbooks, schedules, rosters, and crisis plans.
 - 6. Work with the administrative team (including physical plant staff) to inventory classroom resources (from furniture to curricular materials) and identify immediate needs.

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- 7. Conduct a grounds walk with school community members to examine the interior and exterior of the school; prioritize needs, considering curbside appeal, cost, and timeliness. Coordinate a budget with district and school-based funding sources.
 - 8. Craft a back-to-school message to disseminate by phone, e-mail, and text alert (altering the format and content as needed) that refers recipients to a web-based informational letter listing need-to-know items. Before distributing the message, have a mentor or colleague review it.
 - 9. Review budget priorities and procedures and schedule a specific meeting with a district leader (and your assistant principal[s], if relevant) to overview current states, priorities, and next steps. Review personnel files and consider any existing improvement plans, hiring opportunities, or impending changes.
 - 10. Plan the “Welcome Back” meeting for staff, making sure it lasts no longer than a few hours so that teachers have plenty of time to prepare their classrooms and collaboratively review curriculum, assessment, and instructional strategies for the year. Limit your talk to the whole staff to 40 minutes and focus on the school’s vision and mission. Meet with individual teams to address more specialized items.

- 11. Review transportation, transitions, and dismissal procedures, and monitor them closely during the first week of school.



INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

- 1. Build in at least 20 minutes of short (four- to five-minute) walkthrough observations daily. Provide teachers with meaningful feedback that encourages dialogue and growth.
- 2. When conducting walkthrough observations, record “highlight clips” to share in faculty meetings. Ask the faculty member being filmed to open the meeting with an introduction and discussion of the clip.
- 3. Whenever possible, attend weekly grade-level or subject-area PLC meetings. Review the minutes in an interactive online template, and provide feedback if necessary.
- 4. Provide release time to allow teachers to engage in nonevaluative peer observations. For “singletons” with no colleagues in the same subject area, provide additional time to travel to a nearby school for observations.
- 5. Encourage teachers to incorporate formative assessment and review the results in meetings.

- 6. Plan biweekly or monthly faculty meetings, focusing on the *ABCs* (affirmation, best practices, and coordination) of effective meetings.
- 7. Monitor individual and team improvement and professional goals, and review progress on a quarterly basis.
- 8. Meet regularly with teams to review current standards, curriculum, assessment (formative and summative), and teaching strategies.
- 9. Encourage quarterly vertical and cross-curriculum alignment discussions.
- 10. Protect instructional time. Continually monitor—and reduce—interruptions and distractions that interfere with learning, engagement, and planning.



INNOVATION

- 1. Become an active member of a PLN (start by visiting www.connectedprincipals.com, reading education blogs, or exploring educational leadership groups on social media). Explore, engage, and contribute.
- 2. Maintain an active school-based Twitter feed, sharing out successes and information. If possible, post a panel screen in your school's lobby or front office to show the continuous Twitter feed.

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- 3. Regularly administer online surveys to get input from stakeholders. Share feedback and next steps when appropriate.
 - 4. Use a web-based interactive template for meeting minutes, data organization, and collaboration. Maintain and encourage continual professional feedback and dialogue through this platform.
 - 5. Continually explore ways to integrate technological innovations into your school's practice. For example, consider incorporating Quick Response (QR) codes into learning, facilitating interactive exit slips or scavenger hunts, using handheld devices in class for learning-based interactions, and connecting with students and educators in other countries to enhance global perspectives.
 - 6. When it comes to innovation, lead by example: demonstrate a new tech tool in a meeting or e-mail announcement, and keep up with current and classic TED talks given by educators who provide ideas and inspiration.
 - 7. Continually (at least weekly) refresh your school's website with video feeds of teaching and learning or messages sharing the latest innovations.
 - 8. Send teachers to STEM or tech conferences annually on the condition that they share at least one innovative practice with their colleagues and integrate it into their practice.

○ 9. Before adopting a schoolwide innovation initiative (e.g., interactive whiteboards or a 1:1 tablet program) consider how it will affect learning and whether your school community is willing to commit the time and energy needed to do it right. Do your research as a planning committee and look for examples of schools that have successfully made similar investments.



SCHOOL CULTURE

○ 1. Consider the vision statement of your school. With your school improvement team, consider how you might better lead, live, and share the vision each day. How might you increase buy-in of the vision and make more progress toward achieving your SIP goals?

○ 2. Incorporate the school vision into your daily morning announcements. In faculty meetings, be *inspirational, not informational*, by delivering a short, uplifting message that illustrates the school vision in action.

○ 3. Encourage teachers (and possibly students) to nominate “Students of the Week,” whom you will recognize every Friday during morning announcements.

○ 4. Start each faculty meeting with a short ceremony recognizing a staff member for his or her contributions to student learning, community, or innovation. Or have



one teacher recognize a colleague with a gift card and a school-specific symbolic object (such as a stuffed mascot or a trophy).

- 5. Do not let your school be defined solely by end-of-year test results that measure only “outputs.” With your improvement team, help define—and continually and consistently refer to—other success points, such as improved attendance, decreased discipline incidents, student or staff innovation, grants received, or successful events.
- 6. To bolster school spirit, print quality school polo shirts and distribute them to staff free of charge (be creative in getting funding), and enact “Jeans Day” every Friday.
- 7. On a random Friday morning, take staff orders for lunch, pick up and pay for the food yourself, and deliver it personally to staff as a way of saying, “Thank you for all that you do.”
- 8. Take time during the year to write a personalized, handwritten note to each staff member affirming a special strength or quality that he or she brings to the school. For an added boost, add a piece of chocolate.
- 9. Make sure to include specialists (e.g., arts, music, P.E., and special education teachers) as well as general classroom teachers when planning and engaging in

initiatives and events like classroom walkthroughs and team meetings.

- 10. Have the entire school community sing the school song as a weekly routine. If you do not have a school song, or if it's outdated, work with your music teachers to write one (or update the old one).
- 11. During your school's Bingo night, serve as the caller for at least several rounds. (If your school doesn't have a Bingo night, start one!) Tell a few corny jokes. People will remember!



SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

- 1. Invite your local congressperson to make a 30-minute visit to your school. Use school letterhead to write the invitation, and list three to five unique key points that define your school.
- 2. Identify several local businesses that would be willing to provide gift cards for goods or services (e.g., ice cream cones, car washes, or skate park passes) to be used as weekly recognitions and incentives for both students and teachers. Send a short letter on letterhead introducing your school and its needs, and point out that the donation will provide traffic to the business and create a positive association with success.

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- 3. Research and sign up for organized annual volunteer drives to recruit volunteers to help meet your school's specific needs (e.g., painting or garden maintenance). Build and sustain these partnerships. Write personalized thank-you notes to recognize volunteers' contribution and invite them to school events.
 - 4. Provide a 40-minute volunteer orientation describing your school's volunteer opportunities (e.g., garden maintenance, weekly reading groups) and outlining the nuts and bolts of volunteering, including forms, legalities, times, and procedures. After your presentation, lead a short tour of the school.
 - 5. Log and compile volunteer records, including volunteer names, time spent volunteering, and areas of work.
 - 6. Plan an annual "thank you brunch" for all school volunteers, encouraging each staff member to contribute a brunch item. Create and present a slideshow depicting volunteers' work, arrange for a short musical performance by students (featuring the school song and one other song), and give a short speech highlighting volunteers' efforts. Honor one "Volunteer of the Year" with a bouquet of flowers.
 - 7. Encourage use of school facilities by community groups, using this outreach as an opportunity to share success stories of your school with community members.

Compile a list of events, activities, and spaces as examples of what community groups could use the facilities for.

- 8. When your school is used by the community (e.g., as a polling place or for a social meet-up or an evening class), check in briefly with the lead organizer at the beginning or end of the event to introduce yourself and share one positive fact about your school. Use these events as opportunities to recruit volunteers.
- 9. Periodically visit houses of worship in your area and introduce yourself to their leaders and congregations. Be prepared to share one specific school need (e.g., school supplies) if you are asked.
- 10. Be deliberate about scheduling guest or career speakers to visit your school. Invite local speakers, veterans, and civic leaders who are invested in your district or area. Compile and maintain a list of speakers for consistency and to avoid overlaps or overlooks.



PROFESSIONAL AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT

- 1. Plan for staff development on both a whole-staff level and an individual level. Solicit input from the school improvement team.
- 2. When setting professional goals, encourage staff to consider one team goal as well as an individual goal.

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- 3. Use staff meetings and your daily e-mail as an opportunity to share out effective teaching from within the building.
 - 4. Open each faculty meeting with an example of classroom practice (a video clip or model lesson from either a teacher in your school or an outside practitioner) and teacher-led discussion.
 - 5. Involve teachers in nonevaluative walkthrough observations, and encourage discussion of insights gleaned from these observations and next steps.
 - 6. Spend one faculty meeting having each teacher choose one strategy or strength to share with colleagues, and one strategy he or she would like to learn from a colleague. Identify two consecutive days during the following week to schedule peer observations.
 - 7. Schedule a substitute teacher for two consecutive days to provide half-hour peer observation opportunities for all teachers.
 - 8. Send teachers to conferences with one specified goal (e.g., learning about math differentiation or a new technology), but also encourage exploration and inquiry. Ask them to share at least one insight they gained at the next faculty meeting.
 - 9. Encourage the rotation of team leaders or department chairs every few years and facilitate other team leadership roles to maintain shared leadership.

○ 10. Have teachers submit exit slips after each faculty meeting to help you ensure that meetings are actually useful. On the slips, teachers should specify what was useful and what was not, and write any additional comments they have. Read their feedback, and act on it when appropriate.



OUTDOOR LEARNING

○ 1. Read Richard Louv's (2008) *Last Child in the Woods* and consider how outdoor learning might affect your particular school. Consider possibilities for outdoor learning at your school and next steps you need to take to make it a reality.

○ 2. Raise awareness in faculty meetings, in school newsletters, and on the school website about the benefits of integrating learning and the outdoors. Share ideas from other school leaders, such as Brad Rumble.

○ 3. Conduct a faculty meeting outdoors. During the meeting, make a list of every potential outdoor learning space and brainstorm various learning activities that can occur outside. Make this list available to faculty.

○ 4. Work with physical plant personnel to monitor and overcome any issues, such as poison ivy or fire ants, that could pose challenges to outdoor learning.

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- 5. Invite an innovative architect or planner who is familiar with schools to walk the grounds with you and brainstorm potential ideas, such as a nature track or an outdoor amphitheater, that might be perceived as “big-ticket” items.
 - 6. Work with the school improvement team and local community members or partners to consider and apply for prospective grants and funding opportunities to fund “big-ticket” initiatives you have identified.
 - 7. Conduct walkthrough observations outdoors as well as indoors. Have your camera or smartphone ready to capture photos and short video clips to share at faculty meetings.
 - 8. Bring attention to your outdoor learning initiatives on your school’s website, and offer tips and resources for parents and community members.
 - 9. Help plan and facilitate one outdoors-related field trip for students each year. Identify one learning objective (it may vary according to grade level) that the experience should address.
 - 10. Emphasize to teachers that they should never deprive students of outdoor recess as punishment for behavior infractions or poor academic performance. Embed research and relevant quotes in your reminders to reiterate the importance of outdoor learning.



SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

- 1. Ensure your daily e-mail includes important managerial “need to know” items, such as relevant meetings, upcoming drills, and important due dates. Encourage staff members to rely on their web-based calendars, but realize that you are the best reminder and supporter of their time.
- 2. Be consistent and equitable when assigning morning, lunch, and after-school duties. Do not have favorites, and assign yourself a duty (you should be prominent at each of these times) that allows you to take stock of overall coverage and efficiency. Continually emphasize safety, transitions, and adult presence.
- 3. Visit a well-run school, preferably one of a similar size and grade range to yours. Pay close attention to transitions and operations, and continually seek to improve these at your school.
- 4. Ride the buses after school (a different route each day until you have ridden all the routes) to learn the routes, neighborhoods, and stops. At each stop, quickly exit the bus and wave to parents to show you value safety and smooth operations.
- 5. During teacher work days, give teachers as much preparation and planning time in their classrooms as possible. Share tips (gleaned from positive examples

within the school, when possible) on managing time and space effectively.

- 6. Consolidate the staff handbook into an accessible, searchable online document. Update the handbook quarterly.
- 7. Reduce classroom interruptions (including intercom announcements, tardies, and early dismissals) by putting in place well-defined and consistently supported policies and procedures.
- 8. Streamline your end-of-year “check-out list” to a single page that focuses on organization, allocation of resources, and completion of all necessary items in a clear and concise manner. Reflect on recurring pitfalls and address next steps.
- 9. When additional monies are made available, work with the school improvement team to consider alignment of goals and resources.
- 10. Continually seek data on how time is spent during routine transitions within the classroom to help foster innovation and teacher leadership. Affirm and share success stories.



THE WHOLE CHILD

- 1. Pay close attention to student hunger in your school, particularly on Mondays or after vacations. Observe

student behavior and listen for comments regarding hunger. Act on possibilities to help reduce hunger in your school community, enlisting your district leaders, local community and faith-based groups, and business partners.

○ 2. Compile data on bullying, including online bullying. Work with the school counselor and teachers to identify the most common targets of and platforms for bullying, and work to reduce bullying incidents. Poll students twice a year to better understand their perceptions of bullying.

○ 3. When conducting walkthrough observations, zero in on students' perspective. Ask students, "What are you learning? What excites you about this class?" Share insights with teachers, and figure out ways to act on student feedback.

○ 4. Support after-school clubs that build on student interests (e.g., robotics, the outdoors, languages, games, or computer programming).

○ 5. Communicate the importance of (and options for) healthy snacking to parents. Model healthy eating by offering nutritious refreshments at faculty meetings and school events.

○ 6. Seek ways to reduce the amount of time spent on assessment at your school. Emphasize and advocate formative assessment and engaged instructional time.

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- 7. Include one “whole child” goal in your School Improvement Plan that emphasizes student health and engagement. Refer to resources like www.wholechildeducation.org for ideas, benchmarks, and sample goals. Consider potential partners who can help you in this effort.
 - 8. Emphasize the importance of hydration for both students and staff by facilitating eco-friendly water stations and allowing plenty of time for water breaks.
 - 9. Encourage teachers to incorporate short “movement breaks” into instructional time. Lead by example by building these breaks into faculty meetings and workshops.
 - 10. Consider creating a schoolwide mentoring program. The program should be voluntary, but lead by example by mentoring two to three students each year. Check in with your mentees for a few minutes each day, and meet with each one for 20 to 30 minutes once a week.

Further Resources

An ASCD study guide for *Insights into Action: Successful School Leaders Share What Works* (2011) by William Sterrett: <http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/112009/chapters/An-ASCD-Study-Guide-for-Insights-into-Action@-Successful-School-Leaders-Share-What-Works.aspx>

Children & Nature Network Research & Resources: <http://www.childrenandnature.org/documents/C118>

Connect Learning Today: <http://connectlearningtoday.com>

Connected Principals: <http://connectedprincipals.com>

Contact Elected Officials: <http://www.usa.gov/Contact/Elected.shtml>

eSchool News: Daily Tech News & Innovation: <http://www.eschoolnews.com>

Interviewing for the Principalship: Nine Possible Questions (ASCD EDge blog post, December 12, 2013) by William Sterrett: http://edge.ascd.org/_Interviewing-for-the-Principalship-Nine-Possible-Questions/blog/6492381/127586.html

Listening to Teachers Video Channel on TED.com: http://www.ted.com/themes/listening_to_teachers.html

Publish in *ASCD Express*: <http://www.ascd.org/ascd-express/Themes/Write-for-ASCD-Express.aspx>

The School Improvement Planning Handbook: Getting Focused for Turnaround and Transition by Daniel L. Duke, Martha Carr, & William Sterrett. (2012). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education.

U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools: <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/green-ribbon-schools>

Using Technology and Teamwork to Enhance Peer Observations (*Virginia Educational Leadership*) by William Sterrett, Benjamin Williams, & Janelle Catlett (2010): <http://www.catstonepress.com/vascd-spring-2010>

The Whole Child Initiative: <http://www.ascd.org/whole-child.aspx>