New Leaders
LEADERSHIP CHANGES EVERYTHING

Developing Resilient School Leaders

Three Fail-Proof Strategies District Leaders Can Use to Invest In and Keep Effective Principals

Resilient Leadership in Action

Three Fail-Proof Strategies District Leaders Can Use to Invest In and Keep Effective Principals

In this era of the Great Resignation, when nearly 40% of principals anticipate leaving their roles, districts need more resilient leaders who can meet the challenges ahead. The past two years—from the global pandemic to the national social justice movement—have created a vastly more complex and demanding environment for school leaders. The need for principals and school leaders to be able to effectively navigate amid a fog of uncertainty and constant change has made resiliency a key component of effective school leadership.

What is resilient leadership?

Resilient leadership is the act of demonstrating self-awareness, ongoing learning, and resolve in the service of continuous improvement. Resilient principals lead through adversity. They see setbacks as temporary and challenges as an opportunity to learn. And, they propel the teachers, students, and families in their school community to do the same. It's not simply bouncing back when times are hard. Resilient leaders transform their schools for the better.

How do you develop resilient leaders?

This guide offers district leaders three solutions to build resiliency among the leaders in their schools—and get results where it matters most: for students.

1. **Coaching:** Providing targeted guidance and resources to lead more effectively

2. **Subtracting***:* Evaluating what is working and removing what isn't

3. **Teaming:** Leveraging distributed leadership to drive collective action

> **"**
> **Do not judge me by my successes. Judge me by how many times I fell down and got back up again.**
> **"**
>
> – Nelson Mandela

Felipe Jackson
New Leaders Alum, 2011

Coaching Works for Principals, Too

School leadership can be a lonely and overwhelming place, but it doesn't have to be. District leaders can offer support and foster effective leadership by providing coaching for principals. Here's why coaching works.

1. **Flexes adaptive leadership muscles**

   Adaptive challenges require leaders to find solutions to problems that do not have easy or singular answers. To do so, they need to engage with multiple perspectives, identify key partners, and mobilize the school community to forge collective solutions. A coach helps leaders to chart a way forward and holds them accountable for the results.

2. **Provides individualized support**

   Coaching provides leaders with a safe space to present a problem of practice and get actionable feedback. By knowing the specific context of schools, a skilled coach helps principals get clear on where they are now, where they want to be, and the steps they need to take to get there.

3. **Ensures direct application of professional learning**

   Often professional development for leaders happens outside of schools, making it difficult to truly apply the learning because it's rooted in theory, not practice. Coaching, on the other hand, provides job-embedded learning that is continuous and directly applicable to a leader's goals.

4. **Creates space for self-reflection**

   Coaching offers leaders a way to deliberately and mindfully slow down, flex their own curiosity, and think about current situations and solutions. Self-reflection, coupled with accountability, enables leaders to identify and overcome their own obstacles and then move forward in ways that benefit students and the whole school community.

TAKEAWAY: **Resilient leaders thrive on a growth mindset. Look for coaches who push beyond compliance and challenge your principals to drive toward solutions.**

> **Coaching is professional development. It's a structure through which we can reflect, grow, and refine our practices; it's a way we can learn to use new tools and incorporate new approaches; it's a method for improving teacher and leader practices, and improving student outcomes.**
>
> – Elena Aguilar, *Coaching for Equity*

How to Subtract—Not Add—to Drive Results

Problem-solving by launching new initiatives is a common modus operandi in schools and districts. And, yet, a wiser approach to advance student success may be to encourage your school leaders to subtract, or take away what is no longer working and prioritize what is. How do school principals implement the subtract strategy?

1. **Make a STOP list for what is not working—and stick to it**

   What are the things your school puts time and energy into, both big and small, that are not actually serving students well? Consider:

   - Identifying time-consuming activities that take teachers away from classroom instruction and stop requiring that they be done as frequently or at all

   - Eliminating labor-intensive paperwork and protocols that are not serving students

   - Looking broadly at the systems and structures that reinforce inequity and commit to no longer engaging in them

2. **Remove inessential tasks from the plates of teachers and school leaders**

   A common refrain among principals is never having enough time and far too short a supply spent on what matters most: teaching and learning. Our schedules reflect our values. Consider:

   - What might we take off the plates of teachers so that the precious minutes they have with students can truly be focused on instruction and student learning?

   - For compliance-based tasks that must be accomplished, what support can be provided to principals and teachers so that these tasks can still be achieved?

   - Can we use staff creatively so that we can still meet a range of student needs while simplifying adult schedules and increasing teacher planning time?

3. **Streamline assessment plans and reduce the amount of instructional time lost to testing**

   Assessments are essential to instruction. Yet, equally essential, but often overlooked, is how assessment results and student data are used to improve teaching and learning. Consider:

   - Putting a freeze on any upcoming tests where there's not a clear plan for how data collection will drive improvement to teaching and learning

   - Shortening or eliminating unnecessary assessments so that testing time can be given back as instructional time

   - Creating communication plans so school leaders and teachers have clarity on what comes after the assessment and how it will benefit student achievement

TAKEAWAY: **Nothing thwarts principal efficacy more than feeling that the "asks" placed upon them take them away from best serving their students and staff. Now is the time to support leaders in letting go of what's not working and refocusing on what is.**

Teaming for Collective Action and Better Student Outcomes

Distributed leadership is a shared approach in which decision-making is spread from the principal to the school community. Instructional leadership teams (ILTs), grade-level teams, department teams, and data/inquiry teams are all types of distributed leadership which build the leadership capacity of others and engage the school community in driving toward solutions.

> **I'm not a top-down leader. I'm a collective leader. Our teachers have the expertise, and it's my job to ignite their passion and to provide them with the support and conditions they need to come up with solutions to meet our students' needs. When I do things right, they are really leading a lot of the decisions we make as a school.**

– Dr. Hugo Saucedo
Principal and New Leaders Alum

Distributed leadership may look different based on a school's goals and context, but it all starts with a great leader who fosters trust, promotes collaboration, zeroes in on student learning, and works to bring out the best in all team members. Here is how it can benefit your principals:

1. **A perspective shift on leadership and investment**
   Distributed leadership focuses on what can happen for students, and overall school improvement, when the people supporting them work together to make decisions, diagnose and solve problems, and share expertise. Instead of being on the receiving end of policies and practices that need to be implemented, teachers become increasingly invested in the solutions.

2. **Improved outcomes for students**
   Distributed leadership focuses on how the school community can learn from each other, using untapped expertise, to improve student outcomes. As teams share insights, knowledge is gained. And when teachers and staff learn new strategies, students reap the benefits.

3. **An added dose of joy**
   Distributed leadership focuses on a school community, or a particular group within the school, coming together for a common goal and charting a course together. When teachers, staff, and community members are engaged and trusted to make decisions that can create impactful changes for students, the work they do takes on a deeper, more joyful meaning.

TAKEAWAY: The first step to distributing leadership? Having the right people around the table. Support your principals with guidance and professional learning on how to grow the leadership potential in their teachers and build an effective team. Then they have a group of people to lean on and learn from.

Distributed Leadership Toolkit

A growing body of research, backed by the experience of educators across the country, supports expanded – or "distributed" – leadership as a critical strategy for achieving real, sustained results for students and creating school environments where teachers love to work. The *Distributed Leadership Toolkit* provides a comprehensive review of the research on distributed leadership.

Download the toolkit to receive:

- An overview of the distributed leadership policy landscape

- Practical ways to support initiatives

- Series of vignettes showing how school and system leaders are distributing leadership and improving results for schools and students

Download Today

Powerful and Positive Forces for Change

Resilient leaders have a lasting impact, creating learning environments in which students and adults thrive. They also stay in their roles longer. Investing in the development of resilient leadership is one of the best ways to drive excellence and equity in schools across your district.

New Leaders can help district leaders support resilient leadership in action.
Visit newleaders.org/programs for more information.

New Leaders builds the capacity of equity-minded school leaders who are committed to the success of every child. Our leaders remove barriers to success for underestimated and underserved students, supporting students in fully realizing their futures as the next generation of great thinkers, innovators, and leaders for our society.

In 20 years, we have trained more than 8,000 equity-focused leaders—sixty percent of whom identify as leaders of color. Our leaders impact more than 2 million students in our K-12 school system annually and serve as powerful and positive forces for change in their communities.

Our Impact

Our leaders drive quantifiable outcomes in learning, teaching, and equity and get results where it matters most: in schools, for students. Multiple independent evaluations have proven that in schools led by a New Leaders principal:

Students perform better in reading and math

Students gain additional months of learning

Students have better attendance rates

Principals themselves stay in their roles longer

New Leaders Alumni
Chicago Cohort, 2011