10 Skills for Successful School Leaders

Executive Summary
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Why should a school leader make the time to assess his or her own knowledge, skills, and attitudes given the other demands on his or her time? Because:

- More effective leadership fosters improved learning.
- More efficient leadership may free up time.
- More focus on a defined framework for self-assessment of strengths and areas of challenge will help prepare a school leader in ways that formal preservice training may not have done.
- Self-assessment and public efforts to improve performance model behaviors that every professional in the school community must be engaged in. The only way to improve schools is to increase the capacity of those who work in schools.

Every school leader should regularly ask the question: What impact do I have on my school’s success through my knowledge, skills, and dispositions—not simply through the programs I’ve helped initiate? Too often, principals share best practices with colleagues in terms of programs and approaches to leading, but never get around to reflecting on and discussing the personal ingredients for their success or their strengths or weaknesses, which more often than not are the very things that enabled a best practice to be successfully adopted.

For more than three decades, NASSP has been assessing and studying the skills of school leaders. As a result of that experience, an analysis of the principalship, observation, and research, NASSP has identified 10 skills that encompass the bulk of what school leadership entails: setting instructional direction, teamwork, sensitivity, judgment, results orientation, organizational ability, oral communications, written communication, developing others, and understanding your own strengths and weaknesses.

A Call to Action

Successful implementation of today’s college and career readiness standards now more than ever requires leaders to take personal responsibility for their own professional development, to enhance their leadership capacity, and to model the kind of skills enhancement to which every member of the school community must commit. Student performance rarely improves schoolwide without effective leaders who ensure rigorous instruction supported by high expectations for the students. Higher expectations require improved leadership. Improved leadership is a process, not an event, and leaders who fail to engage in their own development relegate their schools and their teams to inferior performance.

You cannot afford to delay, nor do you have the luxury of pleading “no time.” Seize the opportunities and time provided to you every day to develop your skills. 10 Skills for Successful School Leaders provides school and district-level leaders with a skill set that ties school improvement to the leader’s self-directed professional development. The skills are based on NASSP’s years of experience in assessing and developing leadership skills and provide a solid foundation for building the capacity of aspiring leaders. They also provide a sound performance platform for leading implementation of rigorous standards.
NASSP 21st Century School Leadership Skills

Educational Leadership

- **Setting instructional direction.** Implementing strategies for improving teaching and learning including putting programs and improvement efforts into action. Developing a vision of learning and establishing clear goals; providing direction in achieving stated goals; encouraging others to contribute to goal achievement; securing commitment to a course of action from individuals and groups.

- **Teamwork.** Seeking and encouraging involvement of team members. Modeling and encouraging the behaviors that move the group to task completion. Supporting group accomplishment.

- **Sensitivity.** Perceiving the needs and concerns of others; dealing tactfully with others in emotionally stressful situations or in conflict. Knowing what information to communicate and to whom. Relating to people of varying ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds.

Resolving Complex Problems

- **Judgment.** Ability to make high quality decisions based on data; skill in identifying educational needs and setting priorities; assigning appropriate priority to issues; and in exercising caution. Ability to seek, analyze, and interpret relevant data.

- **Results orientation.** Assuming responsibility. Recognizing when a decision is required. Taking prompt action based on data as issues emerge. Resolving short-term issues while balancing them against long-term objectives.

- **Organizational ability.** Planning and scheduling one’s own and the work of others so that resources are used appropriately. Scheduling flow of activities; establishing procedures to monitor projects. Practicing time and task management; knowing what to delegate and to whom.

Communication

- **Oral communication.** Clearly communicating. Making oral presentations that are clear and easy to understand.

- **Written communication.** Ability to express ideas clearly and correctly in writing; to write appropriately for different audiences—students, teachers, parents, and others.

Developing Self and Others

- **Developing others.** Teaching, coaching, and helping others. Providing specific feedback based on observations and data.

- **Understanding own strengths and weaknesses.** Identifying personal strengths and weaknesses. Taking responsibility for improvement by actively pursuing developmental activities. Striving for continuous learning.
Developing the 10 Skills

The NASSP assessment and development model has been rigorously tested and refined on the basis of leadership principles and the experience of principals. Each of the 10 skills will be fully explored through definition, descriptors of practice that show what the skill looks like, examples of other school leaders putting the skill in practice, and activities to observe and practice the components of the skill, both autonomously and with the guidance of mentors and colleagues.

School leaders using this guide will:

■ Understand the skill dimensions that contribute to effective school leadership
■ Understand the behaviors that contribute to a high level of performance in each of the skill sections
■ Understand the skills required to accurately reflect on their own behavior
■ Understand how to collect feedback and other data about their own behavior, analyze it, and take action to improve based on the analysis
■ Understand how to use the information from their skills diagnosis to construct a professional development plan with goals for development, strategies for finding excellent models, opportunities to practice, methods to obtain constructive feedback, and systems to evaluate progress and revise the plan accordingly.

To purchase *10 Skills for Successful School Leaders, 2nd ed.*, go to www.nassp.org/School-Improvement/Breaking-Ranks-Publications.