WHAT THE RESEARCH SHOWS:
BUILDING RANKS™ IN ACTION
AN EXECUTIVE PREVIEW

NASSP's comprehensive framework for effective K–12 school leaders highlights the growing research base surrounding principals' impact— and the evolving role they play.

Leadership matters. Decades of research and a growing body of literature support the impact of principals on their learning communities and the students they serve, even as their role continues to develop in light of the changing landscape of our schools, students, and communities.

> "*What the Research Shows* demonstrates the efficacy of the Building Ranks™ framework. It also confirms the importance of developing and investing in the professional learning of school leaders at all levels, and it is our hope that *What the Research Shows* can help advance the field of educational leadership to better meet the evolving needs of our schools and those who lead them."
>
> **—NASSP Executive Director JoAnn Bartoletti**

NASSP's standards-based Building Ranks framework is designed to guide school leaders in identifying the specific leadership tools that have the greatest potential to sustain and support the continued growth of their school (see box, page 3). *What the Research Shows: Building Ranks in Action* is a curated review of the research that validates the Building Ranks framework. It also provides an updated overview of the literature surrounding essential and evolving areas of educational leadership.

What the Research Shows details the robust evidence that supports the two domains and 15 dimensions that comprise the Building Ranks framework. It also highlights research that confirms the vital role school leaders play in building school culture and leading learning, and documents what the literature says about emerging leadership responsibilities. Of particular importance, it emphasizes the need for leaders to embrace innovation, global-mindedness, agile leadership, change management, and resilience.

How to Use *What the Research Shows*

What the Research Shows was developed to help a broad range of educational stakeholders with diverse roles and responsibilities support school leaders and the field as a whole.

Researchers can:

- Explore research in areas of current interest and relevance to our understanding of educational leadership.

- Broaden their understanding of specific dimensions of educational leadership, ranging from student-centeredness and relationship building to wellness, ethics, and collaborative leadership. (See page 12 of *What the Research Shows* for a full list.)

- Further research emerging characteristics and impact of innovative educational leadership to improve our collective understanding of the evolving needs of school leaders. (See implications on page 123 of *What the Research Shows*.)

Practitioners can:

- Leverage research to help translate leadership standards and the dimensions and strategies of the Building Ranks framework into practice.

- Better understand the complexity of their role as they attend to the interdependence of building culture and leading learning in their unique school context.

- Identify and pursue continuous learning opportunities related to their personal areas of strength and growth.

Districts can:

- Inform and develop continuous professional learning opportunities for school leaders and leadership teams that reflect individual school and leader needs.

- Develop frameworks that support the recruitment, development, and retention of strong school leaders.

- Invest Title II funds and other resources in targeted professional learning opportunities for school leaders.

Preparation programs can:

- Develop and provide resources that help prepare new school leaders.

- Align programs and research more closely to educational leadership standards, the targeted needs of their district partners, and the evolving needs of all school leaders.

Policymakers can:

- Guide the development of policies that invest in recruiting, developing, and retaining school leaders and recognize the critical role that principals play in establishing a culture and learning environment that students need to be successful in a global society.

- Secure funding restricted to the professional learning of educational leaders.

HOW *WHAT THE RESEARCH SHOWS* IS STRUCTURED

What the Research Shows: Building Ranks™ in Action documents the empirical research supporting each domain and dimension of the Building Ranks framework. It also provides an overview of the changing context of school leadership as documented in more than two decades of research.

What the Research Shows includes:

- An introduction to the evolving role of the school leader as reflected by the research literature and changes to national principal leadership standards, including the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL)

- An overview of the research base supporting the two domains of effective leadership that comprise the Building Ranks logic model, Building Culture and Leading Learning

- Curated research for each of the 15 dimensions of effective school leadership in the domains of Building Culture and Leading Learning, including:

  o A summary of how school leaders put the dimension into practice by employing specific strategies

  o Empirical findings supporting the impact of principals through their application of the leadership dimension and its strategies

  o A bibliography of references pertaining to the leadership dimension

- An excerpt from *Building Ranks™: A Comprehensive Framework for Effective School Leaders*

- Implications for policymakers and further research

THE BUILDING RANKS FRAMEWORK

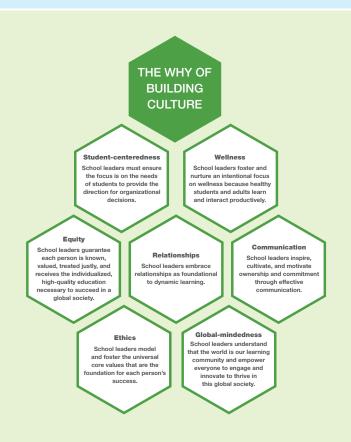The Building Ranks framework begins with the *purpose* of school leadership, which is centered on a common goal: preparing each child, across all grade levels and school types, for success in a global community.
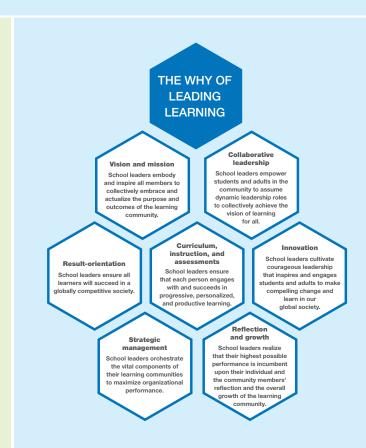
As seen in the logic model to the right, the framework builds on this shared purpose through two essential—and mutually dependent—domains of school leadership, Building Culture and Leading Learning. It also stresses the importance of deliberate leadership efforts in each of these domains that focus on both adults—educators and other staff—and students in order to advance innovative, adaptive, and equitable education that supports each individual learner and the unique school context in which the leader operates.

These deliberate efforts are reflected by 15 distinct dimensions of effective leadership (see illustrations below). Many of these dimensions have long been part of our collective understanding of effective school leadership. Others reflect areas newly emphasized by PSEL and other standards and emerging research about the changing nature of our schools.

Student Success
■ College ■ Citizenship ■ Career ■ Life

Adult Success
■ Professionally ■ Personally

Building Culture
That values
▶ Student-centeredness
▶ Wellness
▶ Equity
▶ Relationships
▶ Communication
▶ Ethics
▶ Global-mindedness

Leading Learning
Through effective
▶ Vision and mission
▶ Collaborative leadership
▶ Result-orientation
▶ Curriculum, instruction, and assessments
▶ Innovation
▶ Human capital management
▶ Strategic management
▶ Reflection and growth

Leadership

THE **NASSP BUILDING RANKS** LOGIC MODEL

THE WHY OF BUILDING CULTURE

Student-centeredness
School leaders must ensure the focus is on the needs of students to provide the direction for organizational decisions.

Wellness
School leaders foster and nurture an intentional focus on wellness because healthy students and adults learn and interact productively.

Equity
School leaders guarantee each person is known, valued, treated justly, and receives the individualized, high-quality education necessary to succeed in a global society.

Relationships
School leaders embrace relationships as foundational to dynamic learning.

Communication
School leaders inspire, cultivate, and motivate ownership and commitment through effective communication.

Ethics
School leaders model and foster the universal core values that are the foundation for each person's success.

Global-mindedness
School leaders understand that the world is our learning community and empower everyone to engage and innovate to thrive in this global society.

THE WHY OF LEADING LEARNING

Vision and mission
School leaders embody and inspire all members to collectively embrace and actualize the purpose and outcomes of the learning community.

Collaborative leadership
School leaders empower students and adults in the community to assume dynamic leadership roles to collectively achieve the vision of learning for all.

Result-orientation
School leaders ensure all learners will succeed in a globally competitive society.

Curriculum, instruction, and assessments
School leaders ensure that each person engages with and succeeds in progressive, personalized, and productive learning.

Innovation
School leaders cultivate courageous leadership that inspires and engages students and adults to make compelling change and learn in our global society.

Strategic management
School leaders orchestrate the vital components of their learning communities to maximize organizational performance.

Reflection and growth
School leaders realize that their highest possible performance is incumbent upon their individual and the community members' reflection and the overall growth of the learning community.

Implications for Future Research

The literature detailed in *What the Research Shows* suggests a number of implications for further study to help strengthen our collective understanding of effective school leadership in a rapidly changing educational system. Collectively, the research indicates that in order to support the ongoing professional growth and efficacy of school leaders, the field must:

- Conduct research for school leaders in newer areas of emphasis identified in the Building Ranks framework, including global-mindedness and innovation.

- Identify the relevance of private-sector leadership research findings in the context of educational leadership.

- Help better understand and document strategies and best practices that principals can use related to:

  o Targeting a broader range of supports (academic, social, emotional, physical) for each student.

  o Balancing the social, emotional, physical, and safety aspects of wellness.

  o Advocating for student needs, differentiating based on the type of need and the audience.

  o Connecting with feeder schools and district offices to provide continuity of student care and vertical alignment of instructional priorities.

  o Identifying and pursuing partnership and community connections that provide a global perspective.

  o Managing change and uncertainty within a context of high accountability.

  o Helping school leaders better identify focal strategies while maintaining balance across multiple leadership dimensions given their personal strengths and school context.

We are seeing remarkable progress in efforts that bring together researchers; practitioners at the state, district, and school levels; policymakers; and preparation programs to help address these areas of practice. It is our hope that the practice-based Building Ranks framework documented in *What the Research Shows* can contribute to this ongoing evolution in how we prepare principals to lead in complex, challenging, and rapidly changing times.

What the Research Shows details the robust research base and provides curated resources that inform the two domains and 15 dimensions of effective leadership identified within the Building Ranks framework. The framework is explained in more detail in *Building Ranks: A Comprehensive Framework for Effective School Leaders* and its executive summary, which is available for purchase at **www.nassp.org/buildingranks**.