

THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL LEADER



BRIEF 3:

LEVERAGING
PRINCIPALS IN
ENSURING
ACADEMIC SUCCESS

OCTOBER 2020







The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) is the leading organization of and voice for principals and other school leaders across the United States. NASSP seeks to transform education through school leadership, recognizing that the fulfillment of each student's potential relies on great leaders in every school committed to the success of each student. Reflecting its long-standing commitment to student leadership development, NASSP administers the National Honor Society, National Junior Honor Society, National Elementary Honor Society, and National Student Council.

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Principals,

Communicating up is just as important as communicating out. It is critical that your voice is heard, as you are the first recipients of "community feedback".

RESTART AND RECOVERY

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OVERVIEW



OVID-19 continues to present unprecedented challenges for our schools and communities, with no one-size-fits-all road map for districts and their leaders to follow. Following this spring's extended closure of school buildings and rapid pivot to online instruction, CCSSO has issued guidance for districts navigating a still-changing public health and education landscape as they move into the 2020-21 school year.

Based on input and best practices from state education agencies and national and local organizations, CCSSO's guidance recognizes the essential elements of supporting school communities as buildings reopen, including the system-level conditions required for an effective restart, the importance of sustaining strong teaching and learning, and efforts to ensure the physical and mental well-being of students, staff, and the entire school community across any combination of remote, in-person, and

hybrid scenarios. Research has long affirmed the central role of building leaders in all of these areas, and principals will play a critical role in districts' efforts to sustain continuity of learning during a period of continued change.

As the voice of school leaders. NASSP is adding to this important knowledge base for districts with three briefs that identify opportunities to ensure that principals both support—and are supported—as part of this essential and intentional work. Informed by research, national standards, and the practical experience of leaders in the field who have worked extensively with their district leadership on planning and executing reopening plans for Fall 2020, this third brief focuses on strategies districts can explore to leverage school leaders in efforts to ensure that teaching and learning continuously meets the needs of each student, regardless of background, circumstance, or modifications to delivery.

STRATEGIES FOR ENSURING ACADEMIC SUCCESS

espite the challenges the 2020-21 school year continues to pose on schools, students, families, and educators, the core mission of K-12 education remains unchanged: providing an effective and equitable learning environment for all students, particularly for the most vulnerable and those who have previously struggled academically. Principals play an essential role in ensuring that schools will sustain this mission during this challenging year by creating the conditions in which each student can succeed academically and ensuring that curriculum, instruction, and assessment supports their continued growth as learners in coherent and consistent ways as modalities of instruction shift in response to changing public health conditions.

The importance of principals in driving academic performance has long been established in the research literature. Effective school leadership is second only to direct classroom instruction among school-based factors in raising student achievement, and principal impact is greatest in low-achieving, high-poverty, and minority schools. Principals improve teaching and learning through their ability to shape a vision of academic success for all students; create a safe and supportive school climate; cultivate leadership among teachers and other school staff; improve instruction; and manage people, data, and processes to further school improvement.¹

Ensuring the physical, social, and emotional wellbeing of students and educators is a foundational element of creating an environment conducive to learning, and the vital role school leaders play in this area is covered in extensive detail in the second brief in this

series. In this brief, we focus on how principals can lead learning in their schools during this challenging and unpredictable school year, a role which has evolved over the years to be firmly established in expectations and standards for school leadership. The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) charge principals with developing and supporting intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, as well as developing the professional capacity of school personnel to promote each student's academic success. More broadly, the standards call on principals to ask a single foundational question for every action they take: "How will this help our students excel as learners?"2 NASSP's aligned framework for school leadership, **Building Ranks**³, recognizes leading learning as one of the two essential domains of school leadership, encompassing domains that explicitly address curriculum, instruction, and assessment, as well as others which reflect the attributes needed to effectively implement and oversee these cornerstones of teaching and learning, including strategic management, human capital management, collaborative leadership, and, importantly for this unprecedented year, innovation. Both PSEL and **Building Ranks** affirm principals as adaptive leaders who must play key roles as their schools face evolving remote, hybrid, and in-person learning scenarios, and both provide guidance and resources that help operationalize these leadership practices over time.

Principals must support district efforts to focus curriculum on essential knowledge, ensure that assessments drive meaningful improvement in teaching and learning across in-person



and remote settings, and provide professional learning that enables educators to effectively sustain and support student learning for all students, regardless of modality or individual needs. The CCSSO guidance recognizes the importance of professional learning in providing a coherent educational experience for each student, and just as principals lead their learning communities in continuous evaluation and improvement of their own practice, they too must receive professional development which explicitly addresses the challenges of leading during this school year. Professional learning has remained a perennial challenge

among principals who report that too little training is targeted at their specific needs as leaders⁴, and role-specific support is all the more important during a time in which they are called to lead across the full spectrum of learning modalities. In the sections that follow, we connect principal expertise and capabilities to supporting academic success in the three focus areas identified by CCSSO, as well as identify links to standards and resources that can help school leaders ensure that districts' efforts around curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional learning are sustained throughout this and future years.

FOCUS AREA CONSIDERATIONS



CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

What should each student know, and how will each student learn this content, whether in-person or remote?

While decisions about curriculum are typically made at the district level, principals play a critical role in ensuring

that the essential knowledge that has been prioritized for the 2020-21 school year is delivered effectively to each student in ways that give them the best opportunity to succeed, regardless of whether they are learning in person modalities. In addition, in districts with hybrid models or where families are given a choice of in-person or remote learning, they will take on challenging new leadership roles in coordinating teachers across different modes of instruction to ensure curriculum is coherent in all settings. They will ensure that appropriate

technology is available to all students and staff, and that parents and quardians are supported as they play important new roles in their families' learning. They also are the mainspring in ensuring that students with additional needs, including English learners and those with disabilities, receive equitable access to targeted learning and services, and in targeting additional support to students without stable learning environments at home. The PRINCIPAL voice IS also is an essential component of the improvement cycles that will monitor the efficacy of new curriculum and delivery models as the school year progresses, particularly in assessing whether they meet the specific needs of their learners and school community.

Of equal importance is ensuring that students continue to be engaged through group work and experiential activities, and, as the CCSSO guidance importantly emphasizes, that they receive opportunities to process the events of this challenging year, including the pandemic and the call to address systemic racism, in authentic ways that are fully embedded in what they do and learn in school such as curriculum focused on social justice and culturally responsive teaching practices. The shifting modalities of instruction also require principals to consider the potential academic impact of activities not traditionally considered part of the curriculum, including extracurricular activities and student leadership, community engagement and service-learning opportunities, and experiential learning.

Principal roles in supporting curriculum and instruction include, but are not limited to:

- Reinforcing the academic vision for the school year and expectations for remote learning to students, staff, and other stakeholders.
- Ensuring that all staff and students have appropriate technology for curriculum delivery and learning in remote and hybrid learning settings as public health conditions continue to change, including coordinating community resources to address gaps in at-home student access.
- Providing guidance to staff on evolving

- district policies in academic areas including synchronous and asynchronous learning, attendance, and grading; as well as ensuring they are implemented consistently and equitably.
- Monitoring the pacing and effectiveness of remote learning, as well as staff modifications of lessons or activities for remote settings to ensure they reach the objective of the curriculum and are coherent with other modes of learning.
- Creating structures that allow teachers in distance and in-person roles to collaborate to ensure curriculum is coherent across all settings and modalities of instruction.
- Monitoring grading and attendance data, with an emphasis on students with language, attendance, and other barriers, as well as identifying and targeting chronically absent and at-risk students through individual outreach to identify areas for support.
- Prioritizing the importance of projectbased learning, group and teamwork, experiential learning, and communitybased activities as essential components of student engagement and learning across all learning modalities.
- Monitoring and adjusting targeted instructional strategies and interventions for English learners, students with disabilities, and those with other needs to ensure they maintain access to specific learning opportunities (e.g., language development) in remote settings.
- Ensuring that authentic opportunities allowing students to make meaning of, and process current challenges associated with the pandemic are integrated into curriculum and lessons in ways that reflect student needs.
- Ensuring that authentic opportunities allowing students to make meaning of, and process existing challenges of social unrest and racial injustice are integrated into curriculum and lessons in ways that reflect and promote equity.



- Collecting feedback for district continuous improvement cycles on curriculum access and implementation.
- Providing support to advisors of student organizations and activities, including honor societies, student leadership, and service organizations, to sustain activities and community-building efforts.
- Encouraging student-centered instructional practices that support student voice by incorporating student feedback, leadership, and voice into school-level decisionmaking through such methods as town halls, surveys, and student councils.
- Attending to the varied needs of students and staff to ensure their physical and mental wellbeing, as described in the second brief in this series.

SUPPORTING STANDARDS AND RESOURCES

PSEL STANDARDS:

PSEL Standard 4 specifically focuses in on the role principals play in supporting coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, including promoting instructional practice that is consistent with knowledge of child learning and development, effective pedagogy, and the needs of each student; and ensuring instructional practice that is intellectually challenging, authentic to student experiences, recognizes student strengths, and is differentiated and personalized.

BUILDING RANKS:

The *Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment* dimension places a similar emphasis on these foundational components of teaching and learning. Supporting this central element of teaching and learning is also connected to a wide range of other leadership dimensions, including *Human Capital Management, Strategic*

RESOURCES FOR SCHOOL LEADERS:

• 2020-21 Priority Instructional Content in ELA/Literacy and Mathematics (Student Achievement Partners)

Management, and Results Orientation.

- Steps to Align Curriculum to Remote and Hybrid Scenarios (CCSSO Guidance on Academics, Appendix F)
- Remote Learning Instructional <u>Considerations</u> (CCSSO Guidance on Academics, Appendix D)
- Content Specific Learning Routines for in-Person and Remote Learning (CCSSO Guidance on Academics, Appendix E)
- Unique Considerations for <u>Students with</u> <u>Disabilities</u> and <u>English Learners</u> (CCSSO Guidance on Academics, Appendix A)
- <u>Lesson Planning Guide for Distance and</u> <u>Hybrid Instruction</u> (Teaching Lab)
- Six Key Considerations for Supporting English Learners with Distance Learning (SEAL)
- <u>Supporting Students Through</u>
 <u>Coronavirus</u> (Teaching Tolerance)
- <u>Teaching About Race, Racism, and</u> <u>Police Violence</u> (Teaching Tolerance)
- Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Guidelines (CAST)
- <u>Collaborative Conversation</u> <u>Performance Guide</u>
- Youth Engagement Guide on Learning (America's Promise Alliance)
- The Attendance Playbook: Smart Strategies for Reducing Chronic Absenteeism in the COVID Era (FutureEd and AttendanceWorks)
- Opportunity in Crisis: A Playbook to Stabilize Education for Families (Yes, Every Kid)
- Resources for student councils and governments (National Student Council)
- National Honor Society/National Junior Honor Society COVID-19 resources
- Changemaker School <u>Districts</u> and <u>Schools</u> (Ashoka)
- <u>The Purpose of School</u> (Ashoka)



OPTIONS FOR DISTRICTS TO CONSIDER:

- Including feedback from school leaders in monitoring and modifying curriculum and policies including attendance, grading, and asynchronous/synchronous learning as conditions continue to evolve.
- Including principal voice in the continuous improvement processes evaluating the essential standards identified in the district's curriculum for the year.
- Providing coaching and professional support to ensure that principals have the capacity to monitor alignment and coherence in curriculum across multiple modes of instruction (see Professional Learning section, below, for additional details).
- Assessing ongoing barriers in at-home learning environments and identifying new technology and community-based resources to support student learning.
- Offering resources and professional learning to support teachers in expanding the student use of technology in safe and meaningful ways that enable projectbased and collaborative learning.

- Re-framing disciplinary policies that negatively impact students AND families impacted by challenges exacerbated by the pandemic and recovery, including housing or food insecurity, lack of consistent Internet access, family obligations, and death or illness in the family, drawing from principal feedback on what they are seeing in their school communities.
- Providing flexibility for school leaders to support extracurricular activities, clubs and organizations, and communityservice projects through planning time and other resources as a means of sustaining student engagement.
- Considering allowing students to earn course credit for certain extracurricular and co-curricular activities that complement academic progress through service-learning and out-of-school experiential learning.
- Creating district stakeholder teams that incorporate students and student voice in the planning and examination of curriculum, academic policies, and opportunities for co-curricular, extracurricular, and out-of-school experiences.



ASSESSMENT

How prepared and how well is each student learning this content?

nsuring that each student receives a quality education during this school year will depend on effectively monitoring, analyzing, and adjusting curriculum and instructional strategies across in-person, remote, and hybrid learning conditions. As the CCSSO guidance suggests, large-scale assessments are less able to provide teachers with the instructional information they need to support students and therefore should be de-prioritized to the greatest extent possible during the 2020-21 school year.

This shift places the onus on principals to ensure that teachers are using and analyzing embedded formative and interim assessments, while limiting remote assessments to those most likely to generate actionable data to understand student performance and improve instruction. Principals also must establish and monitor other systems to ensure the quality and alignment of instruction and student learning across all modalities. They must ensure that teachers and others can-and do-use the data generated by these systems to adapt their instruction as needed within and across all settings. Given the challenges students and families face, principals also should prioritize ongoing assessments of student wellbeing and potential trauma to guide traumainformed education and other supports.

Principal roles in assessment include, but are not limited to:

- Ensuring staff execute district-developed streamlined instructional assessment plans, while accounting for the unique needs of all students and learning modalities to ensure equitable access to assessment.
- Supporting staff in using multiple forms of assessment, feedback, and opportunities to demonstrate learning in an equitable, student-centered, and learner-centered environment, regardless of mode of instruction.



- Monitoring and adjusting targeted interventions based on ongoing screening and assessments for students identified as English learners or in need of additional supports.
- Encouraging students' use of technology not just as a delivery method, but as a means to produce authentic, personalized learning tasks or projects to demonstrate learning.
- Communicating school- and districtlevel decisions made based on assessment data to staff.
- Ensuring families receive information about assessment that is understandable to them and provides opportunities for them to receive support.
- Considering temporary waivers on certain disciplinary measures based on grades or other academic indicators that may disproportionately penalize students with greater needs as a result of the pandemic, including eligibility in school organizations, academic and athletic competitions, and other activities that can sustain engagement.

SUPPORTING STANDARDS AND RESOURCES

PSEL STANDARDS:

PSEL Standard 4 specifically focuses in on the role principals play in supporting coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment—and, importantly, in ensuring that assessment systems are valid and used in appropriate ways to monitor progress and improve instruction.



BUILDING RANKS:

The Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment

dimension places a similar emphasis on ensuring aligned assessment systems, along with ensuring that technology is leveraged in effective ways to support quality instruction. Supporting this central element of teaching and learning is also connected to a wide range of other leadership dimensions, including *Human Capital Management*, *Strategic Management*, *Collaborative Leadership*, and *Results Orientation*.

RESOURCES FOR SCHOOL LEADERS:

- Learning as We Go: Principles for Effective Assessment During the COVID-19 Pandemic (CRPE)
- <u>Assessment Detailed Overview</u> (CCSSO Guidance for Academics, Appendix G)
- Returning to School During and After Crisis: A
 Guide to Supporting States, Districts, Schools,
 Educators and Students Through a Multi Tiered Systems of Support Framework During
 the 2020-21 School Year (Center on PBIS)
- <u>Student-Centered Assessment</u>
 Resources and Guides (Students at the Center Hub/KnowledgeWorks)

- A Transformational Vision for Education in the US (Education Re-imagined)
- <u>Leading Success</u>: <u>Using Data to Assess</u> and Inform School Change (NASSP)
- <u>The W. Edwards Deming Plan-Do-</u> <u>Study-Act Cycles</u> (Deming Institute)
- The Power of Performance Assessments (Learning Policy Institute)

OPTIONS FOR DISTRICTS TO CONSIDER:

- Creating a coherent district-wide set of metrics that promotes system-level objectives and strategies and includes principal input and school-level indicators, while providing sufficient flexibility for principals to respond to their communities' needs.
- Ensuring that principals understand district-wide goals and are supported in developing school-level monitoring systems and improvement cycles.
- Providing autonomy for building-level goals and improvement cycles aligned with district-wide goals and objectives.
- Engaging principals in developing and updating grading policies that are comprehensive, equitable, and sound in the face of multiple and evolving modes of delivery.





PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

How will teachers be prepared to teach this content effectively, whether in-person or remote, and meet the needs of each student?

s they face the prospect of remote, inperson, and hybrid learning modalities and curriculum that may continue to shift throughout the 2020-21 school year, educators need training and ongoing support to teach students with varied needs in this dynamic and unfamiliar environment. Principals play a key role in ensuring that their staffs develop the capacity to ensure continuity of learning across different modalities, navigate the district's chosen learning management system and other technology, prioritize the essential standards identified in the district's curriculum for the year, and, importantly, implement remote learning practices that improve engagement and attendance. The need to provide just-in-time professional learning to accommodate any unforeseen shifts in instructional delivery also remains a priority.

CCSSO's guidance stresses that professional learning should not focus solely on academic needs, but also on strategies to help assess and nurture students' social and emotional health and to identify those with special learning needs who need additional support, including the strategies to promote physical, social, and emotional wellbeing outlined in the second

brief in this series. Given America's current focus on social unrest and racial injustice, professional learning should also encompass such areas as unconscious bias, asset-based thinking, and anti-racist and culturally responsive practices.

As their schools' leader of learning, principals play an essential role in developing and delivering integrated, yearlong professional learning focused on these essential priorities. They also will play a critical role in building teachers' ability to collaborate with each other and develop new leaders within their buildings. But as with efforts to promote the wellbeing of staff, principals need support as well. Districts should provide targeted and sustained professional learning opportunities for school leaders that build their capacity to support their staff, students, and school communities through the unique challenges of this school year.

Principal roles in professional learning include, but are not limited to:

- Monitoring and adjusting school-based professional learning plans to ensure they complement district plans and priorities and are differentiated for teachers working in remote and in-person settings.
- Identifying gaps in staff learning needs and resources then providing targeted professional learning
- Leading training and support for ongoing adaptations to curriculum and modes of instruction
- Building staff capacity to support student wellbeing and address matters of unconscious bias, trauma, and systemic racism.
- Providing ongoing feedback to staff through practices including observation, feedback, and coaching across all learning modalities.
- Overseeing structures and support for staff to collaborate, plan, and coordinate across a mix of in-person, on-line, and hybrid settings (teacher grade-level or content teams, collaborative planning time)
- Emphasizing distributed leadership,

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including efforts to build the leadership capacity of other staff members.

- Communicating evolving staff needs to central office staff to inform districtwide professional learning.
- As learners themselves, identifying and pursuing continuous learning opportunities which improve their own capacity to lead learning across multiple modalities and address the evolving needs of their school community.

SUPPORTING STANDARDS AND RESOURCES

PSEL STANDARDS:

PSEL Standard 6 emphasizes school leaders' role in supporting, developing, and retaining school personnel as part of a cohesive, educationally effective school community, as well as overseeing the development of their professional skills and practice and providing continuous improvement of individual and collective instructional capacity.

BUILDING RANKS:

Along with the staff development and support responsibilities detailed in its *Human Capital Management* leadership dimension, *Building Ranks* emphasizes the importance of holding all members of a school community accountable for learning

in the **Results Orientation** dimension, while the **Strategic Management** dimension calls for strategies that maximize organizational performance based on changing needs.

RESOURCES FOR SCHOOL LEADERS:

- Critical Knowledge and Skills for Teachers and School Leaders (CCSSO Guidance for Academics, Appendix J)
- Identifying School-Level Learning Priorities for Teachers (CCSSO)
- Connected Professional Learning for Teachers Toolkit (ERS)
- <u>Tactical Ideas for Virtually Coaching Your</u> <u>Newly Virtual Teachers</u> (Edthena)
- <u>Culturally Responsive Teaching</u> (USDOE/CEEDAR Center)
- <u>Leading Success: Developing Local</u> <u>School Leaders</u> (NASSP)

OPTIONS FOR DISTRICTS TO CONSIDER:

- Clarifying system-driven and school-driven professional learning time and reinforcing principals' responsibilities as leaders of school-level professional development.
- Creating observation tools, rubrics, and other systems to help school leaders monitor and ensure quality of instruction and student



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learning across all modalities and settings.

- Engaging principals in assessing ongoing staff performance in remote and inperson settings and creating/supporting individual development plans for staff.
- Modeling new models of observation, feedback, and coaching for teachers and staff by providing similar supports and opportunities for coaching and collaboration for principals
- Providing ongoing and sustained professional development opportunities for principals that address specific leadership challenges posed by managing

- any combination of remote, hybrid, and in-person learning scenarios during the current school year, as well as efforts to support the wellbeing of students and staff detailed in an earlier brief in these series.
- Supporting principals in efforts to foster faculty leadership development within their buildings as part of broader strategies to create leadership pipelines and identify future principals.
- Providing training for principal supervisors and coaches focused on effective remote and hybrid learning practices to provide ongoing mentoring and support for school leaders.

CONCLUSION

Curriculum, instruction, and assessment are the cornerstones of teaching and learning, and school districts and their leaders spent much of the summer creating systems and structures to ensure they will be delivered in consistent and effective ways regardless of whether students are taking classes in person, on-line, or any combination of the two as public health conditions continue to evolve during the course of the 2020-21 school year.

As the leaders of learning in their school communities, principals provide the best opportunity to ensure that plans to prioritize the most essential components of teaching and learning during this challenging school year are effective not just for some or most students, but for each student-including the ones who are most at risk of falling further behind academically during sustained periods of remote instruction. While the CCSSO guidance rightly charges districts with providing grade-level learning and mastery for all students regardless of where they started the school year, one estimate by a Johns Hopkins School of Education professor suggests that "summer melt"—the disproportionate loss of learning that occurs when school is out of

session-could extend to 18 months among high-risk student populations in remote settings without effective interventions.5 With their deep knowledge and understanding of the needs of their students, families, staff, and communities, principals have the ability to ensure that district academic initiatives from the distribution of laptops and efforts to dispel chronic absenteeism to ensuring that English learners and students with disabilities continue to receive targeted interventions and supports regardless of setting-don't miss the students who need them the most. As districts assess the curriculum and systems they have put into place as part of their continuous improvement processes, the experiences of principals in their schools will be invaluable in making the kinds of course corrections that will ensure effective and equitable learning for all students this year—and through a greater principal voice in planning and curriculum development, the years to come.

It is our hope that this document and the others in this series will help district leaders continue to enhance opportunities for building principals to support their staff, students, families, and communities as they and their schools navigate a challenging and unpredictable school year. We also hope that it will assist districts in modeling the strategies they want to see from their school leaders through their own understanding of principals' individual needs—as leaders and lifelong learners.

The CCSSO guidelines notably—and rightly—

base what will make a district's efforts a success during this challenging year on their ability to equitably serve each student, especially those with the greatest needs. School leaders' deep understanding of their students, staff, and the communities they serve provide the strongest opportunity to ensure that this vital goal is met.



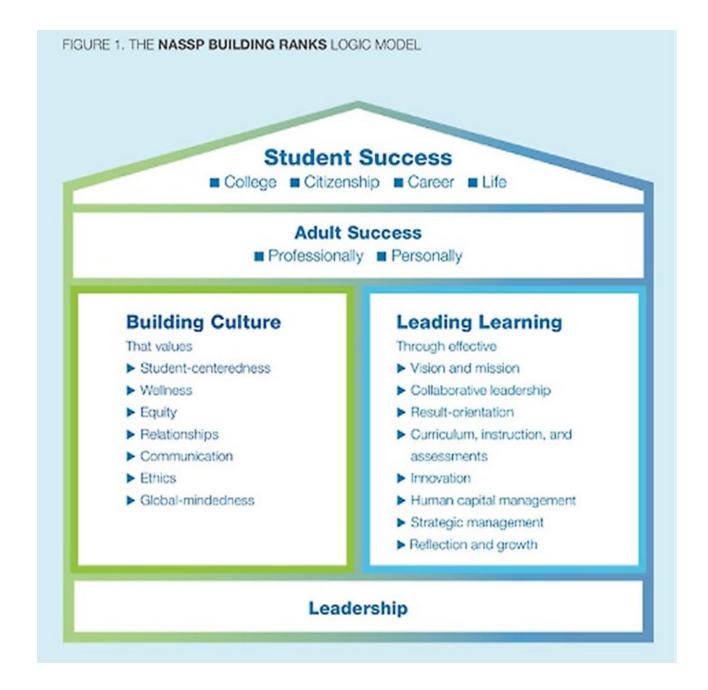
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

CCSSO has compiled a comprehensive series of academic resources in the following areas:

- Priority instructional content
- Curriculum and instruction
- Distance and on-line learning
- Assessment
- <u>Special Education Programming and Services</u>
- Professional learning



NASSP LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK-BUILDING RANKS



YOUR GUIDE TO EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Building Ranks: A Comprehensive Framework for Effective School Leaders

Building Ranks contains materials and guidance that focuses leadership efforts on Building Culture and Leading Learning, the two domains of successful educational leadership. Reflection exercises and tools to promote it are integrated throughout the guide, with invaluable case studies from real principals. Devoid of jargon and packaged in a readable format, this book offers myriad possibilities for common reads in administrative groups, book studies, and more. To learn more, visit www.nassp.org/professional-learning/building-ranks/.



