

# Reimagining Leadership: Setting Your School's Compass

## SAY WHAT?

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The start of a new school year always shimmers with possibility. Fresh notebooks lie open, classrooms buzz with anticipation, and a renewed sense of purpose fills the air. But here is the question every school leader should be asking: Will you spend this year just managing, or will you truly lead?

Too often, leadership is reduced to logistics, schedules, supplies, and problem-solving. While smooth operations matter, true leadership goes deeper. It is about setting a clear direction, inspiring collective action, and building a shared sense of purpose that sustains your school through challenges and lifts it to new successes.

This year, let us do more than steer through the currents. Let us set the compass with intention, clarity, and a renewed focus on teaching and learning.

## SO WHAT?

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### 1. Orienting Your Inner Compass

You cannot guide others until you have aligned your own internal compass. Try this:

- **Pause and Reflect:** Step away from the to-do list for a moment. What were last year's "true north" moments? What core values will guide you this year? Principal Davies sets aside 30 minutes each Friday to reflect on her week, celebrate wins, and note leadership lessons. Could you do the same?
- **Define Your Leadership Stance:** Who do you want to be this year? Empathetic, innovative, or collaborative? Your stance becomes your decision-making filter. For example, if you want to lead more collaboratively, invite teachers into key decisions through advisory committees or focus groups.
- **Be Present:** Leadership energy is contagious. When you show up calm and fully engaged, you inspire focus and trust in those around you.



## 2. Charting Your Course

A compass without a destination simply spins. Set intentional goals that matter.

- **Build a Shared Vision:** Ask teachers, students, and parents, “What do we want to achieve together?” For example, if increasing student engagement is your shared goal, you might allocate funds for hands-on learning materials and provide professional development in project-based learning.
- **Prioritize Impact:** Focus on what will make the biggest difference for students, staff well-being, and school climate. Avoid getting lost in small tasks that do not move the needle.
- **Explain the “Why”:** When people understand the purpose behind a goal, they are more likely to commit. Principal Lee begins each year with quick “vision sessions,” sharing student stories to show why literacy goals matter.
- **Listen for Feedback:** Use surveys, informal conversations, and listening sessions to ensure your vision is truly shared.



## 3. Build Trust and Collaboration



A ship sails best with a united crew. Leadership thrives on relationships.

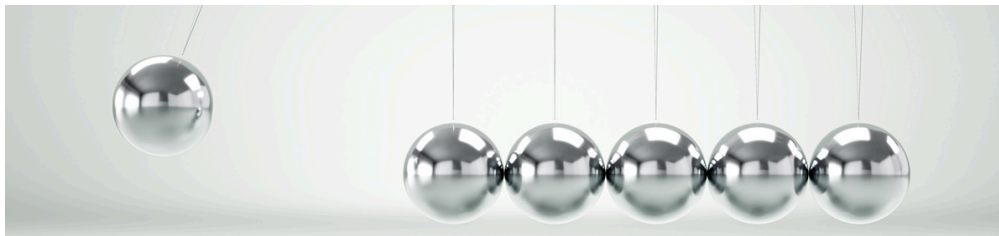
- **Invest in People:** Simple gestures matter. Principal Rodriguez visits two classrooms daily, not for evaluation but to connect.
- **Share Leadership:** Tap into the strengths of your team. At Northwood High, teacher leaders run team meetings and lead professional learning communities.
- **Create Space for Dialogue:** Invite honest conversations and welcome diverse perspectives.



## 4. Navigate with Resilience and Balance

A school year rarely sails on calm waters. Be adaptable, resilient, and balanced.

- **Model a Growth Mindset:** Treat mistakes as learning opportunities.
- **Plan for Challenges:** Anticipate roadblocks and have backup plans ready.
- **Celebrate Milestones:** Recognize progress to keep momentum going.
- **Balance Management with Instruction:** Manage operations strategically so they support instructional leadership. Principal Evans blocks out weekly “leadership hours,” and Principal Bell always asks, “How will this impact teaching and learning?” before making budget decisions.



## 5. Sustain Momentum

The energy of a new school year fades if you do not nurture it.

- **Check In Regularly:** Revisit goals in staff meetings and leadership team check-ins.
- **Embed Vision into Daily Work:** Link professional development and staff discussions to your leadership stance.
- **Tackle Challenges Head-On:** Resistance to change is normal. Address it with open communication and celebrate small wins along the way.

### NOW WHAT?

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## Setting Your Compass for Success

Reimagining leadership does not mean abandoning good management. It means elevating it, anchoring everything you do in vision, relationships, and instructional impact. This year, you are both captain and compass. You are steering your school through the daily grind, but you are also charting a course toward academic excellence and student growth. So, ask yourself: What small action will you take this week to set your school's compass toward learning?

*Blog Authored by Elisa Brente*

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**CATALYST FOR EDUCATIONAL CHANGE**

**SYSTEM  
CONTEXT**



**STRUCTURES**



**POLICIES**



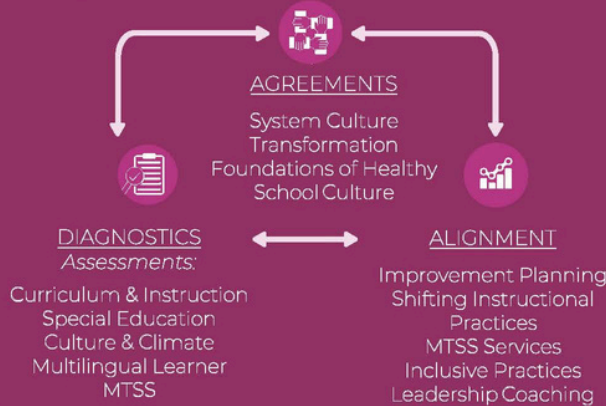
**RESOURCES**



**COMMUNICATION**



**CAPACITY BUILDING INPUTS**



**MEASURABLE OUTCOMES**



**LONG-TERM OUTCOME:**

*Increased system capacity to orchestrate equitable, inclusive transformation to reach intended outcomes through large-scale organizational change.*

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When stakeholders work together around shared agreements...the unthinkable is possible. CEC's focus on the **System Agreements** in school reform efforts aim to realign the adult culture and dynamics. We know when systems cultivate healthy, values-based relationships within each school and classroom measurable outcomes are more likely. People matter. And people working together really matters in schools. Developing a strong adult culture as a foundation of a change agenda is what makes CEC stand apart.

CEC uses **System Alignment** to create collective efficacy on the agreed upon improvement aims of a school or district. Our tools and processes are designed to empower those closest to the issues to own the work. Our change management approach intentionally paces improvement through attainable short-term, mid-term, and long-term goals. It is the "secret sauce" of school improvement.

We invite you to explore the role our **Logic Model** might play in your system's large-scale improvement. Our website includes [FREE](#) resources that might be helpful in opening up dialogue with key stakeholders. Let's work together to turn ideas into action, so we can all see what's possible for our schools.

