

AWSP's Networked Improvement Communities

Scott Seaman

Deputy Executive Director, AWSP

PRINCIPAL EVALUATION CRITERIA

Managing Resources

As another school year winds down and you start planning for the next, I triple-dog dare you to consider making your own learning a priority this next year. You must be the lead learner in your building. It's crucial you model that for your staff and students. A principal who focuses on their own professional learning will be a more effective and impactful leader. So, it shouldn't be a matter of if you will get involved in a networked improvement community, but which one and when?

PICK A NIC

For starters, we'd better address the definition of a Networked Improvement Community (NIC). What is a Networked Improvement Community? How is a NIC different from a Professional Learning Community (PLC)? Educators are famous for creating acronyms, abbreviations, and flavors of the month. And, here we are again, with the newest term creeping into the education world.

PLCs entered our vocabulary a decade ago as the movement began to allow educators to hit pause and come together to share best practices, discuss student data, and solve problems. However, just like with any new initiative in our system, PLCs were implemented with varying degrees of effectiveness on improving the overall system for kids.

“Principals must get engaged in networks to increase their own effectiveness and long-term sustainability in their buildings.”

Why? There are too many aspects influencing the outcomes of PLCs, but one main influence is the purpose of the PLC itself. Most PLCs do a great job of bringing people together to talk about problems, but not to collectively solve those problems.

A Networked Improvement Community is different, simply because of the purpose. A NIC focuses on building powerful professional relationships where leaders come together to identify problems of practice and then form collective theories of action to solve those problems. In other words, instead of informal sessions often described as a platform for sharing and complaining, a NIC moves straight into collective and common action in order to achieve measurable improvements around a problem of practice.

MAKE IT A PRIORITY

The first thing you need to do is step back and reflect on your own professional learning. How are you being fed professionally? Are you engaged with other school leaders in some form of PLC or NIC? Do you spend more time complaining about the difficulties and challenges of leadership than you do working to create solutions? How often do you gather with colleagues in meaningful

professional learning?

You need to make your own professional learning and growth a top priority. In addition to whatever structures are in place in your district, AWSP has several options for your consideration. We developed what we affectionately refer to as the AWSP Leadership Continuum. This continuum is designed around the purpose of creating networks for principals to engage in ongoing, relevant, and personalized professional learning.

The AWSP Leadership Continuum emphasizes and supports our organizational goal of keeping great principals in the same building for longer amounts of time. Principal churn is an epidemic in the country and needs to be addressed. Simply stated, it is bad for kids. In order to reduce turnover rates, we must work collectively as a system to better support the professional learning needs for principals. Principals must get engaged in networks to increase their own effectiveness and long-term sustainability in their buildings. Being in a network shouldn't be optional for principals, but rather prioritized, emphasized and supported by systems leaders around the state.

THERE'S A NETWORK FOR YOU

If you are not in a network right now, we encourage you to join one along the AWSP Leadership Continuum or form one on your own by applying for

an AWSP Networked Improvement Community Grant (formerly known as a Cluster Grant). No matter where you are in your administrative career, there is a network for you. This summer, we will form and launch next year's new cohorts of networked

principals. Which one will you join? Remember, your students and staffuly deserve the best principal. You can't be your best without prioritizing your own learning.

Get networked now! ■



Aspiring School Leaders Network: A critical turning point in an educator's career is making the decision to become a school leader. This network is designed to provide resources, guidance and support for those with their sights on leading and transforming educational systems for all students. Participants learn how to enhance their administrative internship experience, hear from successful veteran leaders in the field, and gain valuable insights on preparing for employment in a leadership role.

Launching Principal Leadership Network: This network provides new and newly assigned principals and assistant principals the opportunity to maximize their leadership skills during the first year. This cohort-based series meets three times a year with attendees learning from veteran practicing colleagues, university professors and other expert educational leaders. Launching Principal Leadership delivers "just in time" professional learning which supports the new principal across their first year of leadership.

Building Effective Leadership Network: This network brings principals and assistant principals together three times during the year for relevant, timely and personalized learning specifically designed for leaders serving in years two through five. Research shows the greatest amount of principal turnover occurs during these crucial years. BELN is focused on not just helping these leaders survive this window in their career, but to thrive as equity-focused school leaders.

Mastering Principal Leadership Network: This network is designed to help principals and assistant principals take their leadership to new heights through networking and the sharing of highly effective, gap-closing best practices. MPLN participants take a deep dive into themselves as lead learners in order to more effectively lead others. This three-part cohort-based series focuses on the art of leadership by diving deep into our School Leadership Paradigm and Principal Action Paradigm.