

# ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS MATTER

*Sometimes, the best next step for an assistant principal is staying right where they're needed the most*

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**It's a question** I get asked all the time: "As you look back on your career, what was your favorite role in education?"

The answer? My time as an assistant principal.

If I have any professional regrets, it would be that I ascended into the principal role way too fast, and should have enjoyed more time as an assistant principal. Why? Because it is the best job in the K-12 system. Many of you are reading this right now and nodding in agreement. It's the best position because you have a leadership role, but are not in charge of the entire kitchen. You have some of the adult messes, but not all of them. And, best of all, you get to be with the kids who need you the most. That is the key.

## FIRST RESPONDERS

As an assistant principal, I was instantly thrown into relationships with students that were literally life saving. These were students who knew they could turn to me for anything and everything life was throwing their direction. I provided a space for healing, calming, recovering, affirming, and hope. I also provided direction, boundaries and unconditional love. Even though some adults in the school questioned my patience and tolerance for "unacceptable behavior," I knew I was changing a life forever through the relationships I was slowly nurturing.

There hasn't been a more important time in the history of public education than right now to make sure our students have access to caring, nurturing, empathetic and restoring assistant principals. APs are on the front lines of the trauma and drama

that walks through the front doors of every school in our state. APs serve as the first responders and recipients of how each day unfolds. And, as each unpredictable day starts rolling, it's the behavior, attitude, bias (implicit and explicit) and heart of an AP that can single-handedly shift the climate and culture in a school. Assistant principals matter, and our educational system better start paying closer attention to the important role they play in the K-12 system.

Public education is overwhelmed with stress and anxiety like never before. Mental health related issues are skyrocketing as the woes of society spill into our schools. All adults in the system are bending, and close to breaking, with these increased pressures. Everyone plays an important role in the system. However, as we talk about maintaining school safety, reducing suspensions, and constantly responding to mental health crises, our assistant principals ultimately are the first lines of defense.

There is no question in my mind we need more social workers, school counselors, mental health professionals, and other qualified caring adults in our schools. Our goal should be to reduce the adult to student ratio. In the meantime, our system needs to reexamine how we allocate assistant principals to make sure every school is staffed appropriately to match not only the student count, but the special programs housed within a particular school.

## AMAZING APs

We also need to reconsider a mindset that has existed for decades: the notion that assistant principals must

be preparing to move on to become principals. That notion is just flat-out wrong and needs to be reconsidered. Of course we need great people to aspire to the principalship and that will happen naturally, but we also need great people to stay in a role where they fit best and where they are needed the most. We need to acknowledge that staying in an AP role is not only acceptable, but encouraged.

Our students need consistent adults in their lives. Those students experiencing more trauma and ACEs than others need that consistency and strong relationships even more. During my tenure as a principal, I was blessed to have two life-long amazing and life-changing assistant principals working for the kids in our school. I got to witness on a daily basis the power of the positive relationships they forged with the kids who needed them most.

I can easily say the culture of our school was built around the consistency of an administrative team, but more importantly, two incredible assistant principals who loved kids unconditionally in the same roles, same school, and same community for 10 years in a row. There is no way I would have "survived" as long as I did in my principal role without my two assistant principals content with doing what they did best, where they were needed the most. Their impact was immeasurable.

Assistant principals matter. Let's build a system that honors their impact. ■



*Dr. Scott Seaman joined AWSP in the fall of 2013 after serving as the principal at Tumwater High School. In July 2018, he assumed duties as Executive Director.*