

CENTERING THE WORK FOR
NEW ELEMENTARY
LEADERS

AWSP's
**EQUITY-
CENTERED**
LEADERSHIP NETWORK

Equity, Justice, Belonging



INTRODUCTION

If you're not leading for equity, you're not leading. Period.

AWSP is committed to ensuring all school leaders have the support needed to create environments where each and every student is seen, where each and every student can thrive and, most importantly, where each and every student feels a deep sense of belonging.

We've all admired leaders who are willing to ask the tough questions, challenge the status quo when it isn't working, and call out long-standing biases, even when it's uncomfortable. In November of 2021, AWSP was able to put its equity statement into practice with help from a generous grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. AWSP gathered a select group of elementary principals and assistant principals who are making strides in their knowledge and implementation of racially literate, equity-centered leadership. The **AWSP Equity-Centered Leadership Network** gathered monthly in 2022.

The Network provided an opportunity for these leaders to share best practices and learn from peers outside of their districts.

The network was created around the following goals:

- Create a dynamic professional learning network of elementary principals and assistant principals committed to increasing their knowledge and implementation of racially literate, equity-centered leadership.
- Identify and infuse equity-centered school leadership and share current best practices from each of the schools and districts involved in the Equity-Centered Leadership Network.
- Recognize systems that perpetuate gaps and rebuild with an anti-racist, equity-centered focused vision.

This resource for new elementary leaders is a product of the work done by this network and is designed as a means to support new elementary leaders in their equity work.

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Contents:

Self.....	3
Students	5
Staff	6
School Community	9
District.....	11
Meet the ECLN Team.....	12

AWSP's Equity Statement:

Educational disparities based on race, economics and other dimensions of difference are eliminated. Positive school outcomes are distributed equitably across all demographic and identity groups.

SELF

Equity-centered leadership begins with knowing yourself. Every person has a unique identity and engaging in an ongoing reflective process is important to help you learn and grow. Knowing yourself includes knowing your prejudices and biases. Accepting this early will help you recognize racism in the system and in yourself. Equity-centered leaders take responsibility for the impact of their actions and words rather than trying to justify intent. Your actions, words, and choices have a lasting impact on all the people in your community. Be your authentic self.

Train your brain to celebrate your progress and give yourself the grace you deserve.

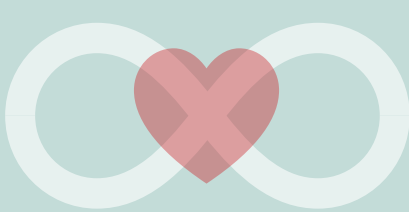
Uncomfortable conversations are a necessity.

This is your identity. Know your why, race, culture, strengths, passions, and priorities. Learning about yourself and your leadership is a never-ending process.

Know your biases. Your view of the world is always filtered through your own lens.

Make connections and build relationships. Create contacts and know your mentors.

Wear comfortable shoes for your walk alongside staff, families, community, and students.



SELF (Continued)

GIVE YOURSELF THE GRACE YOU EXTEND TO OTHERS.

Take the time you need for yourself--this is modeling AND it is good for you as a person and as a leader. Delegate! Empower others, then trust them. Build teacher leaders that are able to follow the mission/vision and why of the leadership.

UNCOMFORTABLE CONVERSATIONS MEAN SOMETHING NEEDS TO CHANGE.

These conversations are imperative. Center your conversations around data, outcomes, or initiatives when possible. Prepare for the conversation in an intentional way. Honesty is the best approach. It is valuable to normalize uncomfortable conversations by modelling, providing training, and requiring accountability.

APOLOGIZE AND TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR HARM YOU'VE CAUSED.

Be vulnerable and real. Understand intent versus impact. Take responsibility for your impact; don't just rationalize your intent. We are all human beings. You will make mistakes.

KNOW YOUR WHY AND BE TRUE TO IT.

Have your mission and vision alive in your day to day work. Know how your why is aligned to the vision/mission of your school. You need a plan based on a vision that is developed collaboratively with staff, community and students. Sticking with the status quo does not create transformational change.

KNOW YOUR STRENGTHS, PASSIONS, IDENTITY AND CHALLENGES. THIS IS THE CORE OF YOUR WORK.

See yourself as a learner who is continually growing and changing. Be vulnerable. Share your personal journey and your own learning and growth.

KNOW YOUR BIASES.

Acknowledge that everyone has them, including you. Point out biases of a group. Acknowledge that there are things you don't know, and allow yourself to be vulnerable.

FIND YOUR CREW! LEAN ON, SUPPORT, AND ENCOURAGE EACH OTHER.

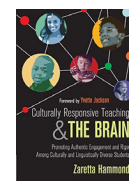
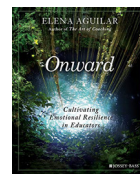
Take the time to build relationships--both in the building and with a mentor on the same "level" as you. This must be someone you can trust. Know the people in your group.

LEAD ALONGSIDE.

Leverage the strengths of people in your community and school. Build teacher leaders. Know your strengths/weaknesses, your people and their strengths/weaknesses. Focus on the strengths of your people.

POSSIBLE RESOURCES:

- *Onward: Cultivating Emotional Resilience in Educators* by Elena Aguilar
- *Courageous Conversations About Race* by Glenn Singleton
- Harvard Implicit Bias Test: www.projectimplicit.net
- *Blindspot* by Banaji and Greenwald
- *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies* by Resmaa Menakem
- *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* by Zaretta Hammond



STUDENTS

Toni Morrison said, “When you get these jobs that you have been so brilliantly trained for, just remember that your real job is that if you are free, you need to free somebody else. If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else.” As an equity-centered leader it is imperative to root your purpose in students. Here are a few ways you can achieve this:

SPEND AS MUCH TIME WITH THE KIDS AS YOU CAN.

This is essential to keeping you grounded in your why. Be visible and intentional about being present—in the cafeteria, in the hallways, during celebrations, and during their academic work. Use every opportunity to build trust with students. Spending time with students will also help them to see the many hats you wear (disciplinarian, lunch supervisor, caring adult, etc.). Most importantly, it will bring you joy.

“Use every opportunity to build trust with students.”

INSIST ON STUDENTS BEING AT THE CENTER OF EVERY CONVERSATION AND DECISION.

First, it is necessary to be rooted in the statement “All students are presumed competent.” (Shelley Moore) Recognize, validate, and celebrate that each student brings unique strengths and funds of knowledge to the school community. Have systems in place to incorporate student voice in conversations and decision making—they are the most important stakeholders in their education. Some ways to achieve this can be through student surveys, focus groups, or lunch with the principal or assistant principal.

KNOW EACH STUDENT BY NAME, STRENGTH AND NEED.

One strategy is the 2x10 Strategy. Educators or school leaders select a particular student and set a goal to engage in a 2-minute conversation with that student for 10 consecutive school days. In the book *Street Data* by Shane Safir and Jamil Dugan, one suggestion for collecting valuable data is to shadow a student: “Put on your comfy shoes and, with permission of course, follow a student through his or her school day. This is particularly impactful if done by a network of leaders and focused on students who are currently outside the sphere of success.” It is important to build in ways for staff to get to know every student. Intentionally plan professional learning communities (PLCs) to take a holistic look at each student.

BELIEVE IN YOUR STUDENTS.

Celebrate successes as a community. Focus on student assets and strengths. Build students up. Help them to see the strengths they already have and show them how those strengths can be used to better the community. “Every child deserves a champion—an adult who will never give up on them, who understands the power of connection, and insists they become the best that they can possibly be.” (Rita Pierson)

RESOURCES:

- *Street Data* by Shane Safir and Jamila Dugan
- *Leader in Me* by Stephan Covey
- *Emergent Strategy* by adrienne maree brown
- *Differentiation Through Personality Types* by Jane A. G. Kise
- Shelley Moore-TEDTalk: *One Without the Other*
- Rita Pierson-TEDTalk: *Every Kid Needs a Champion*
- Association of Washington Student Leaders
- *Kids at Hope* and *Youth Development From the Trenches* by Rick Miller

STAFF

As an instructional leader, who you hire, retain, and let go impacts your school culture tremendously. In every building, there is a different sense of urgency to make change. Building trust, whether it be through careful observation or following through on your non-negotiable leadership objectives, is essential to a healthy and effective staff culture.

If the culture is toxic, ignoring and not addressing it will only perpetuate the problem and erode trust. On the other hand, coming in and doing large sweeping changes can also backfire. Leading staff is a balancing act. Knowing when to push and how hard to push is not always straightforward. Trust your gut but also back it up with multiple data sources.

You are the right person in the right seat! You were chosen for a reason and not by chance.

START WITH THE VISION AND MISSION.

By facilitating a conversation with all staff, and being laser-focused on what that looks like and sounds like in all spaces of the school, you are establishing a culture to regularly revisit and anchor stakeholders in the school's collective "why." Unpacking the thinking and rationale for decisions, including the sharing process for soliciting stakeholder input, leads to shared decision making and builds high levels of trust.

Having the "right people in the right seats" to create equitable opportunities for students sometimes means you will come up against past ways of doing things in order to create the best conditions to serve students. Trust your decisions, lean into your why. Creating a culture of high trust allows for difficult conversations to happen about what is best for our students.

Creating a culture of high trust often means a regular practice of transparency and specific feedback. Through use of the evaluation tool, detailing specific patterns of practice may lead to temporary discord. Keep in mind, it is important to know when to reference the evaluation rubric and when to have a collegial conversation. Be mindful of big emotional reactions. Give time and space and make the decision that is best for students. Just remember, clear is kind.

KNOW YOUR STAFF AND LEVERAGE THEIR STRENGTHS.

We are all individuals who have unique talents and gifts. Not only will this help you get your staff "into the right seats" but it will also help you create a school filled with joy, creativity, and uniqueness. No teacher, student, or school is the same. Use your staff's strengths to create a rich, inspiring, and diverse learning environment. When we create from our strengths, anything is possible.

Take the time to get to know the individuals in your building by asking about their hobbies, families, and community service. Use interest surveys, listening sessions and ice-breakers early in the year. Use resources like *Strengths Finder* by Tom Rath, or *Differentiated Coaching: A Framework for Helping Teachers Change* by Jane A. G. Kise, to uncover hidden strengths and areas of expertise, but don't stop there. Take this knowledge and use it when making decisions like forming grade level teams or PLC leads. By acknowledging and celebrating your staff's talents and modeling differentiation, you are creating a safe place to learn and grow.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH TEAMS MATTER.

As a school leader, it is a privilege and honor to serve in this position. Knowing what decisions are yours to make is imperative. While distributive leadership matters, there are times when the administrator will have to make the decisions that will best support all students. At the end of the day, you are responsible for the decisions made in your building.

Distributive leadership is also an important component of operations of the school. Encouraging and even inspiring others to lead can often create a culture with higher level of staff buy-in and better outcomes for students.

The relationships among team members matter. The relationships between staff and administrators matter. Scheduling regular check-ins with teams, focusing on the following questions helps anchor all stakeholders back to the shared "why." What's going well? What's stretching you? What might support look like?

KNOW YOUR PEOPLE INSIDE AND OUT; LEVERAGE RELATIONSHIPS.

Many times you will be reminded how truly important it is to have a professional relationship with all staff. When you have the relationship and know the strengths and the areas staff are growing in, you are in a better position to actively listen and understand the perspective being given to you, whether you share that perspective or not. You are better equipped to respond in a way that keeps students centered in the decisions being made.

If you find yourself having only negative or no interactions with a particular staff member(s), make it a point to connect with them. Drop by their classroom in the mornings. As we suggest the 2 x 10 strategy to teachers in their efforts to support building relationships with students (see page 5), we should also model that with staff as we continuously work to build, strengthen, and sustain our relationships. (The 2 x 10 Strategy involves selecting a student and for 2 minutes a day for 10 days in a row, engage in a brief conversation with the same student.) Every person has a continuum of communication preferences whether it is highly expressive to introspective and needing time to process. Additionally, every person has different learning preferences. Some need agendas with bullet points while others prefer to see the vision or rationale behind each project or initiative.

FIND A PLACE OR ROLE THAT ALLOWS EACH STAFF MEMBER TO THRIVE.

A positive school culture is what leads to a school's success. Teachers focus their attention on students ensuring they get what they need to thrive in the classroom to give them every possible chance at success academically and socially. One component of a principal's job is to set school staff up for success. Don't be afraid to move people into positions that best suit them even if the staff member thinks differently, but be careful with this so that you can manage with trust and maintain a relationship. Meet with the staff member before making the move and discuss the reasons you know the move to a different position is the right move. Allow them to talk through their fears about taking on a different role and help them process those feelings associated with the change. In the end, your job is to place people in the right positions where they can thrive, which in turn allows the students to thrive. This is true for support staff as well.

“Remember, while you do not have to have a great relationship with everyone, you must *have* a relationship with everyone.”

It takes time to build trusting relationships as a new leader, especially with a staff who have already been working together and have built their own relationships and ways of doing things. Observe how they interact with each other and notice each person's strengths. Use that knowledge to help you determine best placements for staff, and allow the leaders in the groups to help you lead in areas of their expertise. Another caution, don't overlook staff members who are not very vocal in meetings/discussions. Just because they may not be leaders of a group does not mean they don't have opinions, great ideas, and other strengths that can help you move your teams forward with the mission of the school. Diversity amongst group members makes a great group as it promotes the sharing of differing ideas and perspectives which helps eliminate conformity.

Celebrate staff every chance you get! This can be done in weekly staff communication, staff meetings, personal cards of appreciation, email, etc. Be specific with your praise and name specific actions/shifts happening to enhance student experiences and collegial relationships. When creating a positive school culture with students and staff in the forefront, students want to come to school creating less absences, and staff will remain at the school minimizing staff turnover. Acknowledge personal and professional accomplishments of your staff. This simple act will show them you care about them. Make it a habit to check in with every staff member and get feedback on what is working at the school and what needs work. This is a great time to check in about what support they need as an individual, not just what is important for the school culture. Not everyone needs the same thing, or the same kind of support and not everyone likes to be acknowledged in front of their peers. Take the time to get to know them. It takes time, but it is well worth the effort. When they know you care, they will move mountains to support you!

STAFF (Continued)

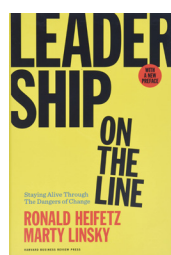
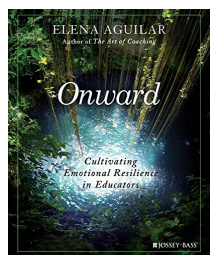
Teaching is a demanding job and the job is getting more complex with each passing year. When school staff do not know how to cope with their stress it can have a negative impact on student learning. When staff feel respected, valued and affirmed they create a positive learning environment for their students, which in turn supports students in reaching their full potential in all aspects of learning. Social and emotional learning amongst your staff is a critical component of a positive school climate. Take care of yourself so you can take care of your staff, who will then take care of your students.

FIND OUT WHAT YOUR STAFF CULTURE/CLIMATE IS, AND WHO HAS VOICE AND NEEDS VOICE.

While it does take time, be intentional to ensure that all have the opportunity to share their voice. Be aware of the structures you are using for discussion. Do you want to implement circles for discussion? Is a quick confidential survey going to give you a better sense of what staff are feeling, believing, or thinking? If you have staff that are less expressive, do you need to give them information in advance to process so they are ready to participate in an all staff discussion? Consider creating a building-based decision making model to facilitate a process shared by all stakeholders. Being intentional with HOW you gather input from your staff means that more of your staff will likely participate.

Remember, while you do not have to have a great relationship with everyone, you must *have* a relationship with everyone.

RESOURCES:



- **Onward** by Elena Aguilar
- **Clear is Kind. Unclear is Unkind.** Article by Brené Brown
- **Leadership on the Line** by Martin Linsky and Ronald A. Heifetz

ECLN Participant Quotes:

“As a woman of color in leadership, I always look forward to coming together with colleagues in this network. I always leave here inspired, uplifted and am reminded of my why-each and every kid!”

- Evelyn Limehouse

“Being in a shared space with colleagues from around our region has allowed for a safe space in which to grow in my practice so that I can follow it with a renewed sense of commitment and urgency in my leadership moves around equity. Collectively, we have had the opportunity to challenge one another’s thinking all with the ultimate goal of dismantling the racist structures our schools were built on and work to ensure equitable outcomes for our students and families.”

- Holly Nielsen

SCHOOL COMMUNITY

TAKE INVENTORY.

As a new leader, understanding the school community with all its intricacies is an essential starting point for an equity-centered leader. This begins with learning as much as you can about where your school community currently is, co-creating a vision, and creating systems that will move the vision forward.

DEVELOP A VISION.

New leaders develop a vision for racial justice and equity for the school community by providing collaborative opportunities, inviting and co-creating with your community members, in order to create a space in which community members eventually own the vision itself. Initial questions you may ask include:

- How do community members feel about the school?
- What are the values, aspirations and goals of our community currently?
- How inclusive does the community feel?
- How do community members feel about the success of the school? Their student's success?

CREATE SYSTEMS TO SUPPORT THE VISION.

Once you've collected information about your community and co-developed that vision around equity, then begin to work on systems that will support that vision.

It can be easy to get bogged down by the technical aspects of the job: email, evaluations, scheduling, etc. It is important for all stakeholders in your school community to see you spend time greeting students and families at arrival, connecting and building relationships with visitors and volunteers, and being present at dismissal. Be intentional and schedule this into your calendar. What gets calendared gets done!

It is essential to establish pathways for home to school two-way communication and connection. As the school leader, you set the tone regarding communication with families. Being invitational in all communication to the school community builds upon the cultural and social capital of traditionally underserved communities. Use varied types of communication to diversify the outreach, including:

- Newsletters (sent in primary language)
- Social media
- Email to families (with translations in priority languages)
- Apps (i.e. Remind or similar communication tools)
- In-person conversations or listening sessions.

Ask yourself: What systems and structures are currently in place that are designed to include community engagement and commitment to your school's vision on race and equity? Why are some community stakeholders not showing up to the conversation?

Go to them. Reach out to the community and find out how the community views the school and whether or not structures are working or not working to invite input, collaboration, and co-creation. What needs to be created or revised to ensure equitable practices co-exist with communal values? Co-create the hopes and dreams of the education experience with guardians and community partners.

“Why are some community stakeholders not showing up to the conversation?”

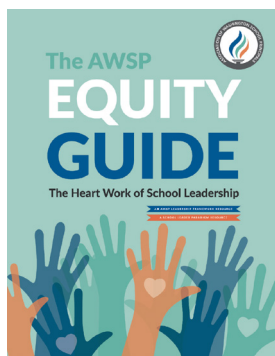
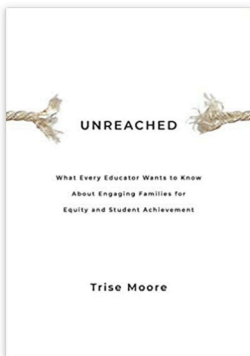
ACTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Create a welcome video from within the community
- Express charisma and be joyfully seen in the school building and community (events). Make personal connections daily.
- Collaborate with the staff so they create a universally welcoming environment throughout the school building and know how to respond to (student, staff and family) communications and to concerns/conflict as it arises.
- Ensure there are multiple entry points for families and community to frequently provide input, collaborate, and co-create.
- Coffee with the Principal or Community Cafe
- Open Mic

SCHOOL COMMUNITY (Cont.)

- Curriculum Night that showcases your skill set in instructional pedagogy and implementation
- Reach out to families that have traditionally been marginalized by the school system with a personal invitation
- Request staff to follow up with families that did not attend teacher conferences
- Seek to eliminate barriers such as transportation, childcare, or language.

RESOURCES



Unreached: What Every Educator Wants to Know About Engaging Families for Equity & Student Achievement

By Trise Moore

In *Unreached*, Moore breaks down four equity partnership recommendations that lay the foundation for five leadership practices to assist individual teachers, school teams, and building leaders as they collaborate with families to develop authentic, outcome-based approaches that support student achievement. Filled with practice scenarios, tips & strategies, and reflection questions, this guide will assess where you are now; facilitate collaborative school, family, and community interactions for growth; and provide the structure necessary to organize and encourage continued engagement.

AWSP Equity Guide

This document serves to help each school leader to learn the grounding vocabulary of justice, equity, diversity and inclusion as it comes alive within the school context and to reinforce the school leader's personal responsibility to lean into their own thoughts, practices and leadership story as they grow and learn in their leadership practices as a transformational school leader.

ECLN Participant Quotes:

“The ECLN provides access to connect with fellow school leaders whose passion derives from the framework of equity. By aligning with purpose and sensemaking together in the ECLN sessions, staff, students, and their families share in the collective experience that ultimately leads to sustainable school community outcomes.

- Baron You

“Being involved in ECLN has allowed me to prioritize the important work of being an equity focused leader. It is often a very busy job, and being able to take time away from the day to day, connect with colleagues, share wins and challenges, and gain new perspectives has made me a better principal for my students and staff.” *- Jen Hogle*

DISTRICT

QUESTION THE SYSTEM BUT LEARN HOW IT'S WORKING IN ORDER TO INFLUENCE IT.

As a new leader, it can be easy to feel like you do not have any influence, that you need to sit down and listen. While it's necessary to check in with the "vibe" to become acquainted with the historical context of staff and community at the district level, with your positionality, it is also important to act. Building leaders have a place in the district. You may want to ask, How are the district goals and visions aligned with your personal "why?" And, where do you find dissonance? Question things and bring them up with in-district mentors and/or teammates.

JUST BECAUSE IT'S ALWAYS BEEN DONE THAT WAY DOESN'T MEAN IT'S THE BEST WAY.

Now that you feel connected to the historical context and vision of the district, you can start to unpack the "why" of district goals and value statements as well as the technical pieces: systems, routines, processes, procedures. Consider asking yourself, What are the effects of current goals, value statements, and district processes and procedures in your building? A way to evaluate these technical pieces is to ask, "What is the problem we're trying to solve?" Use the information you gather to compare the way things have always been done to your personal "why."

"Finding thought partners will allow you to collaborate with equity-aligned leaders which will enable you to be a stronger building leader."

FIND YOUR PEOPLE.

The role of principal can feel isolating as one of few leaders in your building. You have the agency to seek people out. You can also lean on people who know you or are in a similar position. Ask your teammate, a friend in the district, or even your boss who they recommend to connect with. Once they recommend somebody, ask them why they recommend the person. Finding thought partners will allow you to collaborate with equity-aligned leaders which will enable you to be a stronger building leader.

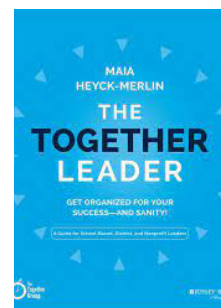
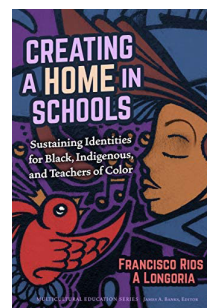
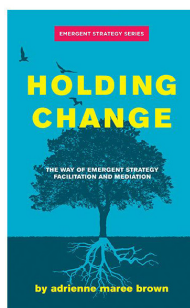
DON'T BE AFRAID TO SPEAK UP FOR KIDS.

This is another opportunity to ask yourself "What is the problem we're trying to solve?" and if students don't come up in that conversation, it doesn't need your energy. Students must be the center of every conversation. As you're reviewing school processes ask "Why are we doing it?"

INVITE DISTRICT LEADERS TO YOUR BUILDING.

You are the author of your building's story. Create an amazing narrative and share it! You have an opportunity to show off what is going well. Share celebrations with people no matter how small they are. Create a clear communication plan for the district team when you know someone from the district office is coming. Surprises are not necessary.

RESOURCES



- *Holding Change*, by adrienne maree brown
- *Creating a Home in Schools*, by Francisco Rios and A Longoria
- *The Together Leader*, by Maia Heyck-Merlin



Colleen Barlow, Principal,
Lakeland Hills Elementary,
Auburn SD



Rachel Collins,
Assistant Principal, Pioneer
Elementary, Auburn SD



Regina Hauptmann,
Assistant Principal,
Alpac Elementary, Auburn SD



Evelyn Limehouse,
Assistant Principal, Hazelwood
Elementary, Auburn SD



Tonni Vu, Principal,
Evergreen Heights Elementary,
Auburn SD



Tamasha Emedi-Frye,
Assistant Principal,
Hazel Valley Elementary,
Highline PS



Zharina Angeles Luna,
Assistant Principal
Madrona Elementary, Highline PS



Lyon Terry,
Assistant Principal, Mt. View
Elementary, Highline PS



Jen Hoglund, Principal,
Daniel Elementary,
Kent SD



Tricia Hoyle,
Principal, Fairwood
Elementary, Kent SD



Pam Pogson,
Principal, Panther Lake,
Kent SD



Dr. Dana Stiner,
Principal, Pine Tree
Elementary, Kent SD



Kimberly Booker,
Assistant Principal,
Benson Hill Elementary,
Renton SD



Steve Lesco, Principal,
Tiffany Park Elementary,
Renton SD



Rachel Lockhart,
Principal, Cascade Elementary,
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Holly Nielsen,
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Andre Stemm-Calderon,
Assistant Principal,
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Renton SD



Pamela Washington,
Principal, Renton Park
Elementary, Renton SD



Baron You, Assistant Principal,
Hazelwood Elementary,
Renton SD



Kelsi Bortoluzzi,
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