

Becoming a School Principal

Course Syllabus



COURSE SYLLABUS

2 Credits (30 hours)

What You Will Learn

Every school needs strong leadership to help students succeed, teachers grow, and communities thrive. This course introduces students to the world of educational leadership and explores what principals actually do each day behind the scenes.

Course Length

This course can be completed during a relaxed 7 week period.

COURSE SYLLABUS

Becoming a School Principal

Number of Credits: 2 Credits (30 hours)

Objectives

LEARN CONCEPT 1: A principal's most important job is not managing, it is leading. Management keeps things running. Leadership makes things better. A great principal does not simply maintain systems or enforce rules; they create a vision for what a school can become and inspire students, teachers, and families to work toward it together.

LEARN CONCEPT 2: School culture is the most powerful force inside any school building. Culture shapes how students feel when they walk through the doors each morning. In strong schools, students feel safe, teachers feel supported, and families feel welcomed. Principals influence school culture more than anyone else because their leadership sets the emotional tone for the entire community.

LEARN CONCEPT 3: Data is a school leader's compass, not their judge. Attendance rates, test scores, graduation rates, discipline reports, and teacher retention all tell a story about a school. Effective principals use data with curiosity and compassion to guide improvement, solve problems, and ensure every student receives the support they need.

LEARN CONCEPT 4: The best principals were almost always strong teachers first. School leadership begins with understanding teaching and learning at a deep level. Principals who have experienced the challenges and rewards of the classroom are better equipped to support teachers, connect with students, and make informed instructional decisions.

Course Overview

Every school needs strong leadership to help students succeed, teachers grow, and communities thrive. This course introduces students to the world of educational leadership and explores what principals actually do each day behind the scenes.

The 3 Ls of School Leadership

Every concept in this course connects back to three foundational principles that define outstanding school leaders:

-  **LEAD** — Guide your school with vision, courage, and clarity
-  **LEARN** — Remain a lifelong learner of teaching, leadership, and people
-  **LIFT** — Support and elevate every student, teacher, and community member around you

From Student to School Leader

Many people see principals only during announcements, assemblies, or disciplinary situations. In reality, principals are responsible for creating school culture, supporting teachers, solving problems, managing operations, communicating with families, and leading long-term school improvement efforts.

Students will explore real-world leadership scenarios, learn how schools operate, and examine the educational pathways required to become a principal. By the end of this course, students will better understand both the opportunities and responsibilities that come with leading a school community.

The 5 Traits of Successful School Leaders

- **Vision:** Ability to create and communicate a meaningful direction for the school
- **Communication:** Clear listening, speaking, and relationship-building skills
- **Decision-Making:** Confidence in solving complex problems fairly and thoughtfully
- **Organization:** Managing people, schedules, systems, and responsibilities effectively
- **Empathy:** Understanding and supporting the needs of students, teachers, and families

Course Outline

Welcome, The 3 Ls of School Leadership, A Letter to Students & Educators

Chapter 1, What Does a Principal Actually Do? A Day in the Life

Chapter 2, The Journey to the Principal's Office, Education & Credentials

Chapter 3, Leadership That Transforms Schools, Culture, Vision & People

Chapter 4, The Business Side of Running a School, Budgets, Data & Resources

Chapter 5, Real-World Scenarios, Decisions a Principal Makes Every Day

Chapter 6, Working with Communities, Parents & School Boards

Chapter 7, Your Career Roadmap, From Student to School Leader

Quiz 1, Chapters 1–3 Knowledge Check

Quiz 2, Chapters 4–7 Knowledge Check

Final Essay, Your Leadership Vision Statement

Resources, Recommended Books, Certifications, Videos & Organizations

Description of Activities

- Read and analyze course chapters and leadership case studies
- Watch videos about school leadership, educational systems, and decision-making
- Participate in classroom discussions about school culture and leadership challenges
- Complete reflection assignments about personal leadership strengths and goals
- Practice solving realistic school leadership scenarios
- Engage in collaborative activities involving communication and teamwork
- Complete quizzes to assess understanding of educational leadership concepts
- Develop a final written leadership vision statement

Rubric for Final Assignment

FINAL PROJECT

Your Leadership Vision Statement

Assignment Overview

You have completed Leading with Purpose: School Administration & the Principal Pathway. This final essay asks you to do something more personal than answer questions or analyze scenarios, it asks you to articulate who you are as a leader, and who you want to become.

Length: 600–900 words | Format: Typed, double-spaced | Audience: Write as if presenting to a principal hiring committee.

Essay Prompt, Your Leadership Vision Statement

"The Leader I Am Becoming"

Write a personal leadership vision statement addressing ALL FOUR parts below:

Part 1, My Why (150–200 words)

Why does school leadership matter to you personally? Think about the educators who shaped your life, what did they do, and what did it mean? What is your deepest motivation for pursuing (or considering) a career in education? This section should feel personal, honest, and specific. Generic answers, 'I want to help kids', are not sufficient. Go deeper.

Part 2, The Leader I See in Myself (150–200 words)

Using the concepts from Chapters 1–3 (the 3 L's, school culture, instructional leadership, leading adults), describe the kind of leader you believe you are becoming. What are your strengths? Where do you have the most to learn? What kind of school culture would you build if you had the chance? Be specific and honest about both your gifts and your growing edges.

Part 3, A Decision I Would Make (150–200 words)

Choose ONE scenario from Chapter 5 (the struggling teacher, the budget crisis, or the safety incident). Describe what you would do as the principal, and more importantly, explain WHY. What values would guide your decision? What would you prioritize? What would be the hardest part, and how would you handle it? Show that you can think like a school leader.

Part 4, My Next Three Steps (150–200 words)

Based on where you are right now, in high school, in college, or early in your career, what are the three most important steps you will take in the next 1–3 years to move toward educational leadership? Be specific: name a degree program you will pursue, a leadership role you will seek, a skill you will develop, or a mentor you will find. Make this a real plan, not a wish list.

Evaluation Rubric

Grading Rubric

Criteria	Description	Points
Personal Why	Specific, honest, deeply personal motivation for educational leadership	25
Self-Awareness as Leader	Accurate, thoughtful reflection using course concepts, strengths AND growth areas	25
Scenario Decision-Making	Clear decision with principled reasoning and awareness of complexity	25
Concrete Next Steps	Specific, realistic, time-bound action plan for pursuing this path	15
Writing Quality	Clear, organized, compelling, professional, meets length requirement	10
TOTAL		100

Recommended Resources

Books, Organizations, Certifications & Videos

Essential Books for Aspiring School Leaders

- The principal: Three Keys to Maximizing Impact, Michael Fullan, The definitive guide to transformational school leadership
- Culturize, Jimmy Casas, how school leaders build cultures of excellence and belonging
- Start With Why, Simon Sinek, Understanding the power of purpose-driven leadership
- The Art of Coaching, Elena Aguilar, A comprehensive guide to coaching teachers and leading instructional change
- Lead Like a PIRATE, Shelley Burgess & Beth Houf, Energetic, inspiring guide to innovative school leadership
- Courageous Conversations About Race, Glenn Singleton, Essential reading for any leader committed to equity
- The Five Dysfunctions of a Team, Patrick Lencioni, understanding how to build high-functioning leadership teams
- The New Principal's Fieldbook, Pam Robbins & Harvey Alvy, Practical guide specifically for first-year principals

Video Resources

- **Video 1, A Day in the Life of a School Principal:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2wFqFBDtSCk>
- **Video 2, How to Become a School Principal, Career Path Explained:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Kf9_O5NRCE

- **Video 3, School Leadership and Community Engagement:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4N7ynbMkT98>
- **Video 4, Why I Became a Principal, Stories from School Leaders:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bU3NtJpv5FI>

Professional Organizations

- National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), naesp.org
- National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), nassp.org
- Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), ascd.org
- American Association of School Administrators (AASA), aasa.org
- Learning Forward (Professional Learning Association), learningforward.org

Degree Programs to Explore

- M.Ed. in Educational Leadership, Available at most universities with education programs; many offer evening and weekend formats for working teachers
- Ed.S. (Education Specialist), A post-master's degree between an M.Ed. and Ed.D.; prepares candidates for senior district leadership
- Ed.D. (Doctor of Education), Terminal degree for those pursuing superintendent, university faculty, or senior policy roles
- Principal Preparation Programs, many states have approved residency-based programs that combine coursework with mentored administrative practice

Online Resources for School Leaders

- Education Week, edweek.org, The leading news source for K-12 education policy, research, and practice
- Edutopia, edutopia.org, Practical resources for educators on innovative teaching and leadership
- Harvard Education Press, hepg.org, High-quality books and research on education leadership and policy
- Wallace Foundation, wallacefoundation.org, The leading funder of school leadership research; free publications available
- Teach Plus, teachplus.org, Teacher leadership development and policy advocacy

Instructor: Daniel Hage (Email: Daniel.ed4equity@gmail.com)

How much time does it take to finish this course: This course can be completed during a relaxed 7 week period.