

Principles for Principals April 2026

For questions or comments, please contact LouisianaLeaders@la.gov.

April's Topic: Professionalism & Integrity/ Professional Norms

"The quality of employees will be directly proportional to the quality of life you maintain for them." Charles E. Bryan

The turning of the calendar to April usually indicates a few things:

1. Testing is here, and it can be all-consuming.
2. Senioritis, or the end-of-the-year yearning for summer, has kicked in high gear for students and teachers alike.
3. Leaders are typically scrambling to put together the final touches for "Teacher Appreciation Week".*

Hopefully, you have been planning and implementing procedures to celebrate and appreciate your teachers all year, but this can feel overwhelming when so many other tasks are drawing your attention.

This month's book, "**If You Don't Feed the Teachers, They Eat the Students!** (IYDFTT)," uses a restaurant metaphor to help guide school leaders with the pleasures and costs of leadership. The author of IYDFTT, Neila Connors, walks leaders through every part of a great meal, from setting the ambiance (school environment) to serving the meal, or as Dr. Connor explains, "The **M.E.A.L.S**" as **Meaningful Experiences Affecting Long-term**



Dr. Lakesha Reese-Penn

My 3 Three Things

One thing I wish I would have done differently my first year: Delegated more effectively: trusting others with leadership roles earlier would have strengthened our team and accelerated schoolwide progress.

One thing I was glad I did my first year: Helped the team embrace student growth and elevate academic achievement as a shared, schoolwide priority from the very beginning.

One thing every principal should know/do: Empowering teachers, prioritizing student growth, and building a strong school culture are key to lasting success and meaningful school improvement.

Success. Supplemental to the M.E.A.L.S. is also **D.E.S.S.E.R.T.S - Defining Experiences Structured to Support, Encourage, and Reward Teachers' Spirit.**

Since we are coming up on the end of the year and Teacher Appreciation Week* is around the corner, D.E.S.S.E.R.T.S is where we will spend the rest of this summary.

Fat-Free D.E.S.S.E.R.T.S

Dr. Connors defines desserts as “the most fun part of any meal” (p. 111), and then she goes on to list 150 options on the **M.E.N.U. - Motivation, Encouragement, Nurturing, and Understanding.** (If you haven't picked up on it by now, **IYDFTT** has an index for all of the acronyms used throughout the book.)

A Sample of the 150 options listed in **IYDFTT** as D.E.S.S.E.R.T.S

- A “Hat’s Off To You” Award: Tacky or Fun Hat is given weekly to staff members to recognize their achievements. (Can be awarded by the administrator or the most recent winner).
- T.G.I.T Refreshments and Luncheon (T.G.I.T. - Thank Goodness It’s Today”
- Another Great Week Get-Togethers: Opportunities for the staff to end the week with a celebration or just to get together.
- Adopt a Staff Member: Work with community and business partners to help support and express appreciation for staff members year-round.
- Pop-In visits: Visit staff members during an off period and bring them unpopped popcorn. Use this time to express your appreciation for them and to leave enough time for small talk and questions they may have.
- Have students decorate the teacher’s classrooms or the faculty lounge.
- Plan staff field trips.
- Purchase a large advertisement in the newspaper to express gratitude for the staff’s presence and work. Can be done at the beginning or the end of the year.
- Award “Brownie Points”: Present a brownie and a soft drink to staff members when they have done something to help you and/or the school above and beyond what was expected of them.
- SUNDAE FUNDAY Party: Provide ice cream and toppings for staff to make SUNDAES during school. SUNDAE FUNDAYS keep the Sunday Scaries away!

In Summary

Neila Connors’s book **If You Don’t Feed the Teachers, They Eat the Students!** uses a restaurant metaphor to emphasize that supporting teachers improves school success. As year-end burnout peaks in April, leaders are encouraged to prioritize teacher appreciation through the “D.E.S.S.E.R.T.S” framework — Defining Experiences Structured to Support, Encourage, and Reward Teachers’ Spirit. Conscientiously focusing on teacher appreciation aligns with multiple indicators and descriptors of the [Louisiana Leader Rubric](#), but we have chosen to demonstrate how this process specifically aligns with the descriptors “Establishes an environment that is open, productive, caring, professional, and trusting for teachers and staff” and “Promotes accountability among teachers and staff for each student’s success and the effectiveness of the school as a whole” under the **Professionalism & Integrity** domain and the indicator **Professional Norms**. Showing appreciation for the work teachers do on a daily basis helps them hold true to their personal “why” and keeps them focused on the idea that their work directly impacts our students, our schools, and our communities. Using the D.E.S.S.E.R.T.S. Framework, leaders can show appreciation

through simple, fun gestures such as awards, refreshments, staff gatherings, community partnerships, classroom decorations, and small treats to boost morale year-round.

Questions for Reflection:

Based on this month's topic.

1. If the quality of your staff is "directly proportional to the quality of life you maintain for them," what does your current school environment say about your leadership priorities?
2. How can you shift from a "Teacher Appreciation Week" mindset to a "D.E.S.S.E.R.T." framework that feels authentic and consistent rather than a seasonal obligation?
3. What are the specific stressors in your building that contribute most to end-of-year burnout, and which "D.E.S.S.E.R.T." strategies could directly neutralize those stressors? (How do you know what those stressors are?)
4. How can you ensure your appreciation isn't "one-size-fits-all"?
5. Are there potential untapped resources/partnerships you can use to help fund some of these appreciations? How can you express your appreciation without resorting to "things"?
6. What systems do you have in place to sustain your own spirits during the April testing crunch?

Resources

Connors, N. A. (2000). *If you don't feed the teachers, they eat the students!: Guide to success for administrators and teachers*. Incentive Publications.

**For 2026, Teacher Appreciation Week is Monday, May 4 - May 8, 2026.*