

# Principles for Principals August

For questions or comments, please contact [LouisianaLeaders@la.gov](mailto:LouisianaLeaders@la.gov).

## August's Topic: School & Community Environment - Community Engagement

"What do you want for your children here at \_\_\_\_\_?" With this simple question, David Hagstrom was set on his life's work when he first served as a principal for a suburban school in Fairbanks, Alaska. David was assigned a temporary principal position while also serving as a professor of educational leadership at the University of Alaska. The question "What do you want for your children?" was how he first tapped into the potential leadership qualities of his stakeholders — teachers, families, and students.

We start our inaugural Principles for Principals with the question, "What do you want for your children?" because so much of the work of the principal relates to it. "What do you want for your children?" can help define your school community's vision, mission, and goal-setting; it provides opportunities for you, as a principal, to serve your students through a deep understanding of the desires of your constituents; and, more importantly it sets the stage for the next question - "How do we make that happen?". The principal can easily become bogged down in the work of "how do we make that happen?", particularly when they feel the isolation and loneliness that come with the responsibility for their students' success.

Where Hagstrom's work shines is when it relates the question "What do you want for your children here at \_\_\_\_\_?" with the impact it had on the community. To quote: "... [the question] is all about community, a community in which different perspectives are pretty much on the same wavelength. Rather than just one person or one perspective... a wider group of parents, teachers, and community members with varying viewpoints came together in dialogue about a key question and, in the process, identified its values and found its vision."



Dr. Kevin W. Nanney  
Education Consultant  
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### My 3 Three Things

1. **One thing I wish I would have done differently my first year:** Been more vulnerable to work with my staff more than "direct" my staff.
2. **One thing I was glad I did my first year:** Establish an executive leadership team to help me develop my thoughts before creating ILT plans.
3. **One thing every principal should know/do:** They are not alone. Finding a peer group of other principals and establishing regular intervals of interaction is essential to coping with the unique stressors of being a principal.

As you begin your work this year as a school leader, how well do you know the desires of your teachers, families, students, and system? Once you begin to understand what this community “wants for their children,” then the work of “how do we make that happen” becomes not a sole, isolating effort by the leader, but, as Hagstrom says, “The group becomes the leader”. Accountability is shared, responsibility is shared, and most importantly, the success is shared!

## How does the Group Become the Leader?

In Hagstrom’s opinion, “The group becomes the leader” when the leader

- Holds an uncompromising and unfailing belief in the people that constitute the school community.
- Honors the people by listening to learn something new about and from them.
- Focuses on what the school community determines to be its needs and wants, then facilitates the development of the community’s vision in a plan.
- Identifies individual gifts, talents, and areas of passion, and invites those talented individuals to support the school community’s vision and purposes.
- Encourages and energizes people and their work.

Ultimately, however, none of this is possible without the first question, “What do you want for your children?” Our principle this month is **servant leadership**, through school and community engagement. As you begin your year as a school leader, spend more time asking questions of your community members than you do answering their questions. Ask them how they define success for their children; ask them how they want to achieve that success; ask them what they want to see from you and your leadership team; ask them.

As a leader, you will be inundated with questions from everyone, and you can be crushed under the weight of them. However, what helps you carry the burden of leadership is having others willingly engage and lift that weight in their own way. To make this year as successful as possible, ask your community to help define the weight and how they can contribute!

Summary based upon **Hagstrom, D. (2004). *From outrageous to inspired: How to build a community of leaders in our schools*. Jossey-Bass.**

## Questions for Reflection:

Based on this month’s topic.

1. What challenges do you anticipate in asking, “What do you want for your children?” and how can you address them to ensure various perspectives are heard?
2. The summary emphasizes the group becoming the leader. How can you foster a sense of shared leadership in your school based on the community’s vision?
3. What steps can you take to translate the desires expressed by your community into a clear, actionable school mission or vision?
4. How can you identify and leverage the unique strengths of your teachers, parents, or students to contribute to shared goals?

5. How might you approach asking your community to define “success” for their children? What questions would you ask to uncover their priorities?
6. What’s one goal you can set for yourself as a leader to embody the principle of servant leadership through community engagement?