



## **Developing a Decision-Making System to Navigate Transitions**

By **Kelly Hastings**

According to *The 4 Disciplines of Execution*, written by Chris McChesney, Sean Covey, and Jim Huling, schools often struggle to reach their goals because they get overwhelmed by the “whirlwind”—the constant flow of urgent, day-to-day tasks and demands that consume time and energy. This whirlwind diverts focus away from strategic goals, making it difficult for school leaders and teams to sustain momentum on high-priority initiatives.

Additionally, schools might set too many goals at once, diluting focus and spreading resources thin. Without clear priorities, measurable lead measures, and regular accountability, it becomes challenging to create the disciplined focus required for successful goal achievement.

### **Include Teachers in Decision-Making**

Principals, you can't do this important and difficult work alone. Including teachers in decision-making is crucial because it fosters a sense of ownership, builds trust, and enhances buy-in for new initiatives. Teachers bring valuable insights from their direct interactions with students, making them essential voices in shaping policies and practices that impact classroom outcomes.

When teachers are involved, they are more likely to implement changes effectively, as they feel respected, supported, and aligned with the school's goals. Moreover, collaborative decision-making strengthens the school community, creating a culture where everyone feels responsible for student success.

### **Start With Small Steps**

According to *Learning to Improve: How America's Schools Can Get Better at Getting Better*, by Anthony S. Bryk, Louis M. Gomez, Alicia Grunow, and Paul G. LeMahieu, one of the key tenets of successful implementation in schools is an iterative approach. This means principals should start with small steps, assess the outcomes, and then refine and expand, ensuring teachers are an integral part of the process.

By implementing this iterative approach, school teams can build on what works, learn from challenges, and avoid the common pitfall of rolling out too much too soon. Implementation science, therefore, becomes a roadmap to make effective decisions that lead to sustainable progress in school initiatives with the strong element of teacher voice.

### **A Principal's Framework to Building a Decision-Making System**

#### **1. Clarify Goals and Define Success Early On**

When introducing a new initiative, it's essential for principals to first clarify what success looks like. According to Jenice Pizzuto and Steven Carney in *Implement With Impact*, defining clear objectives allows leaders to measure progress and make adjustments. Without a clear picture of the end goal, decision-making becomes reactive, with principals often getting lost in the day-to-day demands, or the “whirlwind.” Focusing on a clear goal enables school teams to pay attention to what matters most and prevents distraction.

For instance, if a principal's goal is to improve literacy rates, they should outline specific metrics to track and regularly check progress, then hold themselves accountable to observations and team meetings with the goal as a focus. By defining success early, principals create a foundation for all subsequent decisions, allowing them to measure effectiveness and adapt strategies as needed.

#### **2. Develop Strong Organizational Support**

According to a study led by Gregory A. Aarons, Mark G. Ehrhart, Lauren R. Farahnak, and Michael S. Hurlburt, building organizational support is a critical part of implementation leadership. Principals should ensure that teachers, staff, and stakeholders are aligned with the new initiative and understand their roles. This shared understanding creates a strong foundation for effective decision-making. Engaging teachers and staff as part of the decision-making process increases buy-in and ensures that the initiative fits well within the school's existing culture and practices. Ideally, the principal becomes the

becomes the lead listener to support collaborative decisions.

For example, if a principal is planning to adopt a new student behavior management program, involving teachers in the planning phase can help identify potential challenges early on. By collaborating in consistent meetings focused on the goal, principals and teachers can make informed decisions that align with both the needs of the students and the school's operational dynamics. This helps hold each other accountable, as well.

#### **3. Adaptation and Flexibility**

Shifts in education are rarely linear, and flexibility is key to navigating them effectively. Implementation science emphasizes that interventions should be adapted to fit the local context rather than implemented uniformly across all settings, according to D.L. Fixsen, Sandra Naoom, Karen A. Blasé, and Robert M. Friedman in “Implementation Research: A Synthesis of the Literature.” For principals, this means adapting initiatives based on student needs, teacher feedback, and resource availability.

A study by Kevin Kelloway, Julian Barling, and Jane Helleur, “Enhancing Transformational Leadership,” highlights the importance of leaders adjusting their approach based on feedback. Principals should view feedback not as criticism but instead as a necessary part of the adaptation process.

For instance, if an initiative is not producing the desired outcomes, principals should be prepared to change course rather than adhere rigidly to the original plan. This adaptive approach, grounded in flexibility, will allow principals to make informed decisions and sustain momentum.

**Kelly Hastings** is the founder of *Enlightening Leadership for Educators*. (Via [naesp.org](http://naesp.org))



## KDE News

### Two Kentucky Schools Named 2025 National ESEA Distinguished Schools

The National Association of ESEA State Program Administrators (NAESPA) named two Kentucky schools as National ESEA Distinguished Schools during its national conference on Feb. 10-12. The two are among 63 schools nationwide to receive the honor.

South Christian Elementary School (Christian County) was recognized for closing the achievement gap between student groups. Crofton Elementary School (Christian County) was recognized for excellence in serving special populations of students.

Formerly the National Title I Association, NAESPA is dedicated to building the capacity of education professionals to provide disadvantaged children with a high-quality education. NAESPA implemented the National ESEA Distinguished Schools Program to highlight schools that have effectively used their federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) funds to improve education outcomes for students.

### Feedback sought on Kentucky Academic Standards for Technology

The Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) is seeking feedback on the revised *Kentucky Academic Standards for Technology*.

[KRS 158.6453](#) calls for KDE to implement a process for reviewing all academic standards and aligned assessments beginning with the 2017-2018 school year. The schedule calls for one or two content areas to be reviewed each year, and every six years after that on a rotating basis.

Standards outline what students are expected to learn in each grade to successfully transition to the next level of learning. The curriculum or methods and resources used to teach the standards is a separate issue and decided at the local level.

Due to the amount of text within the survey, it is recommended that surveys be completed on a full-size computer or laptop screen. Participants are provided with the opportunity to give feedback on all standards or self-selected areas of interest. **You can access the survey at <https://tinurl.com/vnhfdv>**

### Congratulations to the Read to Achieve (RTA) Award Recipients

The Kentucky Department of Education is pleased to announce the completion of the review process for the FY26 Read to Achieve (RTA) RFA. Awards are contingent on available funding and districts/schools meeting programmatic and budgetary requirements. For the complete list of schools, please visit <https://nyurl.com/ycy3anmz>.



ti-

## Thank you KAESP Sponsor

Hatch Early Learning is the trusted leader in early education, providing administrators and teachers with actionable data on student readiness in multiple domains. Their research-based solutions offer valuable insights into student progress, enabling informed decision-making and targeted interventions.

For more information on their wonderful products, please visit: <https://www.hatchearlylearning.com/>



## From Kentucky Department of Education

### Professional Learning Bulletin Board

The [Professional Learning Bulletin Board \(PLBB\)](#) is a great resource for exploring options for professional learning. Currently, over 70 professional learning offerings are posted on the PLBB, including sessions for administrators, counselors, certified and classified staff. A wide variety of topics are available in both virtual and on-demand formats and the site is regularly updated.

rooted in implementation science and leadership principles. By clarifying goals, leveraging data, fostering inclusivity, and empowering teacher leaders, principals can navigate shifts and transitions with confidence and effectiveness.

As principals build these decision-making systems, they move beyond reactive management and toward a sustainable, proactive model that benefits students, staff, and the entire school community.

*Kelly Hastings is the founder of Enlightening Leadership for Educators. (Via [naesp.org](http://naesp.org))*

## Spring Reflection

Spring offers school leaders a moment to pause, reflect, and refocus. As principals, the work is constant, but this season reminds us of the value of reaffirming priorities and celebrating progress—both big and small. A few intentional moments of reflection can strengthen leadership decisions and sustain momentum through the final months of the school year.

This is also a powerful time to re-energize staff and students by reaffirming purpose. A well-timed word of encouragement, a visible act of appreciation, or a renewed commitment to shared goals can reinvigorate a school community. Leadership in spring is less about launching something new and more about sustaining momentum with intention, clarity, and care.

## Practical Strategies for Principals in Decision-Making

### 1. Use Data to Drive Decisions

Data is a powerful tool for principals, allowing them to make objective, informed decisions. Strategic implementation leadership emphasizes the use of data to guide decision-making and measure progress. Principals can gather data from various sources, including student assessments, teacher feedback, and attendance records, to understand the impact of new initiatives and identify areas for improvement. By analyzing data consistently, principals can identify patterns and make proactive adjustments. Data-driven decision-making fosters a culture of continuous improvement and ensures that initiatives are truly benefiting students.

### 2. Implement Continuous Feedback Loops

Effective decision-making relies on regular feedback from all stakeholders. Douglas Reeves points out in *Ahead of the Curve* that successful implementation hinges on closing

the feedback loop, which allows leaders to make timely adjustments based on real-time information. For principals, setting up continuous feedback loops with teachers, students, and parents provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of initiatives and helps build trust. Principals can set up periodic check-ins or surveys to gather feedback.

### 3. Empower Teacher Leadership in Decision-Making

Principals are not alone in the decision-making process. Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, and LeMahieu suggest that fostering teacher leadership can drive successful implementation. By empowering teachers to take ownership of initiatives, principals not only lighten their load but also encourage a culture of shared responsibility and accountability. When teachers are involved in decisions that affect their classrooms, they are more likely to implement initiatives with fidelity.

### Building a System That Sustains Change

In today's rapidly evolving educational landscape, principals need more than just good intentions; they need a system of decision-making



From the Executive Director, Dr. Rosie Young

### Finishing Strong Together

As the school year enters its final months, principals face the dual challenge of sustaining momentum while preparing for transition. Spring brings testing, staffing decisions, celebrations, and reflection—all at once. Navigating this complexity requires focus, collaboration, and the willingness to lean on professional networks for support.

Principal associations exist for moments like these. Whether through shared resources, collegial conversation, or collective advocacy, we are stronger when we lead together. As the year winds down, let us continue to connect, share, and support one another—ensuring that we finish strong and lay a thoughtful foundation for the year ahead.

This is also a season to recognize the steady leadership that often goes unseen. The daily decisions, quiet conversations, and consistent presence principals provide make a lasting difference in school communities. Taking a moment to acknowledge that impact—both in ourselves and in one another—helps sustain purpose as we move toward a successful close of the year.

All the best,

*Rosie*

### Leading Through Conflict: Guiding with Clarity and Calm

Conflict is an inevitable part of school leadership. Principals routinely navigate disagreements among staff, families, students, and external stakeholders. How leaders respond in these moments shapes not only the immediate outcome but also the long-term culture of trust, professionalism, and respect within the school community.

Effective leaders manage conflict with intention. Listening carefully, seeking to understand multiple perspectives, and responding with clarity and consistency help de-escalate tension. By addressing conflict thoughtfully, principals model problem-solving and resilience for their entire school community. When handled thoughtfully, conflict can become an opportunity for learning, growth, and stronger relationships, strengthening the overall school environment.

Leading through conflict also requires emotional steadiness. Principals are expected to remain calm, fair, and decisive—even when emotions run high. Principal associations provide critical support through shared experiences, dialogue, and professional resources, helping leaders navigate difficult conversations with confidence and purpose.

*“Conflict is not something to avoid—it’s an opportunity for learning, growth, and stronger relationships.”*

### Teacher Retention and Engagement

Principals who build a supportive, collaborative culture help teachers thrive and stay long-term. Providing meaningful feedback, professional growth opportunities, and recognition can strengthen staff morale and improve student outcomes. This serves to stabilize their staff but also strengthens the learning environment for every student.

### Prioritizing Well-Being in Schools

Principals play a critical role in fostering the mental health and well-being of both staff and students. By creating a culture where wellness is openly discussed and supported, leaders help reduce stress, prevent burnout, and promote resilience. Simple practices—such as checking in regularly, providing access to resources, and modeling self-care—can have a lasting impact on school climate.

Supporting well-being also strengthens learning and performance. When students and staff feel safe, valued, and cared for, they are more engaged, collaborative, and motivated. Principals who prioritize wellness set the tone for a healthy, balanced, and productive school environment, demonstrating that leadership includes caring for people as much as for programs. And please remember to take care of yourself!



NAESP News



### NAESP Vice President Election

The 2026–2027 NAESP leadership slate has been finalized, with Ed Cosentino, principal of Phelps Luck Elementary in Maryland, elected as NAESP Vice President. He will assume the role this summer and later become NAESP President, bringing his focus on advocacy, membership growth, and resource evolution to the national stage.



**Annual Conference in Orlando Is Coming!** Planning is underway for the 2026 NAESP Annual Conference in Orlando, Florida—a premier event for elementary and middle-level principals to learn, connect, and explore leadership innovations. This summer’s gathering promises engaging sessions, networking opportunities, and leadership inspiration that can energize your practice for the year ahead.

The conference will take place FL, on July 13–15 at Disney’s Coronado Springs in Orlando, FL.

### Inspiring Resources and Articles Now Available

NAESP’s national website continues to offer a wealth of fresh content, including practical leadership articles, strategies for celebrating diverse histories, attendance-building ideas, and approaches to kindness-centered student achievement. These resources are designed to support principals with timely ideas and classroom-to-leadership connections throughout the year.

### Professional Learning and Advocacy Matters

NAESP’s resolutions and advocacy priorities continue to emphasize high-quality learning, trauma-informed care, and sustained professional development for school leaders. The organization champions both access to relevant learning opportunities and the time, resources, and support principals need to lead effectively in a rapidly changing educational landscape.

### NAESP & AMLE Partner to Support Middle-Level Leaders

NAESP and the **Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE)** have joined forces to provide expanded professional learning and leadership resources for middle-level principals. The partnership includes reciprocal membership benefits, co-published resources, and a dedicated middle-level strand at the NAESP conference—strengthening support for leaders serving students ages 10–15.

### Looking for Funding Opportunities?

Whether you’re seeking resources for new programs, student support, or school improvements, these tools can help you find grants with upcoming deadlines. Staying proactive and organized is key. Many grants provide professional development, classroom resources, or funding for innovative projects, so exploring multiple sources can maximize the impact for your school community.

- [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) — Federal grants search portal with filters for eligibility, topic, and deadlines.
- [SchoolSafety.gov](https://www.schoolsafety.gov) Grants Finder Tool — Lists safety, mental-health, and staffing support grants with current deadlines.
- State Department of Education websites — Most states, including Kentucky, maintain funding calendars and e-mail notifications for new grants.  
Grant calendars & newsletters — Tools like GrantStation and state “grant calendars” help track deadlines and upcoming opportunities.

Tip: Bookmark these sites and sign up for alerts to stay on top of grant opportunities all year long. Even a small grant can make a big difference in supporting students, staff, and school initiatives.



1801 Echo Trail  
Louisville KY 40245

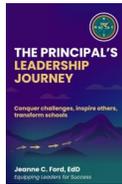
Phone: 502-272-8447



**The Principal's Leadership Journey: Conquer challenges, inspire others, transform schools** by Jeanne C. Ford

This book charts school leadership through the proven leadership principles of **John C. Maxwell**.

The author guides principals through the core challenges of educational leadership—building trust, shaping school culture, strengthening relationships, navigating difficult conversations, leading through crisis, and managing change.



**How to Apply Daymond John's Shark Points to Education Leadership**

By *Todd Brist*

In the vast ocean of entrepreneurship, few have made waves quite like Daymond John. As the founder and CEO of FUBU, a global lifestyle brand with billions in product sales, John has become a beacon for aspiring business leaders.

His journey from selling hand-sewn hats on the streets of New York to becoming a “Shark” investor on ABC’s hit show “Shark Tank” is a testament to his business acumen and resilience. But it’s John’s role as a presidential ambassador for global entrepreneurship, appointed by Barack Obama, that truly underscores his commitment to nurturing the next generation of innovators and leaders.

What makes John’s insights particularly valuable for educators is his personal connection to the power of learning. Diagnosed with dyslexia as a child, John credits his teachers for instilling in him the belief that he could “do anything and everything.”

This experience shaped his perspective on education and success, leading him to develop his five Shark Points—a guide to succeeding in business and life that’s as applicable in the classroom as it is in the boardroom. Let’s dive into how these Shark Points can transform educational leadership and create schools where both students and staff can thrive.

**1. Set Goals: Charting Your Educational Voyage**

“If we don’t set goals for ourselves, we let other people set goals for us,” John said.

In education, this principle is crucial. School leaders must craft a clear vision for their institutions, setting ambitious yet achievable objectives. Whether it’s boosting academic performance, enhancing student engagement, or creating a more inclusive learning environment, these goals become the North Star guiding every decision and action.

**2. Do Your Homework: The Power of Preparedness**

“You can learn from the 99.9 [percent] who have made a mistake,” said John.

For educators, this translates to continuous professional development and staying informed about the latest in pedagogical research and policy changes. It’s about creating a culture of lifelong learning that permeates the entire school community, from administrators to students.

**3. Adore What You Do: Passion as the Engine of Education**

“True entrepreneurs are driven by their passion,” John believes.

In education, this passion is what propels teachers and administrators through the challenges of budget constraints, policy shifts, and the daily rigors of nurturing young minds. It’s the love for learning and student growth that keeps educators motivated, even in the face of adversity.

**4. Remember, You Are the Brand: Leading by Example**

“How you present yourself, both professionally and personally, impacts your success,” said John.

For school leaders, this means embodying the values and vision of their institution. Your actions and decisions set the tone for the entire school culture.

As John puts it, on Shark Tank, “We don’t invest in companies; we invest in people.” In education, staff and students invest their trust in their leaders.

**5. Keep Swimming: Resilience in Education**

Perhaps the most crucial of John’s Shark Points for educators is the call to perseverance. In a field where change is constant and challenges are inevitable, the ability to “keep swimming” is paramount. It’s about viewing setbacks as opportunities for growth and maintaining momentum towards your goals, even when faced with obstacles.

**The Human Touch in a Digital World**

As we navigate an increasingly digital educational landscape, John’s wisdom reminds us of the irreplaceable value of human connection.

“AI doesn’t have the power of human connection,” he said, emphasizing that the personal interactions and relationships formed in schools

*The mission of the KAESP, the collective voice of Kentucky's elementary and middle level principals, in partnership with other education leaders, is to **develop citizens that can succeed in a global society**, by delivering to our members a network for support, professional development, visionary leadership, and by pro-active involvement in shaping education policy.*

**KAESP Leadership**

Dr. Rosie Young, Executive Director

Dr. John Ansman, Treasurer, JCPS, Retired, Louisville, KY

Sarah Williams, NAESP State Representative, Principal, Luhr Elementary

Lara Krill, NAESP Membership Committee, Principal, Gabriel School, Louisville, KY

Want to join us? —Send an email to Rosie Young at [kaespsy@gmail.com](mailto:kaespsy@gmail.com) or [ryoung@bellarmine.edu](mailto:ryoung@bellarmine.edu)



are more impactful than any technology.

John’s journey from a struggling entrepreneur to a “Shark” offers valuable lessons for educational leaders. By setting clear goals, continuously learning, maintaining passion, leading by example, and persevering through challenges, school leaders can create an environment where both students and staff flourish.

*Todd Brist is principal of Watertown Middle School in Watertown, South Dakota. Read more session notes in the [NAESP Conference Blog](#).*

“The ultimate measure of a leader is not where they stand in moments of comfort, but where they stand in times of challenge.” — **Martin Luther King Jr.**

“Leadership is lifting a person’s vision to higher sights, the raising of a person’s performance to a higher standard.” — **Peter Drucker**

“Leadership is about making others better as a result of your presence and making sure that impact lasts in your absence.” — Sheryl Sandberg

**Follow and like us!**



@kaespsy



Kentucky Association of Elementary School Principals

**Follow us!!**

