

Supporting Students with Special Education Needs and Students with Disabilities

# Leading Authentically



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### Themes and Reflection Questions for Episode 3:

#### **Competencies:**

Thinking about the OLF/OCLF Personal Leadership Resources, share some ways you have used your personal leadership resources to impact learning environment for all students?

Can you share a story about your growth as a leader using your personal leadership resources to foster relationships with students, staff and families in order to create a positive, safe, identity-affirming environment for all students?

#### **Physical, social, and academic considerations:**

Share a story about how you have come to consider all aspects of inclusion when creating or revising learning spaces:

- Physical
- Social, Cultural, Emotional
- Academic

Consider the interconnection between these concepts; they are not discreet. For example, the physical environment (e.g., signage) can have unintended impacts on social inclusion.

How might you continue to grow in this area?

### **Setting the Tone:**

As you prepare for the school year, share a story that demonstrates how your leadership ensures the school climate is welcoming to all students and their families to a learning environment that creates a sense of belonging.

When it comes to setting the tone for the school year, it's not easy and can be unconsciously set depending on the many complexities in a school, what might be some ways you ensure that your decision-making process is transparent and reflects equity, inclusion and experiences of students, staff and community and nurtures a school climate that supports belonging?

### **Instructional leadership:**

Principals are instructional leaders. What are some ways you are working with your educators and support staff to ensure that every student has what they need to learn? Consider universal design for learning, differentiated instruction, culturally relevant and responsive teaching and other enabling instructional practices.

### **Building capacity with the multidisciplinary team:**

One of the most significant mechanisms that principals can leverage is the multidisciplinary team to support the learning of students with special education needs. What are some ways you are leveraging this team, along with the expertise of families and community partners to develop successful learning plans for students?

Further research to support centering learning environments for student success:

- [Link](#) to document that summarizes some of the key research on inclusive education and particularly the role and influence of the principal:

The role of the school principal is pivotal in creating and promoting inclusive school environments (Ainscow, 2024; McGhie-Richmond & Haider, 2020; Porter et al., 2023; Sider & Maich, 2022).

Big ideas for the importance of structuring learning environments to support inclusive education - and the ways in which principals enable these:

1. **Competencies** that principals can develop to foster inclusive environments (the research base for these are identified in Table 2.2 of Sider & Maich, 2022):
  - Attitudes which value inclusion, equity, and diversity; asset-based perspectives which enhance student agency; fostering relationships with families and educators; embodies professional standards such as care, trust, respect, and integrity.
  - Knowledge of legal aspects such as duties and regulations; awareness of the lived experiences of children and their family members; instructional approaches within a universal design for learning framework.
  - Skills in communication, collaboration, problem-solving, advocacy, program development, and fostering collaborative teacher efficacy.
2. **Physical, social, and academic considerations:**
  - Physical: makes every effort to ensure full access to all learning environments (inclusive classrooms in the neighborhood school)
  - Social: all students are authentically included and active contributors to the classroom and school community
  - Academic: access to curriculum, instruction, and learning activities that are meaningful, differentiated, and challenging for all students with supports as needed.
3. Principals **set the tone** for the school climate in regard to inclusion (Bennett et al., 2021; Sider et al., 2021)
4. Principals are **instructional leaders** who coach and model universal design for learning, differentiated instruction, and other enabling instructional practices
5. One of the most significant mechanisms that principals can leverage is **fostering professional capital via collaborative planning** (Hargreaves, 2024; Hehir et al., 2016; Sider et al., 2024)