

The 2015 standards characterize leadership as intentional, strategic, and moral

In October 2015, a new set of national standards for educational leaders was adopted by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA), an umbrella organization whose membership includes the primary professional associations of educational leaders—the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), and NASSP—and other national organizations associated with the development and support of the profession of educational leadership. The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders 2015 (PSEL 2015) replaces the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards that have shaped the landscape of educational leadership for the last 20 years.

The profession of educational leadership played a crucial role in developing PSEL 2015. Principals and superintendents provided information and recommendations through surveys, focus groups, and public comment periods, and professional associations also were instrumental in creating and supporting the new guidelines. The result is a set of new standards oriented toward the future that fuses the values and wisdom of professional practice with the profession's latest research knowledge.

Introducing PSEL 2015

PSEL 2015 builds on the ISLLC Standards and represents the major domains of educational leadership work. The primary focus of every domain is student academic success and well-being. The new standards are presented in Table 1 (see below). The full public report on the standards is available on the NASSP website at www.nassp.org/leaderstandards.

PSEL 2015 presents a systemic view of leadership, and the standards are best understood as mutually enforcing, and attending to *all*, not just one or a select few. PSEL 2015 emphasizes human relationships in leadership success. The virtues of school leadership—caring, integrity, trustworthiness, etc.—are distinctly visible and controlling. PSEL 2015 stresses community and culture. The standards focus not only on relationships with the community outside the school, but also on the cultivation of community for students and teachers inside the school. They focus not just on organizational culture, but the children, families, and professional staff as key ingredients of student success. PSEL 2015 presents a positive view of educational leadership that focuses on human potential, growth, and support with rigor and accountability, a view reflecting an optimistic, strengths-based perspective on persons and schooling.

Guiding Professional Practice

Like the standards of other professions, PSEL 2015 articulates principles and values to guide professional practice as well as communicate expectations to educational leaders and to the public. The doctrine signals to professional associations, policy makers, and institutions that support the profession what aspects of educational leadership are most important. To have meaningful influence on professional practice, PSEL 2015 must be coupled with other “levers” such as programs of initial preparation, professional development, induction and mentoring, and supervision and evaluation. They also include the certification, licensure, and accreditation of venues that prepare and support educational leaders. As professional associations, colleges and universities, and other entities organize support of the profession around the new standards, the practice of educational leadership will be drawn in their direction.

As with the ISLLC Standards, PSEL 2015 applies to all administrative leaders in preK–12 education, including leaders of private as well as public schools. The new standards are designed to cascade over different administrative roles at all levels of school organization, from central offices to schools. In bringing the standards to life in professional practice, situational variations will need to be considered.

Table 1: Professional Standards for Educational Leaders 2015

<p>Standard 1. Mission, Vision, and Core Values Effective educational leaders develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high-quality education and academic success and well-being of <i>each</i> student.</p>	<p>Standard 6. Professional Capacity of School Personnel Effective educational leaders develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel to promote <i>each</i> student's academic success and well-being.</p>
<p>Standard 2. Ethics and Professional Norms Effective educational leaders act ethically and according to professional norms to promote <i>each</i> student's academic success and well-being.</p>	<p>Standard 7. Professional Community for Teachers and Staff Effective educational leaders foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff to promote <i>each</i> student's academic success and well-being.</p>
<p>Standard 3. Equity and Cultural Responsiveness Effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote <i>each</i> student's academic success and well-being.</p>	<p>Standard 8. Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community Effective educational leaders engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways to promote <i>each</i> student's academic success and well-being.</p>
<p>Standard 4. Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Effective educational leaders develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to promote <i>each</i> student's academic success and well-being.</p>	<p>Standard 9. Operations and Management Effective educational leaders manage school operations and resources to promote <i>each</i> student's academic success and well-being.</p>
<p>Standard 5. Community of Care and Support for Students Effective educational leaders cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community that promotes the academic success and well-being of <i>each</i> student.</p>	<p>Standard 10. School Improvement Effective educational leaders act as agents of continuous improvement to promote <i>each</i> student's academic success and well-being.</p>

Significant Implications

There are several general implications of PSEL 2015 for principals' practice. First, PSEL 2015 is a set of principles and guideposts for practice, not a script or a checklist of particular strategies. They encourage professional discretion within a framework of principles. As such, the standards provide principals the means to transcend the multitude of disconnected acts of leadership they perform daily and focus on things central to student success. In fact, PSEL 2015 helps to prioritize leadership activities that matter most and direct time and effort away from activities that matter least. While all domains of leadership are important, the standards provide flexibility for principals to move among aspects of leadership that are most salient to particular situations.

Additionally, PSEL 2015 directs principals' practice toward student success in school, not only to academic success but also to social, emotional, and psychological well-being. Importantly, PSEL 2015 is clear in its concern for each student. The standards direct principals' practices toward two foundational pillars of success—academic press and care and support. Academic press refers to the effort to challenge students to develop academic knowledge and skills required for student success in school and beyond. It includes high expectations, the opportunity to learn, and intellectually rigorous teaching. Care and support for students creates conditions conducive to academic success and well-being, like physical and psychological safety, trust, a sense of respect, value, and belonging, as well as services and accommodations to meet learning needs. PSEL 2015 tells principals that if they focus on efficacious combinations of press and support, schools can become powerful relational communities, and students will achieve substantial success.

A third implication is that leadership for student success involves not only attention to curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Standard 4) and to the community of care and support for students (Standard 5)—the two areas most directly related to the pillars of press and support. It also involves attention to the capacity of personnel and school organization to strengthen and integrate these two elements of student success. PSEL 2015 directs principals to cultivate the knowledge, skills, and orientations of teachers and other professional staff to serve students well (Standard 6). It directs them to create workplace conditions—professional community, in particular—for faculty and staff to do their very best (Standard 7). PSEL 2015 calls on principals to develop meaningful, reciprocal relationships with families and communities to enhance student success (Standard 8) and reminds principals of the importance of efficient and effective operations and management to all these things (Standard 9).

Building Student Success

Finally, the new standards call on principals to recognize that educational leadership is an intentional, strategic, and moral enterprise. PSEL 2015 orients practice around a clear and shared mission, an articulated vision of student success (and the practices and conditions associated with that success), and a set of core values (Standard 1). It makes leadership an ethical endeavor governed by professional norms such as integrity, fairness, transparency, and responsibility (Standard 2). PSEL 2015 tells principals that they will not be effective in promoting the success and well-being of each student without striving for the equity of educational opportunity and without promoting practices that are responsive to student culture (Standard 3). Finally, PSEL 2015 tells principals that in order to be successful, they must be agents of continuous improvement (Standard 10).

In sum, the new standards collectively offer leadership practice for student success. As derived from the values, wisdom, and research of the profession, PSEL 2015 represents a significant advancement in guiding principals' and other educational leaders' work. The new standards speak to practicing leaders, policymakers, and the public about how leadership matters to the success of each student. And it is that success about which we most deeply care.

Joseph Murphy is the Frank W. Mayborn chair of education and associate dean at Peabody College of Education at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, TN. He was chair of the Standards Update Project Committee. Mark A. Smylie is a professor emeritus in the Department of Policy Studies in the College of Education at the University of Illinois in Chicago. He was co-chair of the workgroup for completing the standards.