

THE

PRINCIPAL'S

Survival Guide

WHERE **Do I** START?

HOW **Do I** SUCCEED?

WHEN **Do I** SLEEP?

Susan Stone Kessler, Ed.D.

April M. Snodgrass, M.Ed.

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PUBLISHING®



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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Kessler, Susan Stone.

The principal's survival guide : where do I start? how do I succeed? when do I sleep? / Susan Stone Kessler, April M. Snodgrass, Andrew T. Davis.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-57542-491-0 (paperback) — ISBN 1-57542-491-6 (paperback) 1. School principals—Handbooks, manuals, etc. 2. School management and organization. I. Snodgrass, April M. II. Davis, Andrew T. III. Title.

LB2831.9.K38 2015

371.2'012—dc23

2014040153

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Edited by Eric Braun

Cover and interior design by Colleen Rollins

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America

Free Spirit Publishing Inc.

Minneapolis, MN

(612) 338-2068

help4kids@freespirit.com

www.freespirit.com

Free Spirit offers competitive pricing.

Contact edsales@freespirit.com for pricing information on multiple quantity purchases.

This book is dedicated to our children Bradley, Daniel, Ellie, Lauren, Logan, Marit, Sarah, Wynne, and Zachary, whose existence in this world compels us to demand good teachers, good principals, and good schools.

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INTRODUCTION

Seriously, When Do I Sleep?

“Be careful what you wish for. You just might get it.”

You wanted to be a principal. Maybe you worked under superior leaders who inspired you to follow their example. Or maybe you worked under a bunch of goofballs who couldn’t find an eraser on a chalk rail with both hands—you thought kids deserved better, and *you* are the better. However you got here, you may now feel a combination of nausea, paralysis, fear . . . and excitement. It’s time for you to put up or shut up, as the saying goes.

Here’s the good news: You will put up. (Sometimes you may shut up, too.) You will be a great leader in some moments. In other moments, you will make not-so-great decisions in front of people who told you not to do what you did. And you will have sleepless nights.

Until you don’t. Because one day the principalship will stop being terrifying. One day being a principal will seem intuitive, predictable, and even somewhat routine. One day the little things won’t blossom into big things. People will trust your advice and follow your lead. One day people will believe in your ability to lead them through a difficult situation. You will lead them, and they will be glad you were there. And so will you.

You Are the Principal

This book was born out of our conference presentation, “When Do I Sleep? Surviving the Principalship.” At these conferences, we have met hundreds of new and veteran principals who were drawn to the presentation because the title resonated with them regardless of how many years of experience they had. In talking with many of these enthusiastic but

exhausted principals, we learned that the feeling of being overwhelmed by the job is universal—from coast to coast and from preK to high school—and we're all grateful to meet other principals who share it.

As the demands on principals have increased over the last decade, it can feel like we need to be all things to all people at all times. Some might ask, "Who would want to be a principal in this day and age?" Between school violence, helicopter parents, teen pregnancy, student drug use, high accountability, limited resources, and the easy scapegoating of educators for all societal ills, many educators think being a principal would be a terrible job.

But it isn't. Being a principal is a great job, and we know this because it's the most important job we have ever done. Schools need effective leaders. *Kids* need effective leaders. Leading them is both deadly serious and downright fun.

This book is about how to solve the problems that occur in schools with rational logic, balanced emotion, and experience. It is written by three principals who share the goal of remaining principals. The principal job isn't a stepping stone for us. We do not aspire to be central office administrators or full-time university professors once we have mastered the principalship. We aren't headed to our state capitol to be legislators, and we aren't searching for our next gig. We have the jobs we want, and we want to keep growing as individuals and professionals. Together we have over four decades of experience in elementary, middle, and high schools as teachers, assistant principals, and principals in rural, suburban, and inner-city public schools. We have worked in large and small schools. We have been department heads, team leaders, PTO/PTA members, athletic coaches, and drama sponsors. We have been colleagues, and we have been subordinates, and among us we are parents to eight children. As parents, we have been challenged to look at leading a school not just through the eyes of the leader, but through the important eyes of the student and the parent.

What we have learned, again and again, is that for every challenge a principal faces, there are at least twice as many benefits—like working with adults who adore children. After all, true teachers almost always happen to be truly wonderful individuals, individuals who like working with and learning from kids. Every day we get to see the future of the world

forming in front of us. And we get to learn more about ourselves as we make difficult decisions every day.

We wrote this book to help you rise to the challenges so you can enjoy the benefits.

Your Guiding Principles

One of the challenges that all principals face is that we perform in front of an audience, so all our mistakes are public. Teachers, students, parents, and district personnel judge your performance without understanding the complexity of your job or the difficulties you face. You will be second-guessed, doubted, compared to unrealistic examples of best practice, criticized, and even mocked by many of the stakeholders you serve—and this is especially true for first-year principals. Every mistake you make—from a mispronounced name to a spelling error on a memo to toilet paper stuck on the bottom of your shoe when exiting a restroom—will be noticed and discussed.

How do you maintain your sanity, confidence, and reputation in this kind of fishbowl? You have to be a leader.

That may sound pat or overly simple. You're the principal—the boss—of *course* you have to be a leader, right? But *leadership* has hundreds of definitions. It's a concept that is complex, is personal, and means different things to different people.

When we talk about leadership, we're talking about one overarching concept: having guiding principles that govern the decisions we make. That means doing what is right, not what is easy. It means standing up for what's right, even if you're standing alone. Your guiding principles cannot be compromised even if doing so is politically expedient, pleases your superiors or subordinates, or leads to easier immediate consequences. This is not to say that a good leader operates with a "my way or the highway" mentality. It just means you measure all decisions against those guiding principles.

The most important guiding principle is that all decisions should help, not hurt, kids. For example, maybe you want to paint the school bathrooms with school colors, but the district will only buy white paint. Fighting the district over this is a poor use of energy, because white paint does

not hurt kids. Effective leaders choose their battles wisely. They choose not on the basis of which battles they can win but rather on which battles they must fight to avoid violating their guiding principles.

Of course, standing up for your principles isn't always easy. If you become known for standing up for your principles, voicing opposition or support for issues based on those principles, then you may become a target. If you are unlikely to be manipulated or coerced, you can become a barrier for others, such as parents who want uncalled for special treatment for their children, teachers who want a policy changed for self-serving reasons, outside vendors who want access to your students for the purpose of marketing to them, and more. Not everyone has the best interests of students in mind. Some people want to make money. Others want to have influence. The possibility of being targeted as a leader for engaging in leader-like behaviors is one of the ironies of the leadership journey. At times you will feel anxious or like you are in a "lose-lose" situation. You may question whether your guiding principles are even correct.

The answer to these uncomfortable situations is to stay the course. In the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., "The time is always right to do what is right." If you measure your next steps according to your guiding principles, you will find that staying the course—even when the course feels like an uphill slog—is the correct path.

Not all leaders win trophies or awards. Unfortunately, some leaders are sacrificed by their superiors for maintaining an unpopular decision in the face of opposition. Those people pay a painful price in terms of their careers, their reputations, and even their faith in their own leadership. Those who refuse to allow their pitfalls to define them discover a freedom unknown to the average person. Once one has endured a leadership fall from grace and comes through on the other side, one doesn't fear it anymore. Your guiding principles remain the same and the costs don't seem as expensive. When leaders are doing the right thing, they are valued only because the demand is so great and the supply of principled, committed leaders unafraid to do what is right can be small.

Others recognizing that you operate in this manner is not as important as you knowing it. Others judge leaders based on their own perceptions and often their own "baggage." Successful leaders spend little time trying

to control others' inaccurate assessments. Instead, they lead with courage. They follow Dr. King's words, and although there will be some sleepless nights along the way, the journey is invigorating and worth the trouble.

One thing that makes the job so compelling is that the principal is a safety net. We are often a kid's last chance to be redeemed, to be saved, to be loved. The kids who need us the most are the square pegs who are tired of round holes. They haven't been turned around by a teacher, coach, or counselor. They are in trouble, and their behavior often screams a compelling reminder that the kids who need love the most often act like they deserve it the least. Principals save lives, sometimes just because they are there. Being a significant adult to a child can result in such satisfaction.

How to Use This Book

The Principal's Survival Guide is designed to help with a wide range of things principals have to do but may not have had formal training in, from setting up your master calendar to hiring teachers to communicating with parents—and on and on. If you are an experienced principal, we believe you will find a fresh perspective in this book and at least a handful of helpful new tips. If you are a first-year principal, congratulations on your promotion! As you begin your first year, you are jumping on a nonstop roller coaster, and you will want this book along for the ride. Whatever your experience level, the advice in this book is meant to help you manage the twists, turns, drops, and loop-the-loops that are part of being a principal. You *can* get organized, manage, and lead in a way that gives you both the time and the peace of mind to get the sleep you need, at least most nights.

The systems, policies, advice, tips, and strategies in this book have all been forged from the question at the heart of our primary guiding principle: Is this good for kids? We believe these ideas will help you withstand the scrutiny, make decisions with confidence, and enjoy what truly is one of the greatest jobs in the world. You'll learn meat-and-potatoes things like what to do during morning drop-off, how to furnish your office on the cheap, and how to handle a group of angry parents. You'll also learn how to handle broader issues such as absence policies, talking to the media, and helping teachers fulfill their potential. You'll get tips to help you stay organized, learn from your experiences, and take care of yourself amid the

stress and whirling pressures. This book is not about educational policy, improving assessment scores, or career-building. Those important topics are well-covered in other books. Rather, this book is about the nuts and bolts of being the best leader you can be—every day.

The book is organized like a handbook: You can use the table of contents to guide your reading, skipping around to chapters that can help you at any given time. Of course, you'll get the most out of the book if you read it all.

Chapters 1 and 2 cover the first few weeks after you are hired, and they're all about setting yourself up so you feel confident and prepared for the coming year. What do you do first? What do you need to take care of before the first day of school? What should you focus on next? What is your vision for the school? **Chapter 3** leads you through the process of assessing which policies are working in your school and which ones need to be revised—and guides you through the revision process. **Chapters 4 through 6** help you assess your staff and understand how to support all teachers, no matter their experience or aptitude. **Chapter 7** is all about establishing your leadership style and leading your school through necessary changes. **Chapter 8** provides guidance for documenting decisions and events so you can learn from your mistakes and successes as well as justify decisions when needed. **Chapter 9** is about communication with the outside world. Finally, **Chapter 10** pulls the focus in tight on yourself with advice on how to stay rested, healthy, and happy through all the ups and downs.

Besides the ideas, tips, and guidelines in every chapter, you'll also find "Stories from the Field." These examples are composite stories gathered from our experiences and the experiences of hundreds of principals we've known, including those we've worked with personally and many more we've met at conferences and through networking all over the United States. We have changed details to protect the identities of the people in them.

This is a book written *for* principals *by* principals, and it's important to remember that *you* were chosen to be a principal because someone saw your leadership potential. All you can ask from yourself is the same thing you ask from your teachers and students: Try your best and always be growing. We hope that as you continue on your path this book will be

helpful in that continued growth. This is important work, and what you do matters.

We would love to hear how this book has helped you in your career as a principal. If you have stories or questions for us, you can reach us through our publisher at help4kids@freespirit.com.

Susan Kessler

April Snodgrass

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CHAPTER

ONE

Getting Started

Maybe the promotion to principal was long overdue, or maybe you simply were in the right place at the right time. Either way, you've got the job now, and you have more to think about than your brain can process. Where do you start? Do you walk into a school and say, "I am the new sheriff in town," or do you quietly observe the status quo? Do you introduce yourself by your first name or use the formal salutation of Mr., Ms., or Dr.? What do you wear? How do you transition your predecessor out? What about setting up your office?

Here is what you do: breathe. In and out. Repeat often, and remind yourself, "Rome wasn't built in a day." Begin by making a to-do list, adding items regardless of how big or small they are. That way you won't have to keep remembering all the balls you're juggling at once.

Then you prioritize. This chapter hits some of the high spots of a new principal's to-do list.

Get "The Look"

First things first: You have to look like the principal. What does that mean to you, and how does that play into your leadership style? Does that mean ties with apples and school buses printed on them, or a suit every day? You may be promoted in the summer, which traditionally means business casual clothing for principals until school starts, but perhaps that is not right for you. It depends where on you are in your particular situation.

For example, if you're young—or look young—and this is your first principal job, dressing up is probably better. You do not want to give anyone reason to take you less-than-seriously, and let's be honest: Some people will quickly judge you by how you dress.

As a general rule, the principal should look more dressed up than others in the building. The principal's example also sets the level of professional dress in the building. For example, if you come to work wearing jeans, then others will think jeans are okay as well. You may have heard this expression that we often tell teachers: "It's a lot easier to lighten up than tighten up." The same can be said for the principal's personal image. Dressing down if your initial style was too formal is easier than dressing up if your style was too casual.

The decision about what you wear is yours, but keep in mind that what you wear makes a statement.

Make Your Workplace Work

You have to have an office to do your work. You need a desk, phone, and computer from day one. You'll also want to decorate it somehow. Some people like to display their diplomas and awards while others think that looks too self-promoting. That choice is up to you. Displaying school colors shows your loyalty to the school, and it's easy to order a few custom-colored pom-poms online. Artwork students have made and photographs of your own family are personal touches that send a clear message that you care about children.

You will definitely need (at least) one bulletin board to hang calendars, memos, schedules, etc., and it's invaluable to have a bulletin board specifically to display positive press. These bits of good news have much value, whether they come from the local *PennySaver* or a major metropolitan newspaper. A locking file cabinet that keeps employee records and other sensitive files private and safe is critical and can double as a place to store your purse or bag each day. You can also lock your personal keys in the file cabinet and only carry school keys around your neck or on a belt loop while at school to ensure your own belongings are safe.

What if your predecessor is still sitting in the principal's chair when you start the job? People will be watching to see what you do, and you won't win any popularity points if you oust the former principal from her

office. If you are appointed on June 1 and the principal's last day is June 30, then unless the principal moves out on her own accord, your best bet is to find a satellite office to do your work within the school. Even if the principal was controversial or unpopular, she will have followers and admirers, and alienating those people is a huge mistake.

What if you've got an office but the furniture is mismatched and shabby? Schools seldom have money available for furniture, and if you do have money you likely will want to spend it on student desks and tables. But as principal of your school, your office represents you as a CEO of that organization, and you don't look "large and in charge" leaning over a milk crate that is holding your laptop as you type. We have two words for you: used furniture. Liquidators buy and sell used office furniture when organizations change hands or close down. You can outfit your office with furniture that technically is used—and would be way out of a school's price range when new—but that looks and works great. It's a perfect way to economically outfit your office to look like a leader's office.

Your office is your workplace, and your staff needs to know that you do not anticipate people going in there in your absence. It is wise to re-key your office and give a key only to trusted individuals because that is the only way to know who actually has access.

Get Access

Districts use a wide variety of computer programs to keep themselves organized and to do a variety of jobs, from hiring to taking attendance to analyzing student data. Some of those systems include the following.

- **Student data system:** student addresses, demographics, schedules, transcripts, and attendance
- **Personnel data system:** teacher demographics, pay levels, education, certifications, sick time availability, recommendations for hire, background checks and clearances, and retirements
- **Achievement data system:** data on standardized tests by student, by subject, by grade level, by teacher, and by school; predictions of student success on standardized tests
- **Accounting/purchasing system:** requesting purchase orders, processing requisitions, and approving checks; collecting and crediting monies

- **Maintenance system:** recording building needs, maintenance items, upgrades
- **Inventory system:** tracking books, technology, copy machines, and equipment checked out to employees

If you're new to the district, you will need to learn all of these systems and ensure that you get access in a timely manner. Even if you're not new to the district, you will probably need to spend time learning these systems. While you might have some experience with them, generally a principal will have different levels of access than an assistant principal because the jobs and responsibilities are different. Things that were grayed out for you when you were an assistant principal may now be usable, or you'll need to learn programs that you may have known about but didn't have access to. Your supervisor or a veteran principal at the same tier level could tell you how to get the access you need. It may be as simple as sending an email to the right person, or you may be required to attend training, but the sooner you start asking, the sooner you can get what you need.

You also need access to the school's bank accounts. From the first day you officially begin work as the principal, you are legally accountable for every penny that is spent. You will need to go to the bank to take the former principal off the account as the signer of checks and add yourself. You may not want to spend any money the first week until you evaluate how things work at your school, but you do not want anyone else spending money either. The buck stops with you, and you are in charge of all bucks.

Who Else Works Here?

It seems like a straightforward question. But in reality, it can sometimes be hard to pin down. How many teachers, administrators, secretaries, cafeteria workers, and custodians work here? Ask for a payroll printout that shows everyone's full- or part-time status. Ms. Falco and Mr. Bernardino may share one position, but if you do not know their FTE (full-time equivalent), you may think you have 42 teachers when you are only budgeted for 41. But you have 42 teachers (some with part-time allocations) who fill 41 positions.

Make a list of everyone's job title and FTE, and take a look at your vacancies. It is usually better for you to hire new teachers, rather than your predecessor. Some new principals might feel it's easier to let the

outgoing principal handle this, but you know what you want in a staff member, and your predecessor may have wanted different attributes. You might not have a lot of time, but hiring staff members is actually the most important job a principal does. You can involve other team members or a leadership team, but you must have the head seat at the hiring table. See pages 80–90 for more about hiring teachers.

The School's Mini-Makeover

With the rare exception of brand new buildings, most schools have some cosmetic defects or improvements that can be made, and if you start during the summer, you have time to take care of these things. A newly painted area or some freshly planted flowering bushes can make a big difference. Bright, kid-friendly colors and positive messages are environmental magnets for kids, teachers, and parents. They make a difference because they impact everyone's attitude about the school environment. When teachers and students return from break and see that the school *looks* good, they're likely to feel that things will *be* good.

These cosmetic improvements help instill school pride, and they show your attention to detail.

Meeting with Staff and Families

Secretaries are used to adapting to what their supervisor wants, but they can't adapt to what they do not know. Meet with your office support staff early on to set clear expectations about a wide variety of things including:

- How the phone is to be answered
- How questions and concerns are routed to the principal or others
- How foot traffic is handled
- How upset parents are handled
- How salespeople are handled
- What to do when students want to see the principal or teachers
- The keeping of your calendar and scheduling of your meetings
- Who relieves the secretary for lunch

Meeting with secretaries is important because they are your gatekeepers. The way they communicate—both formally and informally—represents you, so be clear about how you want communication handled. Think of the damage a secretary can do by saying, “I am sorry but Principal Hall does not meet with parents without an appointment” as opposed to “Have you spoken with the teacher? Principal Hall will want you to do that before he schedules your meeting.” In a large school where there are several assistant principals, secretaries need to point the parent to the assistant principal assigned to the student as a matter of procedure, but there are times when parents want to see the principal in charge. Principals need to meet with parents when they demand a meeting, and the secretaries need to know that you will do so.

It's also hugely beneficial to meet with teachers and parents when you can. For these stakeholders, there is no substitute for looking you in the eye and hearing what you have to say. Some teachers and parents will be hungry for this opportunity, so if they reach out to you, embrace it. (See pages 149–158 for more on meeting with parents.) Your relationships with parents and teachers are integral to moving the school forward.

Different people will want different things from you. Some may request a sit-down meeting while others would like a hand shake at an informal gathering. Neither is necessarily superior—make yourself available for both.

Meeting with Administrators

Most principals beginning a new appointment will be joining a staff that has at least one assistant principal as part of the administrative structure, and you may have as many as seven assistant principals reporting to you. How do you maintain consistency among many administrators? How do you keep parents, students, and teachers from employing the manipulative “mom says no so ask dad and hope for a different answer” tactic? And how do you foster *teamwork* among the administrative team?

One word answers all those questions: *communication*. How you want things handled in your school needs to be explicitly communicated among all administrators. For example, an effective strategy in a large school where several people are disciplining students is to have an internal discipline matrix that lists offenses and the consequences that go with

them. (We do not advocate publishing this document, because there will be exceptions, and some students and behaviors will warrant more or less severe consequences depending on the situation.) It is a good idea to meet with your administrators to go through the painstaking process of establishing what are the most important behaviors to reduce at your school and how to do it.

As head principal, you need to be decisive and clear, not only to make sure your school runs efficiently, but also because the assistant principalship is a means of preparing for the important role of head principal. Assistant principals may not agree with how you do something and tell themselves, “When I’m the principal, I’ll do it differently.” That is the entire point! Assistant principals may agree or disagree with a strategy or philosophy of yours, but they can only make informed opinions about these things if they are *informed*. Communicating your beliefs and guiding principles enables assistants to continually compare their own philosophical positions to yours. This process allows future leaders to give thought to the important decisions the principal has to make before they have to make them. That leadership development is the most helpful thing a mentor can do for protégés.

Some principals meet weekly with their assistants at a regular time. Some meet only as necessary. The important thing is to get everyone on the same page. Things that regularly need to be discussed:

- Days and times you will be out of the building, and who is appointed principal designee for those times
- Days and times assistant principals will be out of the building
- Unusual schedule changes or special events
- Upcoming planning: when are the report card deadlines and parent conference days be scheduled?
- Review of data: how are students progressing and what are we doing to help those who are struggling?
- Review of teacher performance: are teachers having classroom management issues, high absenteeism, or a negative attitude, or who is going above and beyond and needs to be recognized?

Revisit these topics weekly because the information can change so frequently. A school with several assistant principals may have more than

one hundred teachers. You will need to rely on your assistants to help keep you informed since you can't be everywhere at all times.

Information sharing with assistant principals can be done via email; however, leading assistant principals is incredibly important and is most effective in face-to-face interactions. The administrative team is critical to an effectively run school, and if everyone is too busy to talk to one another, what could result is five small schools all running within the same building rather than five sub-parts of one well-coordinated machine.

Schedules and Calendars

As principal, you'll have many demands on your time, and you'll need a way to keep ahead of what is going on. Having a master calendar for the school, a detailed calendar for yourself, as well as plans for daily routines will help keep your head above water during the school year.

Master the Schedule

If you're hired in the summer, the master schedule—the schedule that shows when, where, and by whom all classes are taught—has probably already been developed. Unless there are a lot of problems with the master schedule, go with it for now. Revamping it when you're not yet familiar with the talents of your staff could result in a schedule that is good for teachers but not necessarily a schedule that is good for the students.

What kind of problems should you look for? If the schedule is grounded in adult wants rather than student needs, then you will need to make changes. At the high school level, look at the course requests and see if the master schedule matches. For example, if you have 200 students who need English IV, you need at least six sections of English IV in your schedule. You also want the right teachers teaching the courses. You want your top-level teachers in your most important classes (those that count for your state testing and those that prepare students for life after high school). At all levels, make sure teacher certifications match up with the classes they teach. You don't want a teacher certified in biology teaching Spanish just because she happens to also speak Spanish. Also pay attention to the needs of students, and make sure those who need smaller classes or particular classes, such as English language learners or special education students, get them.

If the schedule isn't done when you arrive—or if the existing schedule is too problematic to fix—then you need to get working, because the schedule is a prerequisite to identifying personnel needs. Even though you are the principal, you do not have to do the schedule alone. If you are inexperienced at scheduling, ask your supervisor to recommend another principal who can help you. And you'll be able to see how another school has organized its school day for success.

Master Calendar

No matter the level of your school, you'll have a wide variety of school events, and a school master calendar is essential for you and your staff to keep track of them all. If one does not already exist at the school, you'll want to create a master calendar as soon as possible. Include information from the school district about school holidays, conference days, progress report and report card days, and assessment dates. Add school-specific events such as PTO/PTA meetings, field days, musicals, sporting events, open houses, school fund-raisers, and club events. Add field trips, assemblies, faculty meetings, and faculty-wide professional development to this calendar as they are determined.

When placing items on the calendar, don't just name the event, but include time, location, and any requirements such as AV equipment, seating, people needed to supervise, or whether you must attend. Having all this information in a central location helps prevent conflicting events and ensures that everyone is in the know so they can plan accordingly. Many schools use an electronic calendar that all staff can access and add to via their own computers and devices, while others have one person who maintains the master calendar and handles submissions to be added. You do not necessarily have to be the one to coordinate the calendar, but we recommend that you approve the adding of events.

Principal's Calendar

Your own calendar is separate from the master calendar but needs to include all of the information from the master calendar, plus appointments, meetings, and trainings that you're required to attend. Add your personal appointments to the calendar, too. Principals need to get their teeth cleaned every six months like everyone else, and maintaining a

single calendar for professional and personal appointments will reduce confusion.

You may want to share this calendar with your secretary if your secretary makes appointments for you, but otherwise this is a personal calendar for you to keep track of what you need to do.

Daily Routine

When starting a new job, you'll want to establish a daily routine immediately. This consistency will help you as well as your staff and students. While there will always be unforeseen events that come up and force you to make changes to your schedule, establishing a daily schedule and routine will prevent you from wasting time and help you make progress toward meeting the school's goals and your vision a reality.

Here are a few guidelines to consider.

Drop-Off Time

Morning drop-off is a great time to see and be seen and interact with kids, parents, and teachers in the hustle and bustle of the school day. Whether it is working the drop-off line for car riders, being present when students get off buses, greeting students in the lobby, or rotating through the cafeteria during breakfast, taking the time to be visible sends a clear signal that you are involved and getting to know your students and their families is important to you.

The downside of being visible is that it can often feel as if you are on a raging river being pelted from all sides by parents, staff, and students constantly bringing situations to your attention. People will approach you to discuss a wide variety of situations. These interactions are often short, and it is important for you to be present and to make that time count. If people feel like they've been heard, it solidifies your leadership. Conversely, if a stakeholder feels slighted, snubbed, or ignored, these relationships will soon manifest themselves into bigger problems down the road.

It is also important to keep track of what you say, agree to, or approve during these interactions. We recommend having some way to keep notes about these interactions as well as other decisions that you make during the day. You might carry around a clipboard with a notepad or a small

notepad in your pocket, or you might use your phone to record information. Do what works best for you, but regardless of your system, the few seconds it takes to record these interactions can save you hours down the road. See pages 135–136 for more information.

Morning Announcements

By handling the morning announcements, you are setting the tone for the entire school day. Decide what tone you want to set and how you will go about it. Will you recite the Pledge of Allegiance, observe a moment of silence, play a song, or invite student participation? Will you close with a tagline such as “No one knows what you can achieve until you try”?

Announcements take up very little of the school day, but they can impact the overall school culture. By handling the morning announcements, you let students and staff know that you are in charge, which is comforting to them. If you’ll be away from the building and unable to give the morning announcements, have a procedure in place for a designee to handle them so the school knows that even if you are out or unavailable, leadership is still present.

Classroom Visits

Schedule time so you can rotate through classes during the day and monitor student learning. This action helps you keep a pulse on the school atmosphere for the day. It also helps hold teachers accountable and sends the message to teachers and students that instructional time is valued and monitored. You can also make note of positive behaviors and particularly good lessons or other moments to talk about with teachers and students later. Following up with a teacher in a brief note or hallway conversation about something positive you noticed during your rounds will help boost morale and let staff know that you are paying attention. The same is true for students.

Regularly Scheduled Meetings

Set up regular meetings with assistant principals, instructional coaches, counselors, and other people in the building. Many principals schedule these meetings on specific days of the week at specific times, such as 3:33 on Mondays, so people will remember these are standing appointments.