

**PRINCIPALS LEAD THE WAY FOR PK-3:  
Early Investment, Strong Alignment, Better Results  
National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2006**

**Overview**

A child's first five years are critical to development. Without adequate early education, statistics show a dramatic decline in later academic performance. But early learning success should not stop at the kindergarten door. Each year principals and school administrators from across the country strive to insure that PK through third grade builds in deliberate ways on the previous year's experience. Understanding lessons learned from principals who are leading efforts to align PK-3 and improve results for children can help more principals build similar systems in their schools. Because no PK-3 program is a 'one size fits all' principals are integral in creating and implementing a program that works for their school. This article presents several case studies of principals and schools at PK-3 districts across the country.

**Discussion**

- a. This article discusses four core elements found in successful PK-3 programs across the country:
  1. Strong PK-3 alignment
  2. Strong principal leadership
  3. High-quality, ongoing professional development
  4. Strong focus on student achievement and results
- b. The key to successful alignment is streamlining the core elements of teaching and learning, and focusing on grade-level transitions. Teachers must work together to achieve a seamless transition.
- c. In addition to supporting a strong PK-3 vision, principals must apply all their skills and knowledge to create a community and school focused on education. This involves managing resources, energizing teachers, building community support and leading reform. It is important for principals to be a resource for teachers for PK-3 techniques and tools.
- d. Principals are responsible for creating a climate throughout the school that balances developmentally appropriate teaching and learning with specific academic expectations. As principals implement the PK-3 continuum, age-appropriate assessments and accountability should be embraced and used to continuously inform teaching.

**Conclusion**

Each principal brings a unique set of skills and personal strengths to the task of creating PK-3 programs. Leading by doing, principals are spurring PK-3 reform in communities across the country. By interviewing these principals and sharing case studies about their experiences creating aligned PK-3 systems, it is hoped that more principals will have the tools and the knowledge to implement PK-3 in their district.

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