

# Creating a Culture of Learning: An Introductory Guide for School Leaders

One goal that every school shares is that they want students to have a place to learn and grow. However, for that to happen, it's important to create a culture of learning that encompasses everyone, from the students and faculty to leadership.

In this guide, we have pulled together tips on how leaders can start building a culture of learning across all aspects of your school.

It is divided into four parts:

[Part 1: A Culture of Learning for Leaders](#)

[Part 2: Teacher Growth-Focused Learning](#)

[Part 3: Student Growth-Focused Learning](#)

[Part 4: Additional Resources for Growth](#)

## Part 1: A Culture of Learning for Leaders

One of the first things you need to do to grow as a leader is to know your leadership style.

You can start this process by asking yourself some essential questions.

### *Essential Coaching Questions*

- How do you ensure that the entire school community prioritizes the achievement of schoolwide goals?
- What processes and supports are in place to encourage and support a schoolwide use of established processes, rubrics and protocols to align instruction, assignments and assessments with state standards? How do teachers know what to teach and when to teach it?
- How do you and district leaders establish and communicate a clear vision, mission and culture of high expectations for the entire school community?
- How do you and district leaders engage parents and community partners in the student learning process and communicate school success?

Once you have these answers, it is time to look at your leadership type.

### *Three Types of Leadership Styles*

In his book *Visible Learning*, John Hattie defines three distinct types of school leadership.

Which one are you?

- ***Transformational Leadership*** – inspiring teachers towards a common mission, overcoming challenges and reaching ambitious goals, and then to ensure teachers have time to conduct their teaching.
- ***Instructional Leadership*** – high expectations of teachers for their students, visit classrooms, and are concerned with interpreting evidence about the quality of learning in the school.
- ***Learning Leadership*** – leadership that emphasizes student and adult learning and occurs when leaders promote teacher learning through coaching, forming data teams, focusing on how students learn subject-matter content, and enabling teachers to work collaboratively.

Once you know your leadership style, you can use it to guide you as you work towards creating a support system for teacher- and student-led growth in your school.

## Part 2: Teacher Growth-Focused Learning

Once again, one of the first things you should do when you begin to create a culture of learning for your teachers is to start by asking some important questions.

### *Essential Coaching Questions*

- What processes are in place to support teachers in designing and delivering instruction that ensures student learning occurs?
- What processes are in place to support and encourage teachers to collaborate to create a classroom environment in which students persist and engage in a productive struggle?
- What processes are in place to encourage and support teachers, instructional coaches and other staff to use protocols and procedures to analyze student work and assess the effectiveness of instructional strategies on student engagement and achievement?

Now, let's talk a little about the steps you can take to encourage teacher-led growth.

### *Three Steps Towards Teacher-Led Growth*

One thing you can do to create a culture of learning in your school is to encourage teacher-led growth, in which the teachers are partly responsible for their own growth.

You can [start this process in three steps](#), though it is wise to start this process with small cohorts of willing teachers before growing it for the whole school.

- **Step 1:** Have teachers share student work with each other.
- **Step 2:** Encourage teachers to share their lesson plans and collaborate with each other on planning.
- **Step 3:** Create opportunities for teachers to invite other instructors into their classrooms so that they can learn and practice together. On the next page, we have provided a sample peer review form you can use.

For each of these teacher-led steps, match teachers from different grades and content areas to foster out-of-the-box thinking.

*Sample Peer Observation Form*

Teacher Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Block/Period: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher Visited: \_\_\_\_\_

Subject: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Visit: \_\_\_\_\_

**Essential Questions:**

- Standard Alignment – Is instruction aligned to grade level standard/learning target?
- Student Engagement – How are the majority of students demonstrating engagement?
- Connections – How did the teacher connect new content for learning?
- Questioning Strategies – What type of questioning strategies were being used?
- Literacy – Was there evidence of students building content knowledge through reading grade level text? Was there evidence of students developing writing products to demonstrate understanding?

**Reflection:**

*What I liked*

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*What I learned*

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*What I will use*

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## Part 3: Student Growth-Focused Learning

As we move on to a student growth-focused learning plan, let's start by once more asking some important questions.

### *Essential Questions*

- What is your point of view of evidence of student learning in classrooms?
- How do students know their progression of their learning?
- What connections do we make to new content for learning?
- What evidence is there for students building content knowledge through reading grade level text?
- What evidence is there of students developing writing products to demonstrate understanding?

### *Protocols for Engaging Students*

Now, let's look at some best practices on how to achieve student-led growth in your school.

#### Allowing for Student Voice and Choice

Allowing students the opportunity to have choices in the classes and projects they tackle, while still helping them meet standards and objectives, is a great way to put them in charge of their own learning and growth.

It also helps them explore their interests and teaches them critical thinking and decision-making processes.

#### Students Tracking their Own Data

Along with giving students more choices, it is also a good idea to give them opportunities to track their own success by allowing them to see their own results and data.

There are many ways to do this, but here are a few ideas:

- Have an online system that is easy for students to access and understand
- [Deemphasize grading for a time](#)
- Encourage teachers to [work with students to create some of the class success criteria](#)
- Use [scoreboards to track class goals](#)

## Part 4: Resources for Additional Learning

To help you on your journey towards continuous learning, we have included some resources to get you started.

- *The Coach Approach to School Leadership: Leading Teachers to Higher Levels of Effectiveness*, Jessica Johnson, Shira Leibowitz, Kathy Perrett
- *Visible Learning*, John Hattie
- [SREB's Learning Leadership Program](#)
- [SREB's Powerful Instructional Practices](#)
- SREB Blog: ["Tips on Using Data Effectively"](#)
- SREB Blog: ["Let's Give Our Teachers What Any Employee Needs to Be Successful"](#)
- SREB Blog: ["Collaborating With Students on Success Criteria"](#)
- SREB Blog: ["Mastering Master Schedules"](#)
- SREB Blog: ["Three Steps Towards Powerful Leadership"](#)
- SREB Blog: ["Three Ways to Design Towards Teacher-Led Growth"](#)