

Sustaining Courageous Leadership in Schools: *The Soul of Leadership: Courage Presence & Integrity*

Leadership and Culture Matter in Schools

Educators need meaningful support to build the cohesive and trustworthy adult school communities that are critical to student success. It's widely understood that successful teachers pay attention to social emotional learning and classroom climate for their students, and there are many effective SEL curricula to choose from. But when it comes enhancing school leaders' social emotional competence and providing them with tools to cultivate adult school climate, we are on the cusp of a new and as yet under-resourced field of professional learning.

The Soul of Leadership: Courage, Presence & Integrity develops educators' critical capacity for self-awareness and reflection and supports the building of caring, respectful communities that are the foundation for safe and productive schools. The program provides a unique experience for educators to grow personally and professionally, to enhance their leadership capacity, and to nurture the trust among colleagues that builds a school community and fosters social emotional learning (SEL) for both students and adults.

We provide participants with the time, space, and skilled facilitation to do what Parker Palmer calls "the work before the work." Participants are invited to reflect on their lives and work through contemplative and reflective practices drawn from the Center for Courage & Renewal and the fields of mindfulness, social and emotional learning, neuroscience, poetry, literature, and the arts. The program helps integrate reflective practices into the routine of administrative team meetings and helps teams apply these practices to their daily work. We enhance participants' capacity as leaders, provide a lived experience of the process of building relational trust, and offer strategies to help them strengthen social-emotional learning (SEL) in their adult community.

Program Format: Currently offered as a role-alike experience for principals, *Soul of Leadership* brings together a cohort of principals from elementary, middle, and high schools in a combination of four single-day retreat sessions spread throughout the year (August to May) combined with three virtual small group video-conference sessions in between. Participants each receive a copy of the *Leading Together: Building Adult Community in Schools* guidebook with accessible protocols and activities that build relational trust, facilitate reflection as a community, and build the muscle for listening and staying engaged with the challenging conversations that are critical to continual school improvement.

To help students build these SEL skills and habits of mind, educators must have spaces in which they, too, can cultivate these habits in themselves. Mutual respect and courageous dialogue begin with the adults who establish generative habits and habitats that shape the school experience.

Key Program Elements

- **Courage, Presence & Integrity:** Through reflective and mindfulness practice, principals develop the capacity to be more present in their leadership. The opportunity to listen to self and others is a key skill and contributes to building authentic relationships and the courage and integrity needed in this demanding role.
- **School Culture:** We lead who we are. Principals play a key role in creating and sustaining school culture. Relationships among the adults in schools are key to developing strong school culture – and student learning.
- **Self-Care & Compassion:** We learn to receive care and practice self-care and compassion, enabling us to be able to extend compassion to others and model it in school communities.
- **Relational Trust:** Trust is critical to a healthy school culture and social and academic outcomes for students. Drawing from the work of Anthony Bryk and Barbara Schneider, we learn the elements of relational trust based on respect, personal regard, competence and integrity and we learn how to cultivate relational trust in our school communities.
- **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion:** Through listening, mindfulness, and reflection, we develop a deeper awareness and understanding of how systemic racism, implicit bias, and cultural diversity affect each of us. This enables us to be better able to engage in dialogue and take action to create a more culturally responsive and inclusive school community.

Who We Are

[Courage & Renewal Northeast](#) is a regional affiliate of the Center for Courage and Renewal. The Center's founder Parker J. developed *Courage to Teach*®, a unique approach to renewing personal identity, professional integrity and vocational vitality for public school teachers. The [Massachusetts School Administrators' Association](#) (MSAA) provides professional learning and support to over 2,200 school administrators. With the support from the Angell Foundation, Courage and Renewal Northeast and MSAA developed *The Soul of Leadership: Courage, Presence &*

From our participants...

Participation in the “Soul of Leadership” program has been a significant source of strength and empowerment for me during my third year as high school principal. Inspired by many of the activities, I feel healthier, more grounded, more balanced and more joyful. As a result, I am a more effective leader, better able to meet the needs of those (students and teachers alike) who rely on me to make a positive difference in their lives.”
High School Principal

“One of the, if not the, most valuable things for me about the Soul of Leadership sessions is that you somehow manage to slow down time. In our work in schools, things happen fast, fast, fast, and people want decisions fast, fast, fast. In my experience, most fast decisions go wrong at some point down the line. In our sessions there are so many ways that you model and teach slowing down, and I’m working to use those techniques in my work life so that I can slow down and improve my decision making.”
Experienced Elementary Principal

“There is a real risk of burning out. I feel it and I see it in my colleagues. The risk is even higher among administrators with high levels of compassion and sense of responsibility. These are the administrators that we can least afford to drive out. This work has allowed me to embrace rather than suppress these traits in ways that make me more effective and able to lead in a more sustainable and meaningful way.”
Second Year Elementary Principal

Integrity in 2018 as a role-alike experience for principals. This program grew out of *Leading Together: Building Adult Community in Schools*, first developed in 2012 for the Center for Courage and Renewal by Pamela Seigle, Lisa Sankowski, and Chip Wood as a model for school teams.

Our Impact

Since 2012, we have tested these programs with almost 100 K-12 schools and over 50 principals from diverse communities across Massachusetts. Evaluations by the Center for Creative Leadership and the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia find these programs are personally transformative and equip principals to build school communities where educators innovate, and students thrive academically and socially.

“The Soul of Leadership has demonstrated the ability to both reduce the isolation of the profession by building relationships between principals and to increase principals’ psychological health, making participants more willing to continue in the incredibly difficult job of being a principal.”

**Micela Leis, Center for Creative Leadership
Soul of Leadership Final Report, July 2019**

- **Enhanced Relational Trust:** Trust between teachers and colleagues and teachers and their principal improved.
- **Increased Professional Capacity and Shared Leadership:** Principals and teachers’ confidence in their collective ability to meet student needs, motivate students, and reach difficult students increased.
- **Increased Psychological Capital:** Principals were much more likely to feel hopeful and to feel a sense of efficacy after the program. Resilience in the face of challenges also increased.
- **Improved Social Networks:** Principals formed strong collaborative relationships with other principals participating in *Soul of Leadership* that flourished beyond the program.

Our Future Work

Conditions in our increasingly complex and conflicted world challenge us as citizens, and particularly as educators, to help our students develop the pivotal skills of democracy—an understanding that we are all in this together, an appreciation of the value of diversity, an ability to hold tension in life-giving ways, a sense of personal voice and agency, and a capacity to create community.

We seek to expand opportunities for more educators and school leaders to experience this approach. We will accomplish this by preparing a diverse group of educators to facilitate the program, significantly expanding our reach. We will also consult with and support networks of school leaders and teachers who have participated in these programs to sustain their courageous leadership.

For additional information (including program options), contact:

Pamela Seigle
Executive Director
Courage & Renewal Northeast
pamelaseigle@gmail.com

Rick Rogers
Program Coordinator
Massachusetts School Administrators’ Association
rickrogers409@gmail.com
978-729-2190