

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

We begin with the voices of school leaders...

“The most valuable thing for me about the sessions for Soul of Leadership 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 our sessions there are so many ways that you model and teach slowing down. 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.”

~ Beginning Elementary Principal

“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

Sustaining Courageous Leadership in Schools

Over the past three years, the Massachusetts School Administrators’ Association (MSAA) has partnered with Courage & Renewal Northeast to offer a new and unique professional learning experience for school leaders called the *Soul of Leadership: Courage, Presence and Integrity*. With grant funding from the Angell Foundation to support transformational leadership, nearly 100 school leaders from a diverse cross-section of districts across Massachusetts have participated in our first four cohorts, including over 30 who have subsequently participated in our alumni network.

The world of schools has been dramatically altered by the pandemic, alongside urgent calls for racial justice and equity. Our work has expanded to meet a critical need among school leaders while adapting from a partial to a completely online format. The challenges of leading today

underscore the need for school leaders who can handle stress and model caring and culturally responsive practices, creating trusting school communities where everyone feels safe, cared for, and valued.

Soul of Leadership grew out of the earlier work of *Leading Together: Building Adult Community in Schools* (2012), a professional development model for school teams that focuses on the critical role that clear and effective leadership plays in enhancing and supporting the adult community in schools.

Both *Soul of Leadership* and *Leading Together* develop educators' capacity for self-awareness, listening, and reflection in order to support the building of caring, respectful communities that are the foundation of safe, productive, and equitable schools. We enhance participants' capacity as leaders by providing a lived experience of the process of building relational trust and offering strategies to help strengthen adult SEL. The programs integrate reflective practices into the routine of team meetings and help teams apply these practices to their daily work.

Foundations of our Work

- Reflective Practices from the Center for Courage & Renewal (Parker J. Palmer)
- Relational Trust in Schools (Anthony Bryk & Barbara Schneider)
- Social Emotional Learning
- Contemplative Practices rooted in Mindfulness, Self-care, Compassion, and the Arts
- Social Justice and Equity

Program Format

The program was originally designed as a blended format of four full-day, in-person retreat sessions held quarterly over the school year, combined with small group video-conference sessions in between. With the pandemic, we successfully converted to shorter online retreats last spring. The additional small group sessions provide an opportunity to check in on participants' intentions for themselves and their schools, to continue to experience protocols and practices, and to keep the momentum of their experience moving forward.

Recent Timeline

- 2018-2019 ***Soul of Leadership Year 1***
Cohort 1: 26 Principals from 23 Districts

- 2019-2020 ***Soul of Leadership Year 2***
Cohort 2: 27 Principals from 20 Districts
Cohort 1: Second year for 21 Principals
Reflective Practice Group for Facilitators (10 participants)

- 2020-2021 ***Soul of Leadership Year 3***
Cohorts 3A & 3B: 45 Principals and Assistant Principals from 31 Districts
SoL Alumni Network: 25 Principals
Reflective Practice Group for Facilitators (14 participants)
Practices in Soul of Leadership (Introductory Experience): 27 Principals, funded by Essex County Learning Community

Over the past three years, our work has reached over 100 school leaders in rural, suburban, and urban districts across Massachusetts. The Angell Foundation has contributed a total of \$190,000 in grant support for this work. Program fees have raised an additional \$70,000.

Expanding Our Reach

We will

- Identify an urban partner district for district-based work
- Offer additional state-wide cohorts of school leaders
- Sustain a robust Alumni Network
- Develop a New England regional offering
- Explore alternative models through collaboration with other organizations
- Build our facilitator preparation pipeline
- Cultivate a diverse organization serving a wide range of school communities

Research & Evaluation

- *Leading Together* 2012: University of Virginia (Sara E. Rimm-Kaufman, Micela Leis, Carol L. C. Paxton)
- *Soul of Leadership* 2018-2020: Center for Creative Leadership (Micela Leis)
- *Soul of Leadership* 2020-2021: University of Colorado-Denver (Julia Mahfouz)

“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

For More Information

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