



SELA

SPECIAL EDUCATION LEADERSHIP ACADEMY



SELA Mentoring Guide for New Leaders

Alignment to IL Director Standards

Overview

This guide is designed to serve as an introductory road map for the exciting new adventures that new special education leaders face during a fast-paced unpredictable phase of educational reform that continues to evolve in concert with the incredible changes in our society that will impact the future dreams and opportunities for the students with special needs that we serve.

The road ahead for new leaders lacks clarity, specifics and defined directions on how to get to where you are headed. What is for certain is that it will have unanticipated twists and turns, detours that take you off course, that seem unsurmountable, frustrating or lonely at times. Despite the challenges, the unseen pot holes and difficult conditions, the wonderful rewards far exceed the challenges and are reflected in so many special life-changing ways – a family’s appreciation for the extra efforts, the caring, the team collaboration resulting in a positive outcome, students’ successes and dreams fulfilled in graduation and a customized job designed around a student’s interest or an authentic partnership in a community that literally opens new doors. These and so many other examples are valuable in unmeasurable ways – in the pride, appreciation and most importantly evidence of the power of making a difference.

The guide is designed to serve several purposes – a guide to assist you throughout the year, to work together with a mentor on the important pillars of leadership aligned to the Illinois Director standards and to provide opportunities for self-reflection that will be invaluable to you throughout the adventures of special education leadership. This electronic mentoring guide can serve as your own customized professional journal, as a collaborative mentoring process and/or as an ongoing resource to assist you in this important leadership journey. Regardless of how you choose to utilize this guide, incorporate advice you receive along the way, gather information and resources beneficial to your role, it is intended to provide flexible, ongoing advice and food for thought on your leadership journey. Leadership is an ongoing learning experience that doesn’t have a defined how to manual but guard rails to keep you on the road and landmarks to look for to make sure your path is future-focused and goal-orientated. Special education leadership evolves gradually and constantly through a series of experiences and lessons that serve as opportunities to develop a greater sense of depth and understanding in the purpose of the role, the connections and potential impact it has on others along the way .

Mentoring has been an important cornerstone of success for leaders early in their careers and the relationship between mentor and mentee offers great opportunities for both to benefit from each other as well as contributing to a greater network of colleagues working together to become stronger and more effective in their influence on students, families and the special education field committed to excellence. Working closely with a mentor and using this guide to support the partnership between the mentor and mentee will help serve as part of the ‘ways’ app for navigating the road trip of leadership in the early stages.

Table of Contents

- 1. From the Beginning- Establish your “Why”**
- 2. Relationship Building**
- 3. Establishing Priorities**
- 4. Budget Sense**
- 5. Communicating with Intent**
- 6. Positive Culture of Support**
- 7. Mindful Leadership**
- 8. Legal Toolbox**
- 9. Depth through Growth – Professional Learning**
- 10. Wider view through the Rearview mirror**
- 11. On the horizon – what’s coming ahead**
- 12. Additional SELA Resources and Links to Forms**

I. From the Beginning – Establish your Why

People don't buy WHAT you do, they buy WHY you do it. A failure to communicate WHY creates nothing but stress and doubt. Simon Sinek

Introduction:

In the book *Start with Why, How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*, Simon Sinek reviews the golden circle of influence seen over a million times on a TED talk that uses the success story of Apple to make the point. The author Sinek goes on to explain that people don't buy what you do, they buy why you do it. Often the demands of our roles in education steer us into a reactive frenzy of activity, responding to growing demands and requests for assistance and we focus our energies on what we need to do, what is coming at us full force and constant and we shape our days, weeks, months on what we need to do by what deadlines and mandates require us to stay on top of it all. While it might feel like that is the norm, that is the role, that is the expectation, great companies and districts are great because they can articulate why they do what they do, they know what drives them to excel every day – they can speak to their purpose and their mantra reflects about their worth and what excites them about coming to the role they love every day.

II. From the Beginning – Establish your Why

Guiding Questions of Focus:

What is your why?

Why are you in the role you are in and why do you want others to follow you?

What do you believe the importance of your work entails?

How do you want others to see you as a leader?

What do you need to do to reflect that mission?

What do you need to avoid to ensure you don't go off course?

III. Define your Purpose

Develop your own mission statement.

There is a great exercise used to help leaders identify/write their mission statements and it begins with identifying your top 5 values in life – only 5, no less, no more. When given 40 words, preferably depicted on individual cards, from the list of values attached it becomes apparent quickly that it is quite difficult to limit it to 5, but through a challenging process of elimination and prioritization, identify the top values that drive your life and your work – your purpose. They are not two different lists. Your drive, what you are passionate about, how you work is closely linked to the individual you are. The values are listed on the next page and can be used as a great exercise for you and your leadership team. It is also an important mission to display for others so they know what drives you – what your why is and how that will likely influence your leadership focus.

IV. Summary:

List your non-negotiables, guided by your values – and the compelling reason they are on your list.

Think about the best way to convey them to others. Values can best be operationalized by discussing with your team what they look like in observable behaviors

Establish norms for yourself and work with your team to establish group norms

Consider beginning your leadership journey with a journal:

write down lessons learned from each day/week... comments people shared that were helpful, eye-opening or reflective.

Denote successes and mistakes – they are both incredibly valuable.

(philosophy, mission statement, non-negotiables as a leader)

V. Questions/Thoughts:

List of Values

Accountability
Achievement
Adaptability
Adventure
Altruism
Ambition
Authenticity
Balance
Beauty
Being the best
Belonging
Career
Caring
Collaboration
Commitment
Community
Compassion
Competence
Confidence
Connection
Contentment
Cooperation
Courage
Creativity
Curiosity
Dignity
Diversity
Environment
Efficiency
Equality
Ethics
Excellence
Fairness
Faith
Family
Financial Stability

Forgiveness
Freedom
Friendship
Fun
Future generations
Generosity
Giving back
Grace
Gratitude
Growth
Harmony
Health
Home
Honesty
Hope
Humility
Humor
Inclusion
Independence
Initiative
Integrity
Intuition
Job Security
Joy
Justice
Kindness
Knowledge
Leadership
Learning
Legacy
Leisure
Love
Loyalty
Making a difference
Nature
Openness
Optimism
Parenting
Patience
Perseverance.

Personal fulfillment
Power
Pride
Recognition
Reliability
Resourcefulness
Respect
Responsibility
Risk Taking
Safety
Security
Self-discipline
Self-expression
Self-respect
Serenity
Service
Simplicity
Spirituality
Sportsmanship
Stewardship
Success
Teamwork
Thrift
Time
Tradition
Travel
Trust
Truth
Understanding
Uniqueness
Usefulness
Vision
Vulnerability
Wealth
Well-being
Wholeheartedness
Wisdom
Write your own:

