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# THE LEARNING Principal®

FOR A DYNAMIC COMMUNITY OF SCHOOL LEADERS ENSURING SUCCESS FOR ALL STUDENTS

## OPENING DOORS TO SUCCESS

*Making a case for effective leadership*

BY TRACY CROW

**P**rincipal Frank Roti of Beach Court Elementary School in Denver can describe in great detail selected leadership practices that have been

effective at increasing student gains at his school. Tonya Cooper, principal at LaRose Elementary School in Memphis can do the same. So can Tatiana Epanchin of Monarch Academy in Oakland, Calif.

It isn't necessarily unique that Roti and other school leaders can point to the actions that make a difference at their schools or that they can describe a meaningful strategy. What's exciting is that each of these principals is participating in an innovative method for not only documenting but also disseminating their knowledge about school leadership actions and

approaches that impact teaching and learning.

Roti, Cooper, Epanchin, and many others are members of the Effective Practice Incentive Community (EPIC), an initiative of New Leaders for New Schools. (See details about New Leaders for New Schools on p. 5.) In 2006, New Leaders and its EPIC partners (Denver Public Schools, Memphis City Schools, Prince George's County Public Schools, Washington D.C. Public Schools, and the EPIC National Charter School Consortium) received federal support through the U.S.

Department of Education's Teachers Incentive Fund to

connect incentive pay for teachers and principals to the widespread dissemination of specific

*Continued on p. 6*



### WHAT'S INSIDE

#### School Leadership

Meet Panigkaq Agatha John-Shields, principal of Ayaprun Elitnaurvik-Yup'ik Immersion School in Bethel, Alaska.

**PAGE 2**

#### Focus on NSDC's Standards

Simple steps support implementation of new strategies.

**PAGE 3**

#### NSDC Tool

Look for in K-5 reading and writing instruction.

**PAGES 4-5**

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**NSDC's purpose: Every educator engages in effective professional learning every day so every student achieves.**



**PANIGKAQ  
AGATHA JOHN-  
SHIELDS**

Principal, Ayaprun  
Elitnaurvik-Yup'ik  
Immersion School  
Bethel, Alaska

**AYAPRUN ELITNAURVIK-YUP'IK  
IMMERSION SCHOOL**

*Bethel, Alaska*

**Grades:** K-6

**Enrollment:** 165

**Staff:** 13

**Racial/ethnic mix:**

White:	2%
Black:	0%
Hispanic:	0%
Asian/Pacific Islander:	0%
Native American:	98%
Other:	0%

**Limited English proficient:** 66%

**Languages spoken:** Yup'ik and  
English

**Free/reduced lunch:** 77%

**Special education:** 3%

**Contact:** Panigkaq Agatha John-  
Shields, principal

**E-mail:** Agatha\_john-shields@lksd.  
org

# Q&A Keeping school relevant requires connections to the community

BY VALERIE VON FRANK

**Q. Your school is an immersion charter school for the native Yup'ik language. Why is this program important?**

We want to maintain and bring back the language. Some parents cannot speak the language because *their* parents were punished in school for speaking their native language. Language helps with strengthening self-identity and learning to accept other people rather than being so focused on one goal — on reading, writing and math — to be considered successful.

**Q. Although children don't start formal instruction in English until 3rd grade, you still were able to make Adequate Yearly Progress?**

We started as a Level 5 school. Through professional development, data studies, and working with other schools, we met AYP two years in a row. We have the data to show it can be done.

It isn't just data. Data have names. We look at each and every child and see what that child can do. We learned how to use data with names rather than just look at numbers. We integrate a lot more, even artwork, to concentrate on the whole child. The children cut up fish, walrus, or seals and use that learning as part of their writing. They are not just coming to school for reading, writing, and math. They are learning about culture and values and self. You can't live life only one way or the other. You have to have your own identity, and adjustments have to be made to help

our students survive in Western society, integrating both cultures. To do that, it's important to know who you are and where you come from.

**Q. How do you work with teachers on cultural goals?**

We have to remind each other. Although state and national standards have to be met, we have to be creative in figuring out how to integrate our community's needs and make instruction relevant rather than just required.

Teachers are expected to work together, and we talk about these goals during staff meetings, during professional development time. Teachers share what they have learned and what has worked, just like any teacher would be expected to do. That's what they are expected to do as educators. That is what I do as a leader.

**Q. How did you become principal?**

Our school needed a Yup'ik speaker to lead, so I got my master's degree, not for myself, but to show it can be done — that even as a Yup'ik speaker, you can become somebody, can make a difference, can lead.

**Q. What lessons have you learned about leadership?**

From the elders, the biggest thing I learned was you have to have support to be successful — sharing love and support is the biggest thing for getting better results. Love the children, the staff, the parents, and open the door to make them feel welcome to take part.

Try to make the climate positive. As a leader, don't take a directive approach; we're a team. No matter who you are, you want to be recognized as a successful person.

Celebrate what you have that's good, and build on what you have.

All that has to be there to open the door to success.



Pat Roy is co-author of *Moving NSDC's Staff Development Standards Into Practice: Innovation Configurations* (NSDC, 2003).

## Simple steps support implementation of new strategies

**L**isten for metaphors about schooling. We had the warfare phase — *we're down here in the trenches* — and the factory phase — *the production of learning and inputs into the system*. A new metaphor is surfacing — school is like a tornado. There is a swirl of mandates, expectations, research-based strategies, and assessments to which each school must attend. Many school folks walk into this maelstrom each day and have a hard time focusing on the essential components of quality teaching and learning.

How can a principal focus educators' attention to what is important in the middle of this turbulence? Principals can use many of their daily school routines to reinforce the use of new instructional strategies and classroom assessments. First, they can ensure that they **allocate resources to support implementation** of new practices (Roy & Hord, 2003, p. 105). Seminal professional development research has found that knowledge does not automatically translate into classroom practices without ongoing support and follow-up (Joyce and Showers, 1988). This support can come from skillful colleagues within a learning team as well as instructional coaches. Most adults need more than a surface understanding of new practices before they are willing to attempt use within their classroom. Colleagues can provide this support.

Relentlessly emphasizing expected strategies and practices at **staff meetings, committee meetings, and schoolwide events** signals the importance of these new practices to staff. While some principals might believe this repeti-

tion isn't necessary, Fullan reminds us of his fifth pillar of change: *Repeat the core messages again and again* (2009). One principal I know spent a year focusing every staff meeting, team meeting, and observation on the writing process. Statewide assessment that year resulted in her school's largest growth in student writing scores.

**Public recognition** of early adopters of new strategies is low-cost and an important signal of what is important within the school. Principals can highlight innovators in staff meetings or send notes to individual teachers based on practices they see in walk-throughs or classroom observations.

Finally, the principal can **dedicate time** to the development of new classroom skills and practices. Instead of hiring an outside expert for a professional development day, the school administrator can yield that time to small grade-level or content area teams to develop lessons that incorporate new strategies, analyze classroom videos that employ new strategies, or examine student work to determine the impact of new strategies on student learning.

These ordinary efforts communicate to staff what is important and end up being much more significant than events that launch new programs or organizational efforts. The ordinary can result in the extraordinary when applied purposefully and uncompromisingly.

### NSDC STANDARD

**Quality Teaching:** Staff development that improves the learning of all students deepens educators' content knowledge, provides them with research-based instructional strategies to assist students in meeting rigorous academic standards, and prepares them to use various types of classroom assessments appropriately.

**Learn more about NSDC's standards:**  
[www.nsdcs.org/standards/index.cfm](http://www.nsdcs.org/standards/index.cfm)

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# Look fors in K-5 reading instruction

LOOK FOR	DESCRIPTION
<b>Program and lesson components</b>	<p><b>Whole group</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher explicitly models and explains strategy or skill focus for lesson through shared reading or readaloud.</li> <li>Anchor charts with visuals are created with students to use as resources during independent work.</li> <li>Students engage in accountable talk during lesson through Think/Pair/Share, Turn and Talk, and other cooperative learning activities.</li> <li>Preview/Review and other sheltering strategies are used to ensure comprehensible input for ELLs.</li> <li>Read-alouds happen daily for all students; in primary grades, shared reading happens daily as well.</li> <li>Materials used include DPS Instructional Planning Guides, <i>First 30 Days</i> and author studies, <i>Making Meaning</i>, trade books, big books, and overhead transparencies.</li> </ul> <p><b>Independent and buddy work</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students engage in independent or buddy reading and meaningful practice of strategies or skills taught during whole and small group lessons.</li> <li>Activities include reading ijust righti books, writing responses to reading, word/letter work, listening to books on tape, and rereading big books and poetry or song charts from shared reading.</li> <li>Some days, teacher confers with individual students and sets goals with them in reading assessment notebooks.</li> </ul> <p><b>Small group</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>While the rest of the students are working independently, teacher meets with small groups of 3-6 students who have similar needs.</li> <li>Lessons are brief (15-20 minutes), have a clear focus, are scaffolded for students, and use short, appropriately leveled texts that support the focus.</li> <li>Materials used include sets of leveled texts (e.g., Benchmark Library books), white boards, magnetic letters, sentence strips, and sticky notes.</li> </ul>
<b>Classroom environment</b>	<p><b>Arrangement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The room is organized for whole- and small-group instruction and independent work.</li> <li>Materials are clearly labeled, readily accessible to students, and arranged in an inviting way.</li> </ul> <p><b>Displays</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Anchor charts reflect current instructional areas of focus, procedures, and expectations.</li> <li>Examples of current student work are displayed on walls.</li> <li>Word wall is being developed with students throughout the year.</li> <li>Rubrics or attribute charts, created with students, provide clear expectations for student work and include visuals to support ELLs and emergent readers.</li> </ul> <p><b>Materials/tools</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Classroom libraries are organized by level (about half) and interest/genre. Books are available in students' first language, if possible.</li> <li>Students have individual book bags with "just right" books for independent reading.</li> <li>Students have reading folders with response journals, reading logs, and reading assessment notebooks.</li> <li>Students know what the goals are that they are working toward.</li> </ul>
<b>Assessment</b>	<p>Both formal and ongoing informal assessments are used to inform instruction and monitor student progress and are gathered into a Body of Evidence for each student. Information is collected on the student's performance in both L1 and L2, if possible.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Informal assessments might include conference notes in reading assessment notebooks; Benchmark Bookroom running records, checklists, and comprehension tests; DRA2/EDL2 continuums with leveled texts; and Curriculum-Based Measures (CBMs), such as DIBELS or teacher-developed rubrics and assessments.</li> <li>Formal assessments include DRA/EDL2 and DPS benchmark reading assessments.</li> </ul>

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## Look fors in K-5 writing instruction

LOOK FOR	DESCRIPTION
<b>Program and lesson components</b>	<p><b>Whole group</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher demonstrates strategy or skill focus for lesson using his or her own writing and/or mentor texts.</li> <li>Anchor charts with visuals are created with students to use as resources during independent work.</li> <li>Students engage in accountable talk during lesson through Think/Pair/Share, Turn and Talk, and other cooperative learning activities.</li> <li>Preview/Review and other sheltering strategies are used to ensure comprehensible input for ELLs.</li> <li>Read-alouds happen daily for all students; in primary grades, shared reading happens daily as well.</li> <li>Materials used include DPS Instructional Planning Guides, Lucy Calkins' units of study, Ralph Fletcher's <i>Teaching the Qualities of Writing</i>, mentor or touchstone texts, student and teacher writing, and grade-level genre studies.</li> </ul> <p><b>Independent and buddy work</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students independently engage in the writing process or confer with writing partners or teacher.</li> <li>Students may also read as they explore a particular genre as part of the inquiry process during the beginning of a genre study.</li> <li>Teacher confers with individual students as a "fellow writer," asking questions to help them think through how to improve their writing.</li> </ul> <p><b>Small group</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher may meet with small groups of students with similar needs to provide further assistance.</li> </ul>
<b>Classroom environment</b>	<p><b>Arrangement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The room is organized for whole- and small-group instruction and independent/buddy work.</li> <li>Materials are clearly labeled, readily accessible to students, and arranged in an inviting way.</li> </ul> <p><b>Displays</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Anchor charts reflect current instructional areas of focus, procedures, and expectations.</li> <li>Examples of current student work are displayed on walls.</li> <li>Word wall is being developed with students throughout the year.</li> <li>Rubrics, attribute charts, and other learning posters, created with students, provide clear expectations for student work and include visuals to support ELLs and emergent writers.</li> </ul> <p><b>Materials/tools</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Writing folders include works in progress, editing checklists, and student reflection sheets.</li> <li>Students use writing notebooks in grades 2 and higher to capture stories and entries for writing ideas.</li> <li>A variety of writing and revision tools are available, including different kinds of paper, markers, pens and pencils, alphabet charts, editing checklists, word walls or individual spelling dictionaries, tape, scissors, sticky notes, staplers, and word processors.</li> </ul>
<b>Assessment</b>	<p>Both formal and ongoing informal assessments are used to inform instruction and monitor student progress and are gathered into a Body of Evidence for each student. Information is collected on the student's performance in both L1 and L2, if possible.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Informal assessments might include conference notes, use of teacher-developed rubrics to measure progress toward SMART goals, and teacher/student-developed rubrics for self-evaluation.</li> <li>Formal assessments include DPS benchmark writing, and pre-, mid-, and post-prompted writing samples.</li> </ul>

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## Opening doors to success: Making a case for effective leadership

*Continued from p. 1*

practices that contribute to successful schools. EPIC has awarded more than \$7.4 million to high-needs urban schools that have demonstrated success.

### MAKING PRACTICES VISIBLE

The schools that receive incentive funds agree to partner with EPIC to document the practices of their effective leaders and teachers.

The EPIC staff asks participating schools to reflect on what aspects of their leadership and improvement strategies they believe contributed to student achievement gains and to create a detailed “practice portfolio.” While learning the school’s story, EPIC creates a case study illustrating in detail the practices that were key to raising and maintaining student expectations and high achievement. Videographers document meetings,

interviews, classes, and events. EPIC staff collect related artifacts – meeting notes, protocols, data-collection forms, lesson ideas. The materials are distilled into images of what best practices look like in real schools. MetLife Foundation provides support for production of the case studies, to integrate their use into New Leaders and EPIC grant partners professional development,

and to explore dissemination beyond the existing network.

John Lent, executive director of the EPIC Knowledge System, said that the principals who participate in the project complete an intensive reflective process as part of the documentation

effort. “The EPIC protocols are aimed at getting teachers and principals to get really specific about what improves their schools.” He mentioned that the principals found their learning as part of this process very powerful, and that EPIC has continued to refine the tools and protocols for principal’s reflection on practice.

In Roti’s case, several videos and artifacts document the process he and the teachers used to facilitate data-driven improvement that trans-

formed the culture of the school. To see Roti take a seat with a group of students and ask probing questions, or watch him examine a poster-sized rubric with a young girl as she describes where she struggles is a powerful learning opportunity. Sitting in on team meetings as Roti and several teachers confer over data gives great insight into the elements of effective collaboration.

Teachers and principals across the country agree that collaboration has a direct effect on student success. Two-thirds of teachers and three-quarters of principals surveyed agree that greater collaboration among teachers and school leaders would have a major impact on improving student achievement, according to the *2009 MetLife Survey of the American Teacher* (MetLife, 2009). Teachers (80%) and principals (89%) also believe a school culture where students feel responsible and accountable for their own education would have a major impact on improving student achievement. The faculty and students have documented that collaboration is a key to their success at Beach Court.

### DOCUMENTING DECISION MAKING

An urgent priority for Roti when he arrived at Beach Court was facilitating the implementation of a new, district-mandated literacy program to address the district’s lagging academic performance. Roti made a series of leadership decisions to effectively implement the program.

*Continued on p. 7*

#### NSDC’S BELIEF

Schools’ most complex problems are best solved by educators collaborating and learning together.

### New Leaders for New Schools

The mission of New Leaders for New Schools is to ensure high academic achievement for every student by attracting and preparing outstanding leaders and supporting the performance of the urban public schools they lead at scale. The organization recruits, trains, and supports school leaders for urban public schools. In 2001, New Leaders trained 13 principals in three cities; after nine years, the program has trained and supported more than 640 principals in 12 urban centers. Learn more at [www.nlins.org](http://www.nlins.org).

## FROM KNOWLEDGE TO APPLICATION

Creating the Knowledge System is just the first step in EPIC's effort to strengthen leadership development. An emerging professional learning model integrates the online materials into carefully crafted learning experiences where leaders gather to use the example of others to consider their own goals and practices and to implement and adapt strategies for their contexts.

A recent research brief, supported by MetLife Foundation, outlines the learning model's components and discusses its alignment with the research base and NSDC's standards. The framework for the learning model includes these key components:

- *Exposure:* Participants gain exposure to more than 100 practices in a wide range of schools.
- *Examination:* Participants analyze school leadership practices to identify what makes them effective and the leadership actions that impact their effectiveness.
- *Reflection:* Participants consider how cases apply to their own schools and approaches.
- *Planning for application:* Participants make plans to change their practices and engage with their faculty.
- *Peer learning:* Participants discuss what's working and not working with their peers.
- *Inquiry-oriented, Socratic approach:* Facilitators guide participants through learning by providing a forum for exploring their own actions and approaches.

(New Leaders for New Schools, 2010)

*Continued from p. 6*

For example, he established a vertical leadership team with specials teachers and teachers from grades K-5. Roti charged the team with collectively examining student data in order to set schoolwide instructional goals. Previously, teachers had worked in isolation and there was no alignment across grade levels. Grade-level teams also met on a weekly basis to learn about the new literacy program.

Roti immerses himself in data as well, both formal and informal, including walkthroughs. "On those walkthroughs, I always have a focus so that my teachers knew exactly what my expectations were when I was conducting those walkthroughs, so they could rise to the challenge," said Roti. As part of his walkthroughs, Roti observes lessons, sits and talks with students, and "reads the walls," examining the room for evidence of student engagement and learning. (The tools on pp. 4-5 are artifacts from the Beach Court case study. Each case study typically includes several artifacts.)

The leaders featured in the video cases don't hesitate to share their mistakes along with their successful strategies. Each case study includes a section with reflections from the principal on what worked and what didn't work. At Beach Court, Roti describes a couple of his missteps and what he learned from them. For example,

Roti acknowledges that in his first year, he didn't allow enough time for reflection and discussion. With the pressure to implement the new literacy program right away, staff meetings were spent on learning new content and an emphasis on doing, and teachers didn't have enough time to think. Roti realized teachers would need team time to reflect if they hoped strengthen their practice.

Roti found that as the learning and work of the teams evolved, he has been able to step back to promote the teachers' ownership of the work. "It's been really exciting to see that evolution take place," Roti said. "It's hearing those really deep conversations about instructional practices based on the data and how they're going to implement those in the classroom setting."

For now, the case studies, videos, and other artifacts are available online through the EPIC Knowledge System only to EPIC grantees, their districts and the New Leaders for New Schools community, though EPIC partners are seeking ways to disseminate this information more broadly. Beyond the individual cases, EPIC is pioneering work exploring the use of multimedia documentation as a powerful resource for professional development. EPIC has made the complete Beach Court case study available to NSDC members online at <http://epic.nlns.org/Preview/?id=13>. ■

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Shirley Hord

**BUSINESS OFFICE**

504 S. Locust St.

Oxford OH 45056

513-523-6029

800-727-7288

Fax: 513-523-0638

NSDCoffice@nsdc.org

www.nsdc.org

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# **More from the MetLife Surveys**

## **Percent of teachers and principals who rated these factors as having a “major impact” on improving student achievement.**

	Teachers	Principals
Providing all students with core reading, writing and math skills.	90%	92%
Setting high expectations for all students.	86%	89%
A school culture where students feel responsible and accountable for their own education.	80%	89%
Connecting classroom instruction to the real world.	80%	80%
Addressing the individual needs of diverse students.	77%	86%

## **Percent of teachers and principals who said these factors are “very important” for improving student achievement.**

	Teachers	Principals
Having adequate public funding and support for education.	92%	96%
Strengthening ties among schools and parents.	88%	89%
Keeping pace with technology and related social changes.	78%	81%
Raising the awareness of all students of what is needed to succeed in higher education.	77%	80%
Addressing the needs of students who are English language learners (ELL) .	74%	79%
Preparing students for competition and collaboration in a global economy.	71%	75%
Having opportunities for students for learning beyond the classroom and school building.	67%	69%

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