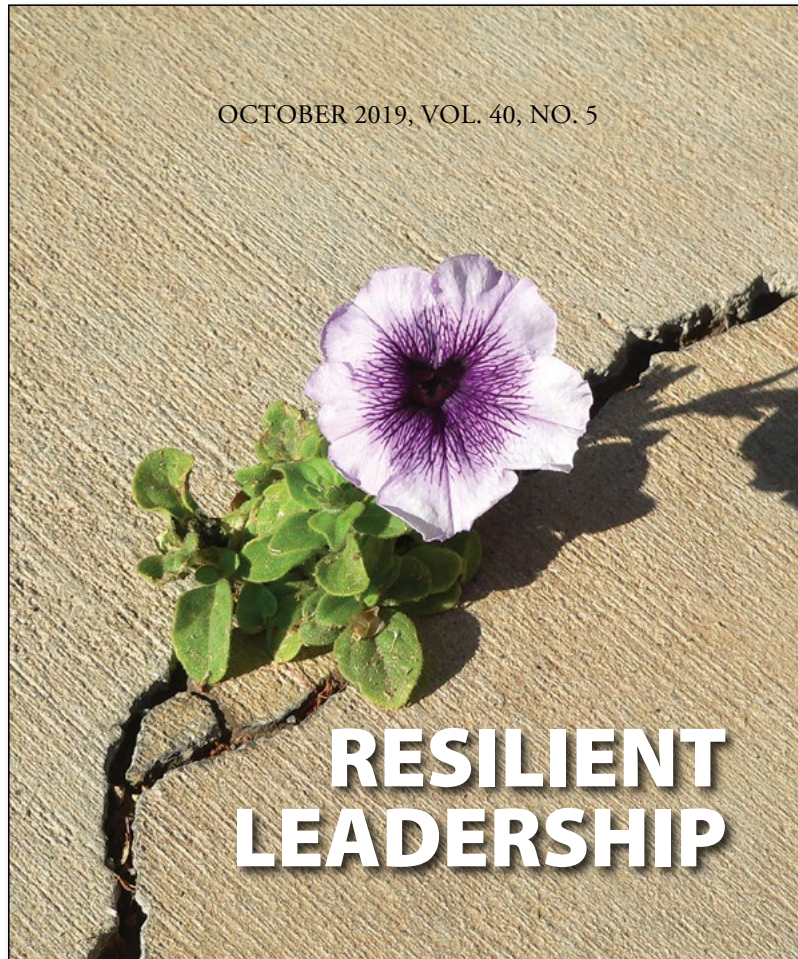


# THE LEARNING PROFESSIONAL

SUPPLEMENTAL GUIDE FOR DISTRICT TEAMS



**T**hank you for being a district member with Learning Forward. To help you spread the learning and engagement with your colleagues, we have designed this supplemental guide exclusively for district members.

This guide will help you take your teams through a deep dive into the latest issue of *The Learning Professional*, which focuses on resilient leadership. By reading the issue and using this guide, teams will:

- Consider the impact of stress on leaders and strategies for managing it;

- Tackle instructional mismatch by building leadership content knowledge; and
- Examine three anchors for resilience and how to strengthen them in your district.

We invite you to share this guide with building leaders and members of your learning teams. Be sure to give us feedback about whether you found this useful, and if you post on social media, tag us [#LearnFwdTLP](#) [@LearningForward](#) so we can share your good work!

# GET STARTED

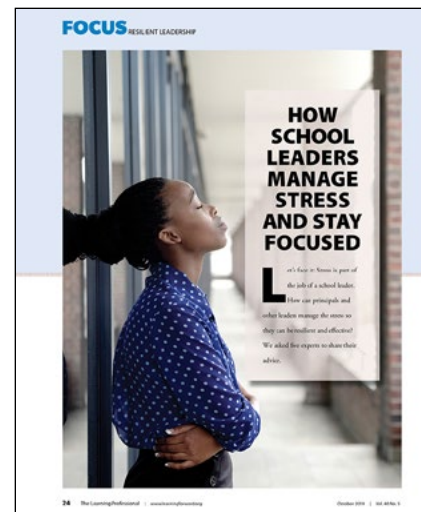
## How to manage stress when you can't eliminate it

**S**tress is a part of life for everyone, but it can be particularly acute for educators. All of society's and students' challenges manifest in schools, whether in the form of traumatized students or accountability and financing pressures. That's why an indispensable part of the job for education leaders is resilience — the ability to bounce back from setbacks and thrive even through challenges.

Contrary to popular belief, resilience isn't a personality trait. It's a state that happens as a result of supportive conditions, relationships, and mindsets. By building and supporting leaders' resilience, school systems increase the ability of adults and students alike to succeed. You can start by conducting brief but ongoing discussions about stress reduction and self-care.

### ACTIONS

1. Begin the meeting or gathering with a brief centering activity. For example:
  - a. Ring a chime and ask participants to listen to the full length of the chime, with eyes closed, and raise their hands when they no longer hear it.
  - b. Download a brief mindfulness activity from a smartphone app or website.
  - c. Lead the group through taking five deep breaths.
2. Ask participants to journal for five minutes about their current job-related stresses.
3. Give everyone time to read the article [“How school leaders manage stress and stay focused.”](#)
4. Hand out a stack of sticky notes to participants' table(s). Ask participants to write one to three stress management strategies that resonated with them from the article or that the article inspired in them.
5. Hang four large sheets of paper on the wall and label them **Mindsets**, **Social Strategies**, **Organizational Strategies**, and **Other**. Ask participants to post their sticky notes on the sheets based on which category they think it falls into. After all notes have been posted, give participants a few minutes to read the responses.
6. Facilitate a group discussion about organizational strategies that can help everyone reduce stress, beginning with those listed on the sticky notes.
7. As a group, plan for how you will hold yourselves accountable for prioritizing self-care and stress management, as individuals and as an organization. For example, make a plan to dedicate the first five minutes of each team meeting to a mindfulness exercise, add a question about stress management to the protocol for supervisor-supervisee meetings, or consider programs and policies the district could offer to help with stress management.
8. Give participants five minutes to journal about one or more strategies they plan to try for reducing stress.



# NEXT STEPS

## Tackle instructional mismatch

A school leader's primary responsibility is to be an instructional leader, but most principals find themselves supervising educators who work in grade levels or content areas they didn't teach themselves. No matter how strong their knowledge of crossover practices, principals benefit from knowing something about each of the content areas they supervise. In their article [“Tackling instructional mismatch,”](#) Sarah Quebec Fuentes and Jo Beth Jimerson describe why this is important and how leaders can build their leadership content knowledge by seeking intentional learning opportunities in areas of mismatch.

### ACTIONS

1. Gather school principals (and assistant principals, if desired) from across your district. Ask each of them to create a name tag that includes the grades and subjects they taught before becoming principals.
2. Ask participants to read [“Tackling instructional mismatch.”](#)
3. Hand out copies of the note-taking tool on the next page and ask participants to answer the first four questions.
4. Ask participants to stand up and, consulting the name tags, find a partner whose content background is different from their own and, preferably, matches the area they want to learn more about. (They will choose another partner later, so don't worry if only one partner gets their desired area met in this round.)
5. In pairs, participants will describe their major content challenge(s) with their partners. Next, each partner will share suggestions of resources and professional learning opportunities from their own area of expertise that could help the other partner develop knowledge. (You can use the table of organizations and journals in the article for inspiration.)
6. Ask participants to stand and find a new partner. Partners will again share their challenges and suggested resources.
7. Ask participants to return to their original seats and answer questions five through eight on the worksheet on the next page.
8. Facilitate a wrap-up discussion about question eight on the worksheet: To whom will you be accountable for following up and building your content knowledge? You may wish to create a group or district process or encourage principals to create their own individual plans.



### How will you tackle instructional mismatch?

1. What subject(s) have you taught?
2. In what grade levels?
3. In which subjects do you feel most comfortable as an instructional leader?
4. In which subjects do you feel most uncomfortable as an instructional leader?
5. Based on your conversations and reflection today, in what content area (and/or grade level) will you commit to building your instructional knowledge?
6. Over what period of time will you commit to building that knowledge? (One month, three months, six months, 12 months.)
7. What steps will you take to build your knowledge? (Examples might include subscribing to a journal recommended by your partner or reaching out to your school or district coach who works in that area.)
8. To whom will you be accountable for building this knowledge? (You might choose to make a commitment with your conversation partner, a supervisor, or the organizer of this event. Alternatively, you might work with colleagues to create a school- or districtwide structure.)

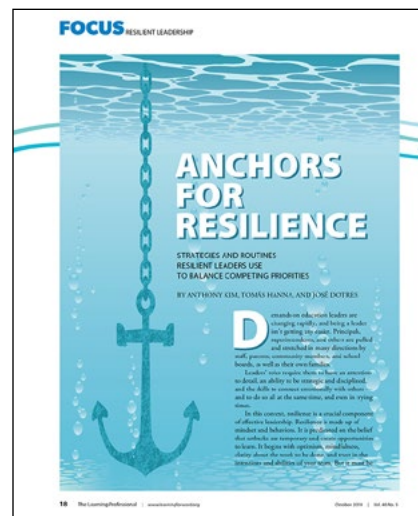
## Build resilient leadership

**E**ducation leaders need resilience more than ever, as Anthony Kim, Tomás Hanna, and José Dotres point out in [“Anchors for resilience.”](#) As leaders themselves, the authors examined research on the keys to resilience, looking to many fields, including psychology, business, and the military, as well as education. They identified three anchors for resilient leadership and resilient organizations:

- Building psychological safety.
- Maintaining a learning organization.
- Applying individual discipline.

### ACTIONS

1. Ask participants to read the article, focusing on the descriptions of the three anchors for resilience.
2. Using the table on the next page, write the definitions of the three anchors at the top of three large sheets of paper and post them.
3. Set expectations and guidelines for discussion (e.g. confidentiality, assuming positive intent).
4. In small groups or as a whole group, invite participants to share which anchor(s) resonated most with them and why.
5. Give participants 10 minutes to complete the next page. They should start by writing down their ratings about how well the school or district is doing with each anchor, then write specific examples of what the school or district is doing well and where they are experiencing challenges. (Be sure to let them know these sheets will not be collected.)
6. Facilitate a discussion about strengths: What are our strengths? What are the benefits to educators and students? How can we build on these strengths? Encourage participants to be as specific as possible. Allow enough time in this conversation to establish a trusting and productive environment, and facilitate any conflicts that may arise. This is important for all of this work, but fundamental for the next steps in the conversation.
7. Next, facilitate a discussion about specific challenges and how to address them.
8. As a group, or in smaller groups by school level or role, determine which of the three anchors will be your priority in the short-term. What are two steps you will take to build or maintain that anchor? Make a plan to check in about progress on these steps in the next one to three months.





Note-taking tool				
Anchor for resilience	What is it?	How well does our district/school foster it? 1 = Not at all well 2 = Somewhat well 3 = Very well	What examples of strength can we build on?	What are our specific challenges?
PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY	The belief that you won't be punished when you make a mistake. Allows for moderate risk-taking, creativity, innovation.	1    2    3		
LEARNING ORGANIZATION	Systems that are in a continuous state of learning and improving through new processes, reflection, and refinement. Allows for tackling new challenges and developing deep expertise.	1    2    3		
INDIVIDUAL DISCIPLINE	The act of finding consistent time to work on what you are committed to. Allows for development of positive habits, decentralized leadership, and efficiency.	1    2    3		