



The Association of Washington School Principals' School Leader Paradigm

August 28, 2025 AI Summary

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Transforming School Leadership: The AWSP School Leader Paradigm

In a time of growing urgency around educational equity and leadership sustainability, the **Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP)** has introduced a groundbreaking framework: the **School Leader Paradigm**. This model, co-developed with principal associations across 12 states, aims to redefine how school leadership is understood, supported, and sustained.

Hosted by the **League of Education Voters**, the August 28 webinar featured a dynamic panel: **Scott Seaman**, Executive Director of AWSP; **Clint Williams**, Principal of Skyridge Middle School in Camas; and **Justin Hendrickson**, Principal Coach in Seattle Public Schools. Together, they unpacked the paradigm's origins, structure, and transformative potential.

The Problem: Leadership Churn and Systemic Injustice

Arik Korman, CEO of the League of Education Voters and a parent of a high school student accessing special education services, opened the webinar with a powerful call for **radical change**. He emphasized that schools are among the systems perpetuating racial and disability injustice, and that every child deserves a public education that honors their humanity.

Scott Seaman described a **leadership crisis**: principals are not being let go for failing to raise test scores, but for issues like poor communication, lack of emotional regulation, and broken relationships. These are **dispositional challenges**, not technical ones—and existing evaluation frameworks don't address them.

The Solution: A Paradigm for “Becoming While Doing”

The **School Leader Paradigm** is built around the idea that leaders are constantly evolving—“**becoming while doing.**” It recognizes that leadership is not static, and that effective leaders must navigate complex, shifting contexts daily.

The paradigm is structured around three **core domains**:

- **Culture:** Building trust, relationships, and a positive climate.
- **Systems:** Designing and maintaining operational structures.
- **Learning:** Leading instructional improvement and equity-focused academic outcomes.

These domains are supported by a **Leadership Continuum** that spans four phases:

1. **Aspiring** – Pre-service preparation, including internships.
2. **Launching** – Support for new leaders in their first two years.
3. **Building** – Years 2–5, where most leaders face burnout.
4. **Mastering** – Sustained leadership that enables systems-level change.

A Universal Language for All Leaders

What makes the paradigm revolutionary is its **universality**. It’s not just for principals—it’s for **everyone in the school ecosystem**, from superintendents to bus drivers. As Seaman explained, “Our dispositions impact students whether we’re driving a bus or leading a district.”

In Camas, the paradigm was renamed the **Educational Leader Paradigm** to reflect this inclusivity. Clint Williams shared how his leadership team used the framework to identify their shared strength in the culture domain—and then intentionally developed capacity in systems and learning.

Seattle Public Schools embedded the paradigm into professional development for principals, assistant principals, and interns. Hendrickson emphasized how it created a **common language** across 106 schools, enabling leaders to reflect, collaborate, and grow.

Context Matters: Matching Leaders to Schools

A key insight from the webinar was the importance of **context**. Leaders must understand both their own lived experiences and the unique dynamics of the schools they serve. The paradigm encourages districts to consider:

- The school's history of leadership turnover.
- The community's needs and demographics.
- The leader's strengths and growth areas.

Hendrickson described how Seattle used the paradigm to improve **matchmaking**—placing leaders in schools where their strengths aligned with the school's needs. This approach is already showing promise in reducing churn and increasing longevity.

Dispositions and Intelligence: The Inner Work of Leadership

The paradigm also introduces a framework for assessing a leader's **personal, social, and systems intelligence**. While formal tools are still evolving, districts are encouraged to use existing assessments like StrengthsFinder or Myers-Briggs to complement the paradigm.

Seaman shared a powerful story from a recent district training, where staff identified their superintendent as a systems leader—only for others to challenge that, saying he was actually a culture leader. This sparked a rich conversation about **how leadership is perceived and enacted**, and how leaders often operate outside their comfort zones.

Implementation: Slow, Intentional, and System-Wide

AWSP offers an **eight-part training series** aligned with the school calendar. The rollout is designed to be gradual and immersive, so that staff begin using the language organically. Seaman emphasized that the paradigm must be adopted **system-wide**, not just by a select few.

Districts are encouraged to start with **context**, then move into domain strengths and dispositions. This approach ensures that leadership development is **equitable, consistent, and sustainable**.

Scaling the Paradigm: Lessons from Other States

Pennsylvania, a latecomer to the School Leader Collaborative, has now **embedded the paradigm into its credentialing process** for all new principals—backed by state funding.

Alaska is also adopting the model in its largest districts. Washington, Seaman noted, must catch up.

His “dream world” includes:

- Embedding the paradigm in **state statute**.
 - Funding cohort-based training for new leaders.
 - Integrating the model into **principal prep programs**.
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Final Reflections: A Call to Action

The webinar closed with reflections from Williams and Hendrickson, who praised the paradigm for its clarity, adaptability, and humanity. Hendrickson noted that this was the **first time in his career** that Seattle had a common scope and sequence for leadership development.

The call to action is clear: **codify, fund, and scale** the School Leader Paradigm across Washington state. Doing so will not only reduce leadership churn—it will build schools where every student feels safe, supported, and empowered to thrive.

Learn More and Get Involved

To explore the paradigm and access resources:

- Visit awsp.org

www.educationvoters.org