

The DNA Blueprint for Educational Leaders



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The DNA Blueprint For Educational Leaders

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Foreword

Few leaders embody vision, integrity, and resilience the way Dr. Robert L. Kirton does. I have had the privilege of mentoring and collaborating with him for many years, watching him grow into one of the most innovative and impactful voices in education today. His commitment to strengthening school climate, elevating student achievement, and empowering educators is both inspiring and transformational.

The DNA Blueprint for Educational Leaders reflects Dr. Kirton's decades of experience and his passion for developing strong, self-aware leaders. More than a guide, it offers a practical and dynamic framework to help educators harness their strengths, navigate complex challenges, and lead with confidence. By integrating behavioral leadership insights, he provides tools that bring clarity and structure to the daily demands of school leadership.

Dr. Kirton's background, which spans public education, military service, and community engagement, uniquely equips him to offer solutions that are both research-driven and deeply practical. He has consistently blended vision with action, improving achievement, behavior, and climate across the schools and communities he has served.

It is an honor to write this foreword for a book that will inform, equip, and inspire leaders at every level. Dr. Kirton reminds us that effective leadership begins with knowing yourself and earning trust. This blueprint will serve as a powerful guide for building stronger schools and communities.

Colonel Lee Ellis | U. S. Air Force, Retired

Introduction

Educational leadership today is demanding, visible, and unforgiving. Leaders are expected to simultaneously improve outcomes, respond to constant change, and build trust. Yet too often, they are asked to lead without a clear structure for turning insight into action. *The DNA Blueprint for Educational Leaders* was written to close that gap.

This book offers a practical way forward. Built on the **Data–Needs–Action** framework, the DNA Blueprint helps leaders make disciplined decisions, focus their energy, and translate purpose into measurable results. It is grounded in the real work of schools and districts, shaped by experience, and designed for leaders who must act, not just plan.

The contents in this book are presented in four distinct sections, each targeting a core domain of schoolwide leadership, and each building upon each other:

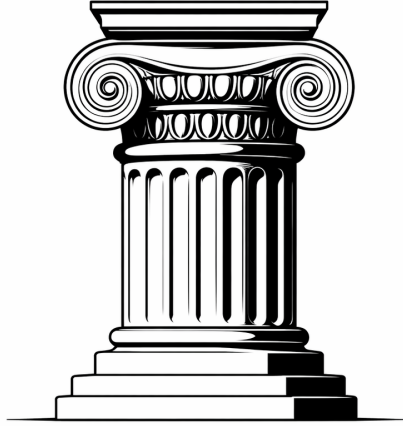
- **Foundational Leadership** – Aligns vision and systems to build trust and results.
- **Student Leadership** – Elevates student voice and outcomes.
- **Operational Leadership** – Builds systems that support students, staff, and families.
- **Sustainable Leadership** – Strengthens capacity, culture, and long-term success.

This is not a passive read. Throughout the chapters, you will encounter Leadership Reflections, Leadership in Action practical applications, Scaffolding Strategies, and key leadership questions intentionally embedded to prompt reflection and sharpen decision making.

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SECTION I



Foundational Leadership

This section lays the foundation for the DNA Blueprint. Chapters 1–3 establish the ground-level structure to align your identity with your leadership style and build systems that turn vision into action.

■ Foundational Leadership

Laying the Foundation for Transformational Change

In today's complex and rapidly shifting educational landscape, school leaders are being called to lead with more than titles or compliance. What makes the difference is clarity of purpose, personal integrity, and the courage to act with intention.

Foundational Leadership is anchored in who you are and how you lead, so that every decision, relationship, and system you influence is grounded in purpose, connected to people, and aligned for impact.

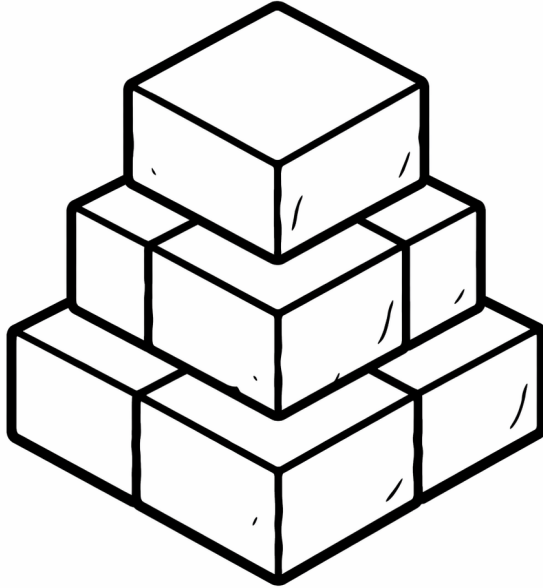
This opening section of *The DNA Blueprint for Educational Leaders* sets the tone for the journey ahead. Chapters 1 through 3 focus on foundational leadership skills that fuel meaningful, lasting change, starting with the leader behind the title. Whether you are leading a classroom, a school, or an entire district, the transformation begins with internal alignment.

Over the course of my own leadership path, from the classroom to the office, from a professor of educational leadership to founding DNA Educational Solutions, I have come to understand one core truth: sustainable change begins within.

My own leadership was sharpened by the guidance of trusted mentors in the military, in the corporate world and in academia whose service, discipline, and integrity shaped how I think about leadership. Their influence challenged me to lead by example and to connect with people. I learned to not just focus on results or systems, but to anchor every initiative in values that endure beyond the moment.

💬 *“You don't have to be in combat or a POW camp to face challenges. Leadership always brings pressure. And honor is always a choice.” – Col Lee Ellis, *Leading with Honor**

Chapter 1



Leadership Foundation

Chapter 1 establishes the foundation of your leadership journey by focusing on how self-awareness drives impact. It explores how behavior shapes trust, communication, and the systems that support transformational school

❖ Chapter 1: *Leadership Foundation*

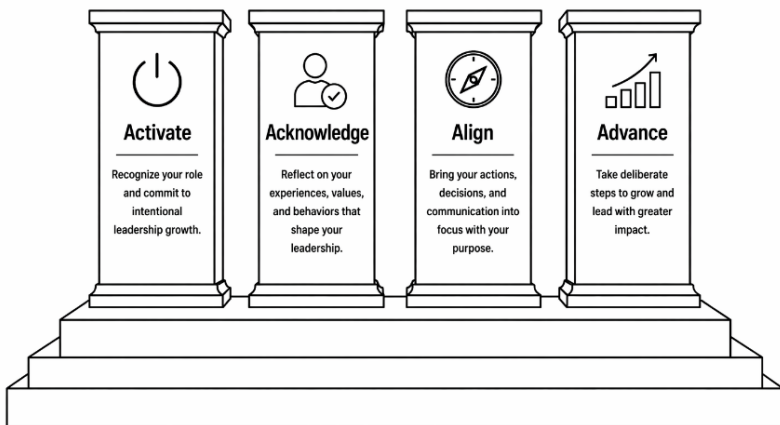
Core Leadership Practices for Transformational School Improvement

Transformation starts with leadership. Just like in modifying any physical structure, the foundation must be solid and steady to be able to support change. This chapter focuses on strengthening that foundation by developing the awareness, mindset, and habits that shape daily leadership.

A strong foundation is built with intention. It requires a clear sense of who you are, discipline in how you act, and consistency in how you engage others. When these are aligned, you build trust, create direction, and set the conditions for meaningful and lasting improvement.

This work connects to the DNA Framework of Data, Needs, and Action by beginning with the internal work of leadership. Leaders cannot respond to data, identify needs, or take effective action without first strengthening the thinking and behaviors that guide their decisions.

The progression of foundational leadership is captured through four key pillars: Activate, Acknowledge, Align, and Advance.



A black clipboard with a white circular hole at the top center. The text is white on the black background of the clipboard.

COACHES' CLIPBOARD

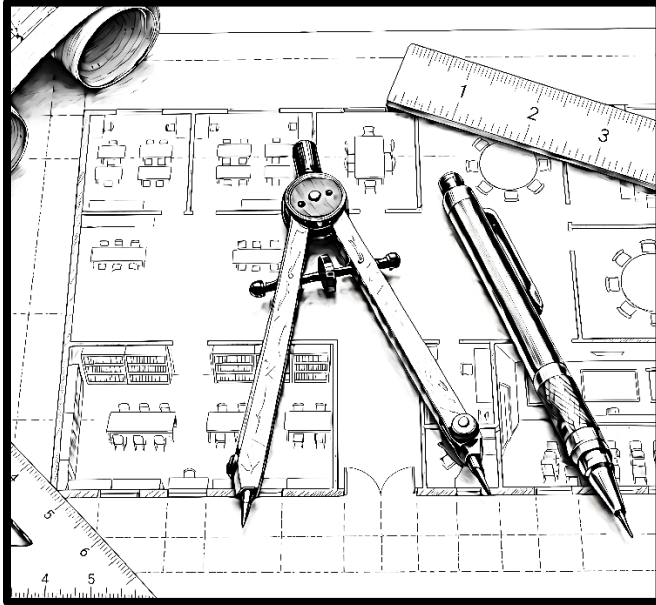
1. Lead with Awareness.

Great leadership begins with honest self-awareness. Understand your strengths, acknowledge your blind spots, and recognize how your behavior shapes the culture around you.

When leaders see clearly, they lead more intentionally.

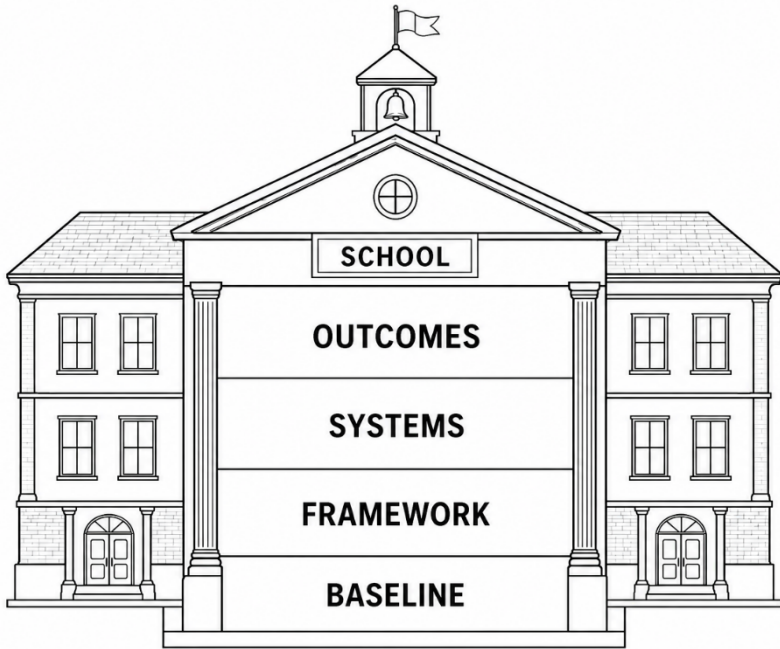
Strengthen Leadership.

Chapter 2



Professional Development

Chapter 2 guides leaders to align Data, Needs, and Action into results-driven systems. By building a strong foundation, aligning a clear framework, implementing effective systems, and inspecting for results, professional learning becomes a high-impact structure that drives student growth and success.

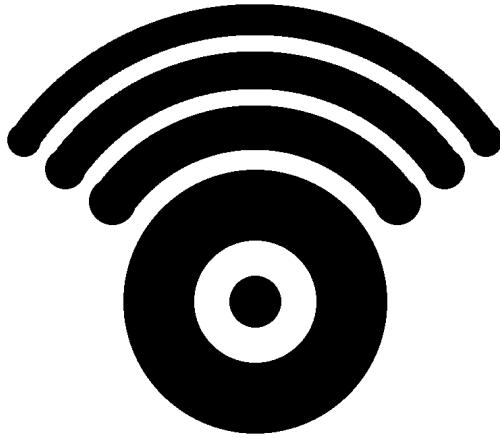


2.1 Baseline: *Establish Purpose and Direction*

Every strong effort begins with a clear baseline. Professional development must be grounded in an honest understanding of current reality, shaped by real evidence rather than assumptions. Too often, leaders begin with activities instead of data, selecting topics without fully understanding the needs of the school. This leads to scattered efforts that fail to address the real work and weaken confidence in the process.

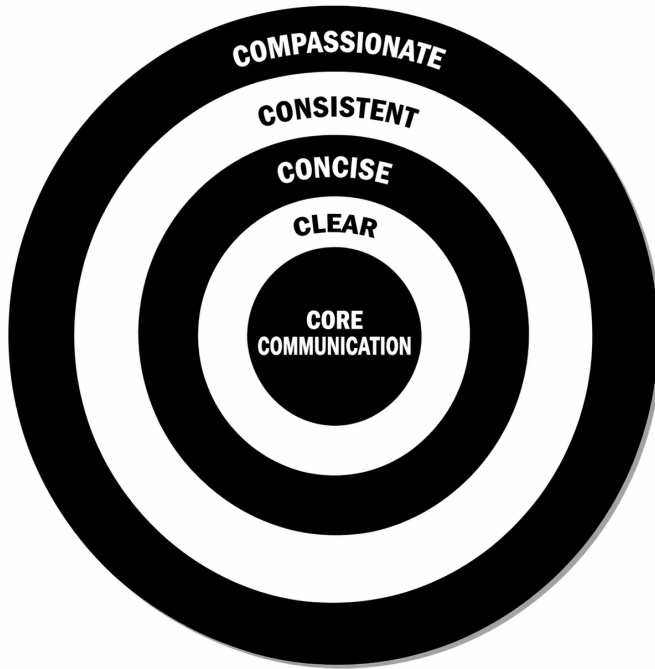
Effective leaders begin by establishing a baseline through careful review of data. They examine patterns in student learning,

Chapter 3



Core Communication

Chapter 3 reveals that Core Communication is the heartbeat of leadership. This chapter equips leaders to communicate clearly, concisely, and consistently with compassion—building trust, alignment, and connection through every



This chapter is your guide to making communication an intentional, structured, and strategic part of your leadership practice. Whether you are a superintendent leading a district, a principal guiding a school, or a teacher leader shaping a team, your words set the tone. Your clarity builds confidence. Your compassion builds community. Your consistency builds trust.

Core Insight:

Clear, concise, consistent, and compassionate communication is the foundation of trust, alignment, and collective action. When leaders communicate with focus and heart, they do not just manage, they inspire. They do not just direct, they connect.



Leadership Reflection

LEADERSHIP REFLECTION

Is my communication steady and predictable, and do I follow through on what I say?

Leadership in Action: *Reliable Communication Rhythm*

Consistent leadership communication builds trust by creating predictability in tone, timing, and follow-through. As a leadership practice, examine how and when key messages are shared with staff, families, and the broader community. Identify whether communication patterns are reliable or reactive, and where inconsistency may be creating confusion or uncertainty.

Work with your leadership team to define expectations for clear communication: establish regular update cycles, agree on standard formats for recurring messages, and clarify when major announcements will occur.

Most importantly, assess whether commitments communicated are consistently honored. This activity reinforces reliability, strengthens trust, and ensures your voice as a leader is steady, intentional, and credible

Scaffolding Strategies:

- Use shared folders for message templates and newsletter formats.
- Schedule regular times for updates and feedback loops.
- Create a visual dashboard of all communication channels and frequencies.

Key Questions:

- Where has inconsistency caused confusion or delays?
- How predictable and reliable is my current communication pattern?
- What routines can I implement to improve consistency?
- How can I model consistency for other leaders?

SECTION I REVIEW

Leadership begins within. The first three chapters form the base of your leadership pyramid, establishing the foundation on which everything else is built. In Chapter 1, you strengthen your leadership foundation through awareness, reflection, and intentional growth. In Chapter 2, you build capacity by designing systems that align Data, Needs, and Action to drive results. In Chapter 3, you connect people and purpose through clear, concise, consistent, and compassionate communication.

These chapters do not stand alone. They build on one another to create a strong and stable base for leadership. Your awareness shapes how you lead, your systems determine how work gets done, and your communication ensures alignment and trust across your team. When these elements are connected, leadership becomes focused, intentional, and effective.

This first layer of the pyramid prepares you to lead beyond yourself. It positions you to elevate student voice, strengthen achievement, improve behavior, and build a positive school climate.

Foundational Leadership is not just a starting point, it is the base you continue to build on, ensuring that every next step in your leadership journey is grounded, aligned, and built to last.



SECTION II



Student Leadership

In this section, Chapters 4-6 focuses on Student Leadership: seeing students as co-leaders in shaping school culture, learning, and driving growth through voice, agency, and authentic engagement.


Chapter 6: Student Support

This chapter completes the section by aligning leadership, instruction, and systems to ensure academic success for every student. It focuses on closing gaps, strengthening teaching, and building structures that provide consistent, equitable support.

How These Chapters Work Together

These chapters form an integrated system for Student Leadership that builds engagement, strengthens culture, and drives achievement. Together, they guide leaders to empower students, improve the learning environment, and school climate, and accelerate achievement.

| <u>Capability</u> | <u>Chapter</u> | <u>Outcomes</u> |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| Student Empowerment | 4: Student Voice | Authentic student engagement and partnership |
| School Climate | 5: Achievement, Behavior, and Climate | Systems that strengthen relationships and belonging |
| Student Achievement | 6: Student Support | Aligned leadership, instruction, and equity |

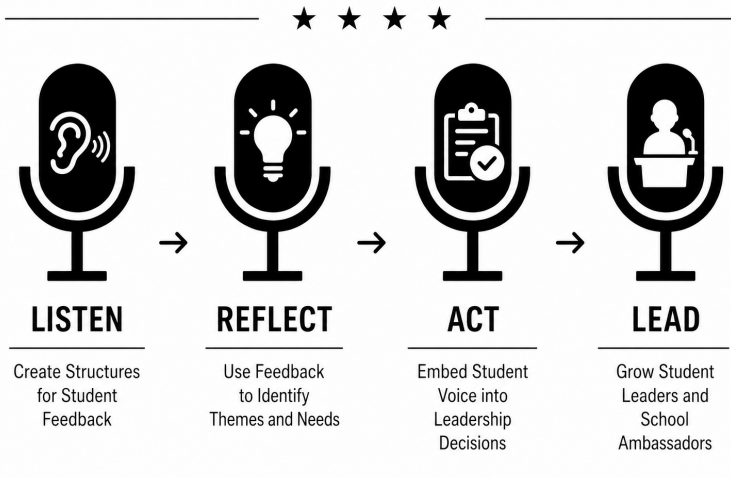
 ***“Student-Focused leadership creates environments where students are seen, supported, and challenged to grow.”*** - Irvin Lee, former student, *The Brotherhood*

Chapter 4



Student Voice

Chapter 4 equips leaders to move beyond surface-level surveys and build systems for listening to, reflecting on, and acting upon student feedback. It emphasizes leadership that values students as partners, not just participants.



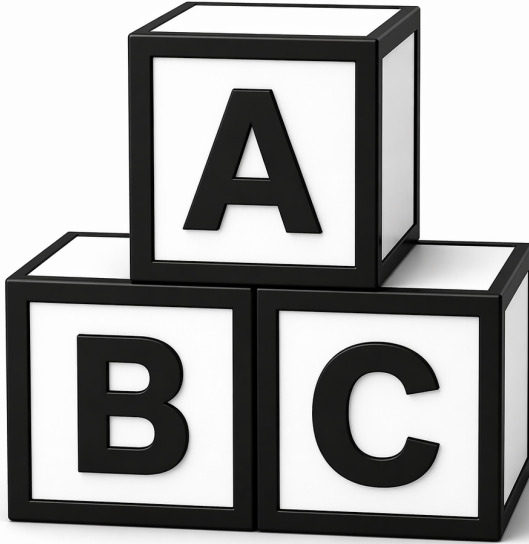
💬 *“When we shift our attention from perceived student deficits to the structures and practices that shape learning opportunities, we begin to see where meaningful change must occur.” — Gloria Ladson-Billings, FBA, American pedagogical theorist*



4.1 Listen – *Create Structures for Authentic Student Feedback*

Listening is foundational, but not all listening is created equal. In many schools, feedback loops with students are traditionally transactional, limited to once-a-year surveys or suggestion boxes. But *authentic listening* is intentional, relational, and ongoing. It creates space for students to share their lived experiences and

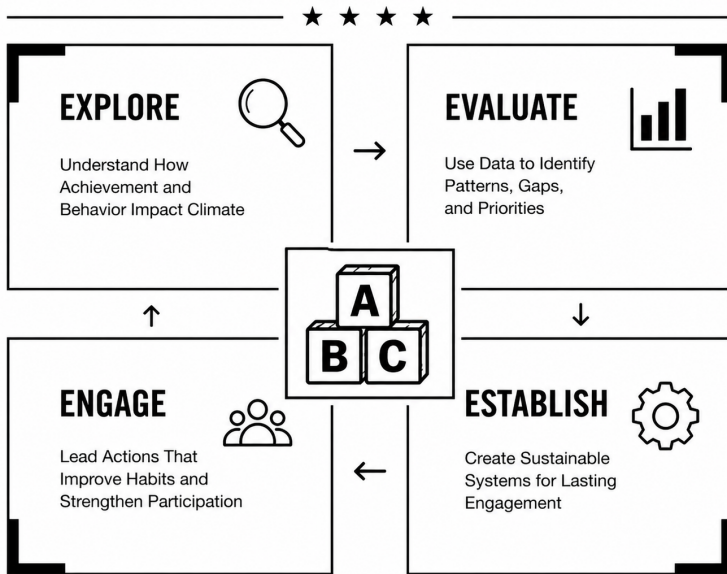
Chapter 5



Achievement, Behavior and Climate

Chapter 5 equips leaders to build integrated systems that address the root causes of absenteeism, behavior, and disengagement—turning data into action through strategic, student-centered practices that drive lasting change.

school from awareness to action and from action to lasting results.



5.1 Explore: *Understand How Achievement and Behavior Impact Climate*

Before we can change student outcomes, we must understand student experiences. Attendance and behavior issues are often not problems in themselves but signals of unmet needs. Chronic absenteeism may be an indication of mental health struggles, housing instability, or a lack of meaningful connections at school. Behavior concerns may be driven by trauma, frustration, or a disconnect from curriculum relevance.

Scaffolding Strategies

- Develop an ABC Data Tracker with indicators such as:
 - Percentage of students with at least ninety-five% attendance.
 - Average daily tardiness.
 - Percentage of students referred for behavior issues per week, and percentage of them who are repeat offenders
 - Student survey data on sense of belonging.
- Review data monthly with staff and students using visuals and color-coded trends.
- Create **grade-level profiles** that include ABC strengths and needs.
- Align academic intervention teams with ABC trends to offer tiered support systems.

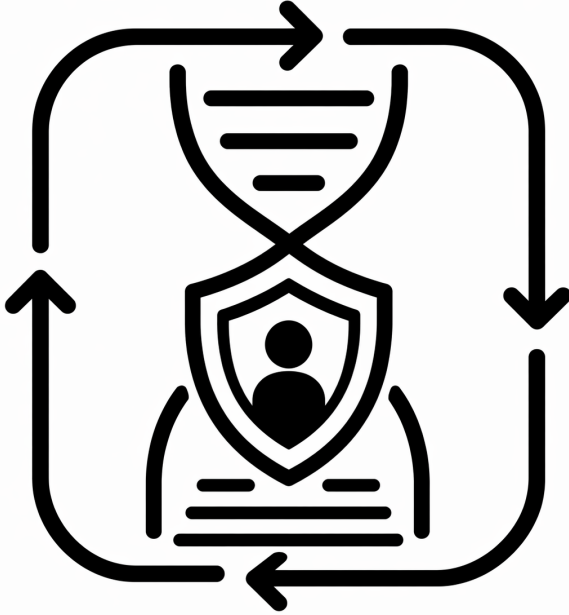
Key Questions:

- What patterns are repeatedly showing up in the data?
- Where are we seeing the greatest student growth gaps?
- How does our data align with classroom reality?
- What actions will have the greatest impact on outcomes?

5.3 Engage: *Lead Actions That Improve Habits and Strengthen Participation*

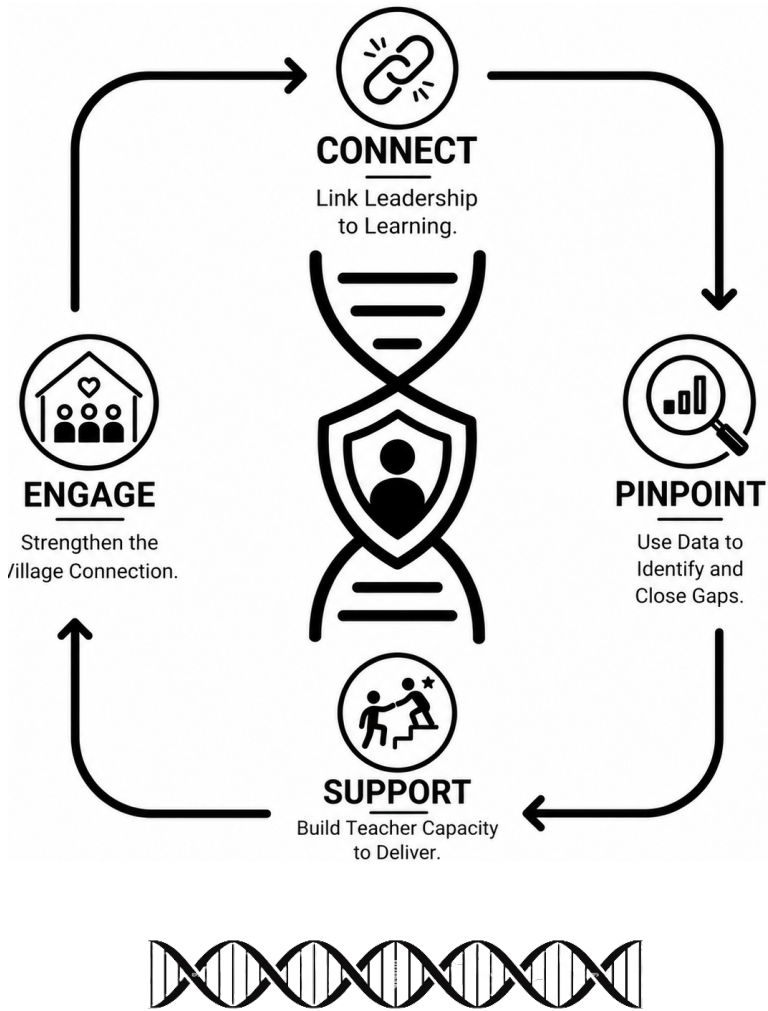
Traditionally, the perception of improving Achievement, Behavior, and Climate focused on “fixing” students. To be successful, however, the focus needs to be on **creating the conditions** where students feel motivated to be present and proud to engage. This section helps school leaders develop **strategic engagement practices** that connect to students’ lives, values, and goals.

Chapter 6



Student Support

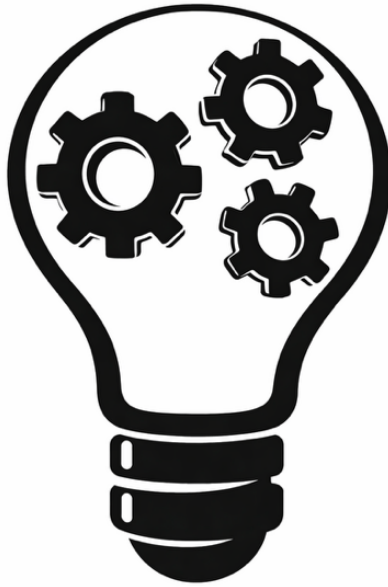
Chapter 6 helps leaders respond to student needs, strengthen instruction, and remove barriers to achievement by creating aligned systems that lead to equity, growth, and lasting student success.



6.1 Connect: *Link Leadership Behaviors to Academic Success*

Student learning never happens in isolation. It is shaped daily by the environment leaders intentionally create and consistently sustain. Every priority you set, every expectation you

SECTION III



Operational Leadership

This section guides you to think systemically, lead adaptively, and design equity-centered, future-ready schools. Together, Chapters 7–9 form the blueprint for building dynamic, high-impact learning communities.

Chapter-by-Chapter Foundations

Chapter 7: Technology Integration

Technology, when integrated thoughtfully, is a force multiplier. Yet many schools face challenges with outdated devices, uneven access, limited training, and a widening digital divide, even as technology resources remain underutilized or misaligned. This chapter guides leaders to bridge gaps, build capacity, and use technology as a lever for equity, innovation, and achievement.

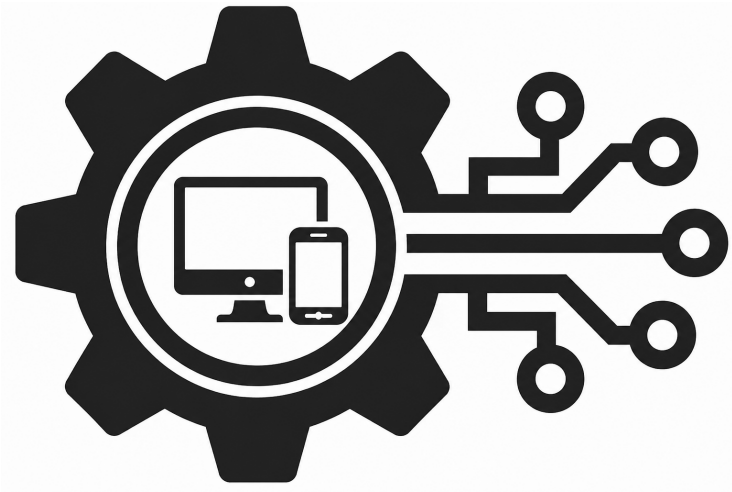
Chapter 8: The Learning Enterprise

A strong organization builds systems that learn, adjust, and improve over time. This chapter introduces The Learning Enterprise as a disciplined approach to continuous growth, where leaders diagnose current reality, navigate with clear priorities, activate consistent execution, and adapt based on evidence. This model helps leaders move from fragmented efforts to aligned systems that build capacity, strengthen practice, and sustain results.

Chapter 9: Safety By Design

Safety is a bold imperative that must be designed. This chapter reframes safety as a systems-level leadership responsibility, where prevention, preparation, and protection are embedded into daily practice. Leaders will learn to assess risks, build layered safety systems, and lead with clarity in moments that matter most. Safety is not just about response. It is about creating conditions where people can perform, grow, and thrive.

Chapter 7



Technology Integration

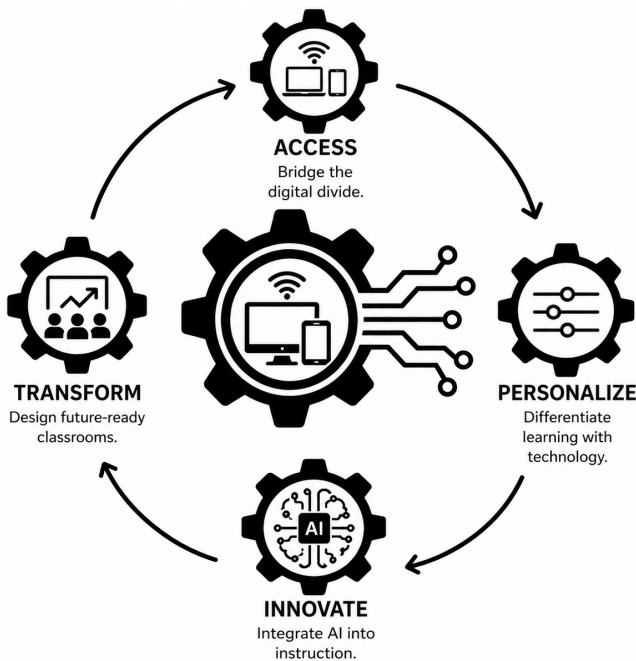
This chapter provides guidance for embedding technology into daily learning, closing digital divides, and designing future-ready classrooms where innovation thrives, access expands, and students are empowered to lead in a technological world.

❖ Chapter 7: *Technology Integration*

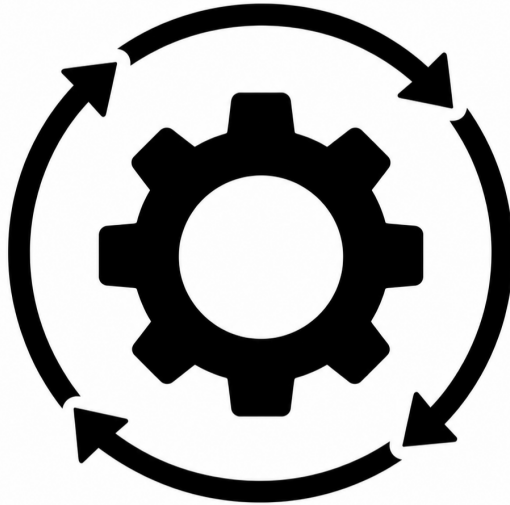
Building Digital Equity, Innovation, and Future-Ready Classrooms

Technology is no longer a luxury in education; it is a lifeline. The challenge for school leaders today is not putting devices in classrooms. It is essential to ensure equitable access, transformative learning experiences, and a clear, future-focused vision where technology deepens engagement, differentiates instruction, and prepares every learner for a rapidly evolving world.

This chapter equips leaders to **move beyond surface-level tech adoption** and into **systemic integration**. Technology should not be an isolated initiative. It must become an embedded, intentional part of the instructional culture that is used to eliminate barriers, inspire innovation, and build a school ecosystem that supports 21st-century learning.




Chapter 8



The Learning Enterprise

Chapter 8 introduces The Learning Enterprise as a practical system for continuous growth. It outlines how leaders Diagnose, Navigate, Activate, and Adapt to move from insight to action and from action to results. The focus is on building aligned systems that strengthen achievement, behavior, and climate

 *“Schools don’t improve because of new ideas. They improve because adults agree on how work gets done.” — Anthony Muhammad, Transforming School Culture*

Chapter 8 Summary

The Learning Enterprise defines how strong organizations sustain growth over time. It is not a standalone initiative or short-term strategy. It is a disciplined system that connects data, direction, execution, and reflection into a continuous cycle of improvement.

Leaders Diagnose to gain a clear understanding of current reality. They Navigate a path to establish focused priorities that align the work. They Activate consistent implementation that is supported by coaching and accountability. And they Adapt and continue to refine practice based on evidence and results.

This cycle builds clarity, alignment, and capacity across the organization. It reduces fragmentation and replaces isolated efforts with a unified approach to improvement. Over time, teams become more responsive, more focused, and more effective in meeting the needs of students.

Organizations that commit to this approach do not wait for change. They prepare for it, respond with purpose, and grow stronger through it.

DNA Leadership Insight

Great leaders do not manage programs; they design systems that last. Developing your school into a learning enterprise means aligning vision, voice, and value at every level. When students see the relevance of their learning, when staff feel supported to innovate, and when communities are engaged as partners, transformation becomes not just possible—but inevitable.

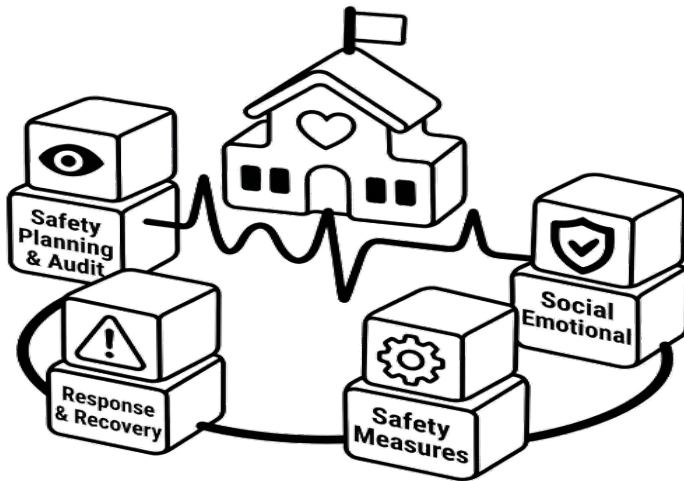
Chapter 9



Safety By Design

In a world of rising school threats, sustainable leaders don't react—they design. This chapter equips leaders to embed safety into systems, build trust, and lead confidently through crises to prevent, prepare, and protect.

If an incident does occur, Support is critical to properly respond to and recover from the crisis. Response and recovery require planning, practice, and compassion. School leaders must lead with clarity, calm, and confidence under pressure.



Centered on the school environment, these components work together as a continuous system to assess risks, build a supportive climate, implement protections, and ensure effective responses.



9.1 Plan: *Safety Planning & Audit*

Every strong safety system begins with honest awareness. Before leaders can strengthen safety, they must clearly understand the current reality of their school. Safety planning starts by asking thoughtful questions: Where are we strong?

Section IV



Sustainable Leadership

This final section, containing Chapters 10-12, guides leaders in building safe, well-resourced schools with systems that withstand challenges, ensuring the vision and mission stays clear.

■ Sustainable Leadership

Building Systems That Sustain Culture, Align Resources, and Deliver Results

Schools thrive when the systems that support culture, resources, and results are intentionally designed and consistently reinforced over time. Sustainable leadership is about building structures that hold steady, even as people, priorities, and circumstances change.

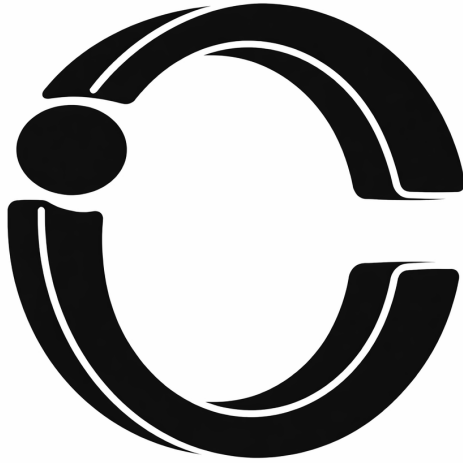
Sustainable leaders think beyond the immediate. They are not only solving today's challenges. They are building systems that will continue to serve students and staff long after their tenure. They consistently ask themselves, "What am I putting in place that will last, and who will be able to carry this work forward?"

This requires alignment. Culture, resource development, and results must work together within a clear and intentional framework. When these elements are disconnected, schools experience inconsistency, initiative fatigue, and limited impact. When they are aligned, schools gain stability, clarity, and the ability to improve over time.

This section, Chapters 10 through 12, equips leaders to build schools that are grounded, well-resourced, and focused on continuous improvement. It challenges leaders to move from short-term solutions to long-term systems that support growth, consistency, and accountability.

Sustainability is not something that happens over time. It is something leaders build on purpose. It requires clear vision, disciplined systems thinking, and the willingness to align decisions, resources, and actions to what matters most. At its core, sustainable leadership ensures that success is not dependent on a single leader but embedded in the way the organization operates every day.

Chapter 10



Culture and Climate

Chapter 10 equips leaders to systematize culture and climate by embedding core values, rituals, and expectations into daily operations, creating schools where safety, belonging, and shared purpose are built and sustained.

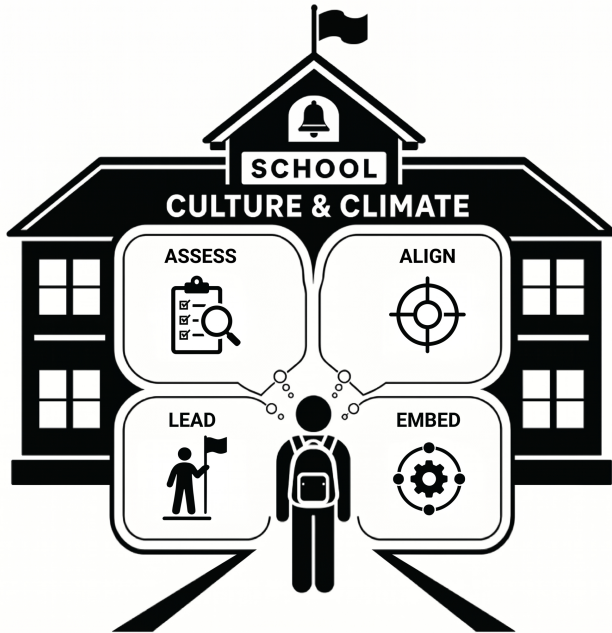
❖ Chapter 10: *Culture and Climate*

Core Leadership Practices for Building Belonging, Safety, and Growth

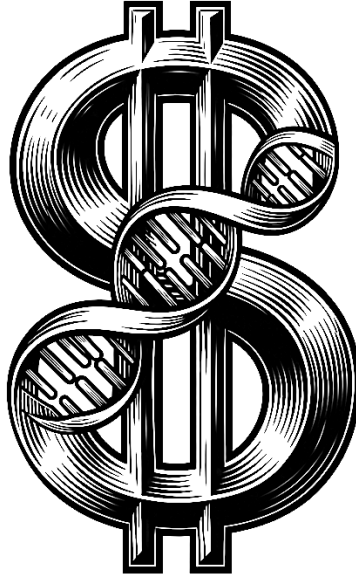
Culture is the invisible architecture of a school. It shapes how people feel, interact, and perform every day. It influences everything from hallway behavior to classroom engagement and staff morale. Culture is the shared understanding of what is normal, acceptable, and expected, whether it is written or not.

Climate, on the other hand, is the emotional temperature of the school in the moment. It tells us whether people feel welcomed, valued, and safe.

School leaders have the power to shape both culture and climate, and it requires daily intentional effort.



Chapter 11



Grant and Resource Development

Along with vision, innovation, and impact, sustainable leaders need the resources to align funding with mission. This chapter empowers leaders to secure support, build bold partnerships, and transform mission into momentum with lasting results.

❖ Chapter 11: *Grant and Resource Development*

A Sustainable Leadership Practice for Advancing Equity, Opportunity, and Innovation

In education, great ideas often exceed available resources. A compelling vision means little if there is no infrastructure to make it real. That is why resource development is a core leadership practice. It transforms possibility into action. Resourceful leaders do not just manage what they have; they expand what is available to meet student and school needs.

This chapter reframes resource development as a leadership strategy. Whether you are writing a grant, forming a partnership, or reallocating your school budget, every resource should be aligned to your mission and designed for sustainable impact. The most effective leaders design ecosystems of support that fuel innovation, equity, and long-term success.



Chapter 12

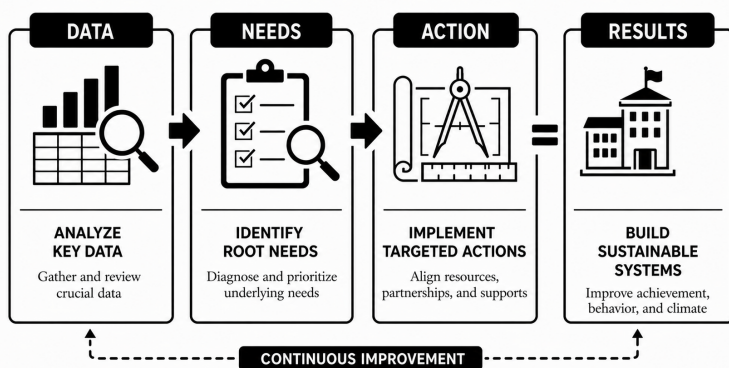


The DNA Framework

This final chapter integrates the DNA Blueprint into a powerful, customizable framework.

By aligning Data, Needs, and Action, you can build sustainable systems that foster inclusion, belonging, and lasting schoolwide improvement. This is your blueprint in motion.

The DNA Framework



The DNA Framework brings the Blueprint to life as a customizable framework that aligns Data, Needs, and Action into a clear, step-by-step pathway to results. Leaders analyze data, identify root needs, and implement targeted strategies to build sustainable systems that improve achievement, behavior, and climate.



12.1 Data: *Collect the Right Data and Improve It*

The most effective leadership does not begin with a plan. It begins with what leaders choose to notice.

In many schools, data is misunderstood. It is often reduced to test scores, reports, or compliance documents that are reviewed briefly and then set aside. But strong leaders see data differently. Data is not just numbers—it is information about

SECTION IV REVIEW

Sustainable Leadership completes the pyramid by ensuring the work endures beyond individual efforts and moments of success. Where Sections I through III built the leader, centered the student, and established operational systems, Section IV focused on sustaining that work through intentional design, alignment, and disciplined leadership practice.

Chapter 10 grounds the work in culture and climate, reinforcing how people experience the school each day determines whether systems succeed or fail. Chapter 11 expands leadership into resource development, ensuring that vision is supported by aligned funding, partnerships, and strategic investment. Chapter 12 brings the entire blueprint together through the DNA Framework, creating a clear, repeatable process that connects Data, Needs, and Action to continuous improvement and lasting results.

Together, these chapters form the top tiers of the pyramid, where systems are refined, sustained, and scaled.

This section challenges leaders to think beyond immediate results and build structures that hold steady over time. When culture, resources, and action are aligned, leadership becomes legacy, and schools become places where success is not temporary, but sustained for generations.

A graphic of a clipboard with a black header and a white body. The header contains the text 'COACHES' CLIPBOARD' in white, bold, uppercase letters. The body contains the text '12. Build Your Blueprint' in bold, followed by a paragraph of text, and 'Get Results.' in bold at the bottom.

COACHES' CLIPBOARD

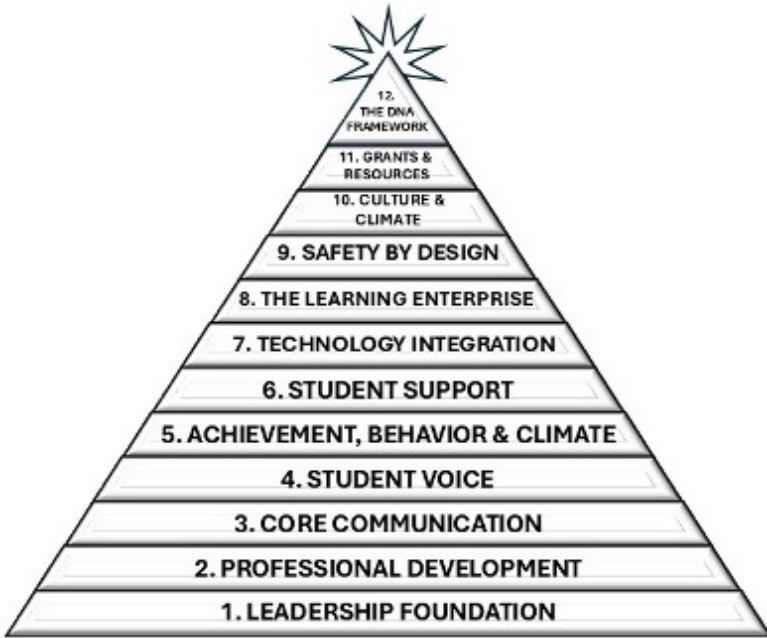
12. Build Your Blueprint

The DNA Blueprint is more than a framework; it's your call to action.

Lead with data, respond to real needs, and take bold steps that transform culture. Progress starts when insight becomes action.

Get Results.

💡 *"Construction is the art of making a meaningful whole out of many parts." — Peter Zumthor, Swiss Architect*



Your Sustainable Leadership Affirmation:

*"I am a systems-driven leader.
I design schools where trust grows, learning
thrives, and progress endures. Through data,
needs, and action,
I lead for today, build for tomorrow,
and sustain for generations."*

Closing Charge to Leaders

The **DNA Blueprint for Educational Leadership** is yours.

As you close this book, remember that leadership is not about perfection—it is about progress. It is about showing up every day, asking the tough questions, making thoughtful decisions, and building a culture of learning that endures.

Use the lessons you have learned here, refine them as you go forward, customize them to your specific schools and situations, and lead boldly.

The **Data, Needs, Action** (DNA) framework is not a one-time tool or a checklist.

- Your **data** establishes your foundation.
- Your **needs** define the blueprint.
- Your **actions** build the structure for success.

When applied with focus and fidelity, this framework reshapes schools into dynamic ecosystems that are responsive, inclusive, and results driven.

This is a way of thinking, a cycle of inquiry, and a system for action that you can return to repeatedly. It is a rhythmic leadership practice that transforms intention into impact. It empowers you to lead with clarity, to focus on what truly matters, and to create schools where students, staff, and communities thrive.

Dive into the book again. Follow the blueprint. And turn professional development into real transformation for your team, your school, and most importantly, your students.



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About the Author



Robert L. Kirton, Ed.D. Master Builder

Dr. Robert L. Kirton brings more than three decades of community service, including honorable U.S. Navy service and leadership in public education. His career includes roles as Professor, Executive Director of Schools, Area Superintendent, Principal, and Master's Level Building Construction Teacher. As founder and Chief Educational Officer of DNA Educational Solutions, he now specializes as a leadership coach, school climate specialist, author, and motivational speaker.

Dr. Kirton turns vision into results. He founded a charter school that graduated 100% of its Black male students, designed an Excel Academy moving over-aged middle schoolers to on-time graduation, and built a Social Emotional Learning Climate System that increased elementary reading scores in a school district by more than 20 percent for three consecutive years. He has also secured more than \$100 million in grants and resources to strengthen schools and communities.

As a professor and mentor, Dr. Kirton shapes transformational leaders and has guided many educators, principals, and superintendents to doctoral completion. His contributions have been Nationally recognized for his contributions, Dr. Kirton has received multiple awards, including the FBI Director's Award for Community Leadership and Development.

About the Foreword Author



Colonel Lee Ellis USAF Retired

Lee Ellis began his distinguished military career as a fighter pilot after graduating from the University of Georgia in 1965. During the Viet Nam War, his aircraft was shot down, and he spent over five years as a prisoner of war in Hanoi. This life-defining experience shaped his understanding of leadership under pressure and inspired his lifelong commitment to helping others lead with honor.

After his repatriation, Ellis resumed flying duties and eventually retired as a colonel. His military honors include two Silver Stars, the Legion of Merit, the Bronze Star with Valor device, the Purple Heart, the Air Medal with eight Oak Leaf Clusters, and the Prisoner of War Medal, along with four Air Force Commendation Medals and four Meritorious Service Medals. He was inducted into the Georgia Military Veterans Hall of Fame in 2014 and received the DAR Medal of Honor in 2015.

In his post-military career, Ellis founded **Leadership Freedom LLC** and **Freedom Star Media**, developing leadership and behavioral tools used worldwide. He authored *Leading with Honor* and *Engage with Honor*, offering practical strategies shaped by his extraordinary experiences. After publishing *Leading with Honor* in 2012, he renamed his company to emphasize honorable leadership. For the past 28 years, he has served as a leadership consultant, author, coach, and trainer.

Connect With DNA Educational Solutions

Turning Data, Needs, and Action Into Results

Continue the Leadership Journey

Thank you for reading The DNA Blueprint for Educational Leaders.

For more than 30 years, Dr. Kirton has served as a teacher, principal, executive director, area superintendent, leadership professor, educational consultant, U.S. Navy veteran, and founder of transformational school and community initiatives focused on improving achievement, behavior, and climate.

As CEO of DNA Educational Solutions and Author of “The DNA Blueprint for Educational Leaders” Dr. Kirton helps educational leaders use the DNA Framework Data, Needs, Action to build aligned systems that improve achievement, behavior, and climate.

We specialize in strengthening leadership teams, coaching administrators, developing professional learning systems, and helping schools secure resources and strategic partnerships that drive lasting results.

Solutions and Support

| | |
|--|---|
| Leadership Development | School Improvement Support |
| Executive coaching, leadership team alignment, and strategic planning. | Data-driven systems aligned to achievement behavior and climate. |
| Professional Development | Grant & Resource Development |
| Professional development workshops focused on SEL, culture, communication, and leadership. | Grant and resource development, partnerships, and funding alignment for sustainable impact. |
| Post-Secondary Leadership | Organizational Development |
| Post-secondary leadership development for colleges, universities, and aspiring administrators. | Systems and organizational development that align safety, culture, and operations. |

Robert L. Kirton, Ed.D.

CEO, DNA Educational Solutions





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The DNA Blueprint for Educational Leaders

A powerful, practical system packed with ready-to-use tools, strategies, and leadership labs built for real-world challenges school leaders face every day.

The Four Pillars of DNA Leadership

Each section targets a critical area of high impact leadership.

-  **Foundational Leadership**
Build trust, alignment, and clarity through strong systems.
-  **Student Leadership**
Elevate student voice, engagement, and achievement.
-  **Operational Leadership**
Empower staff, support families, and serve students
-  **Sustainable Leadership**
Strengthen culture, capacity, and long-term success.

Begin with the Book

Follow the Blueprint

Build Lasting Results

“Professional development is powerful when it empowers educators and fuels student success.”

Robert L. Kirton, Ed.D.