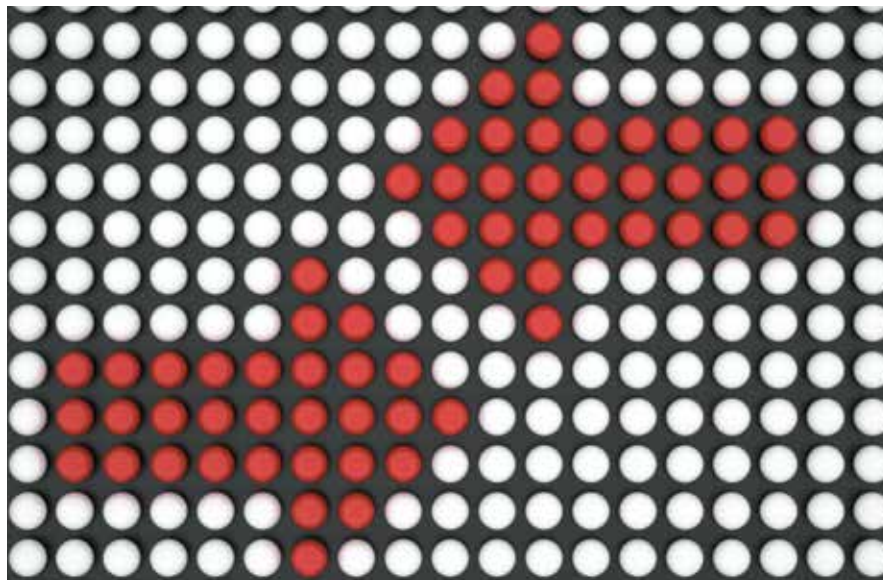


# Double Duty



**W**hen I introduce myself and explain my position, I often get puzzled looks and people usually ask for clarification. “You are the principal of two schools?” they ask. Yes, I am. I lead Epworth and Farley Elementary Schools in the Western Dubuque Community School District in Northeast Iowa. Both schools are relatively small, with approximately 250 students in each building. But just like every other school, neither is ever short of challenges. It is extremely difficult to manage two facilities, construct multiple professional learning plans, develop master schedules for each building, and connect with two separate teams, among myriad other responsibilities each day. However, over the years, I have developed a few solutions that have increased collaboration, capacity building, and aligned improvement efforts.

## A Predictable Schedule

The most challenging aspect of leading two elementary schools is the simple fact that there is two of everything. There are two strategic plans to prepare, twice the number of teacher evaluations to complete, and two separate facilities and staffs with varying needs and their own identities. Consistency and alignment remain challenging because many staff members are shared between the two schools and must work closely with each building. A consistent message is difficult to deliver on one campus at times; that difficulty is amplified significantly when an additional building is added to the equation. Over time, I have developed high- and low-tech procedures and routines to simplify my position while maximizing the impact.

Each day, I start and end in a different building and travel between the two at least once. For example, on Monday mornings, I begin my day at Farley Elementary and finish the day at Epworth Elementary after lunch. On Tuesdays, I start in Epworth and finish in Farley, and then repeat this process throughout the week. The staggered schedule is predictable for staff members, so they know where I will be and when to expect me in their building.

Even when staggering my start and end times each day at each school, I often find myself in the wrong place at the wrong time. There might be a small crisis occurring at Epworth when I am at Farley. Fortunately, the schools are only about four miles apart, and I’m able to get between the schools in less than 10 minutes.

## A Reliable Team

There have not been too many issues over the past three years that have required immediate travel to the other school, but it does happen. I am fortunate to be surrounded by extremely talented people who heavily assist me to make this administrative model work.

Our school counselor travels between the two sites as well; when I am in Epworth, she is at Farley and vice versa. We set aside at least an hour in our schedules on Wednesdays to collaborate about staff and student needs while making sure that our efforts are aligned. Two other key players are the building secretaries at each campus. These ladies are organized, flexible, knowledgeable, and handle many issues for me to make this work manageable. Being the principal of two elementary schools would not be possible if I was not surrounded by quality people or if I did not have access to a variety of technology tools.

## Communication


Delivering consistent messages to multiple groups of stakeholders has never been easier with the use of key technology applications such as Remind, Hootsuite, TweetDeck, and Google Apps for Education. These tools enable users to post messages to multiple platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Google+ with the click of a mouse. Most of our families rely heavily on text messages generated from Remind, and this has had a positive impact on school culture. With the ability to schedule messages to be sent at a later date or time, Remind, Hootsuite, and TweetDeck have helped to keep our buildings organized and our families informed and engaged within each school.

## Strategic Alignment

Leading the strategic improvement plan of an entire campus can be a daunting task for anyone in a leadership position; when this must be done for two buildings, alignment and

efficiency are of the utmost importance. Epworth and Farley Elementary teachers and staff have embraced collaboration efforts during the past three years by developing identical school improvement goals. This has allowed teachers in Epworth Elementary to talk openly to the Farley Elementary faculty about what's working, adjustments that need to be made, different strategies to maximize impact, and tools to simplify the work. Teachers have developed improvement plan goals together to ensure progress is being made, with everyone contributing to a culture of improvement.

Our professional learning structure operates efficiently, as both buildings come together the majority of time during these opportunities. With identical improvement goals, Epworth and Farley Elementary teachers have similar needs that can be met when we conduct professional learning days. This makes the process much more manageable for me because we always meet under the same roof during professional learning days. Many times we need to break up to discuss building-specific items, but being in the same facility cuts down significantly on travel and allows us to maximize the time that we are provided.

There is no question that leading two schools is an incredibly challenging task. I have many responsibilities to ensure that Epworth and Farley Elementary Schools are operating as efficiently as possible while producing results. This work could not be done without a predictable schedule, extremely talented teachers and support staff, impactful technology tools to streamline communication and collaboration, and aligned improvement efforts between two fantastic elementary schools. I feel very fortunate to work with staff members who have embraced this model of leadership and have contributed to a culture that simply gets better every day. 

**Dan Butler** is principal of Epworth Elementary School and Farley Elementary School in Iowa.

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