**Effective Principals build positive momentum by succeeding at key initial leadership tasks and opportunities**

**Introduction and Rationale:**

As the saying goes, “One doesn’t get a second chance to make a first impression.” First impressions constructed from initial experiences are memorable and persistent (Srivastava, Guglielmo, & Beer, 2010). These initial perceptions shape beliefs that are difficult to alter, even in light of contradictory new experiences (Gawronski, Rydell, Vervliet, & DeHouwer, 2010). In his study, “Getting Off on the Wrong Foot: The Timing of a Breach and the Restoration of Trust,” Ohio State University researcher Robert Lount (2008) maintains

*First impressions matter when you want to build a lasting trust. If you get off on the wrong foot, the relationship may never be completely right again. It’s easier to rebuild trust after a breach if you already have a strong relationship.*

The idea that first experiences are extra memorable has a long and extensive history in teaching- learning theory. Harold Gullickson’s 1936 study *The Relationship Between Degree of Original Learning and the Degree of Transfer*, was one of the earliest contributions. Madeline Hunter, in the mid-1980s, included *degree of original learning* as one of the key factors in transfer theory (Hunter, 1982), as did David Sousa in his 1995 book *How the Brain Learns*. More recently, Mike Rutherford (2013), in *The Artisan Teacher: A Field Guide to Skillful Teaching*, devoted an entire chapter to the practice of designing initial learning experiences to take advantage of a student’s natural tendency to recall easily and transfer broadly anything that is judged to be new, novel, or different.

In school leadership, as in life and in the classroom, not every task or interaction is equal in its impact. Initial experiences are like double coupons. They carry their own content and effect, and, more importantly, set the template and expectation for future experiences. In practical terms then, a school administrator’s first faculty meeting, first contact with staff, first weekly memo, first Professional Learning Community (PLC) meeting, or first (fill in the blank) are indeed critical firsts. As such, they are worthy targets for careful planning, sharp design, and best efforts.

The school administrator understands the importance of making a positive impact as an emerging leader. School administrators can be more proactive and purposeful as they plan initial school engagements. The MLDS helps school principals examine best practices, tools, and protocols for designing successful first opportunities typical of the opening of a new school year.

* + 1. Increase your awareness of the large and persistent effects of first experiences.
    2. Identify key windows of opportunity for creating success and positive momentum in typical, beginning of the year school experiences.
    3. Use practical and timely strategies for creating successful and future- shaping initial school experiences.