

Aspiring Leaders Syllabus 2026 2027

Preparing today's educators to become tomorrow's leaders. Independently developed by Dr. Naesha Parks through Heart Matters Media LLC. This course is not affiliated with or developed by the Georgia Department of Education. Developed and facilitated by Dr. Naesha Parks

Heart Matters Media LLC

Cohort	2026-2027
Facilitator	Dr. Naesha Parks, Heart Matters Media LLC, Mr. Michael R. Johnson, Instructor, Site Visit Facilitator

Course Overview

The Aspiring Leaders Academy prepares educators for school leadership through a focused hybrid experience that combines cohort learning, individualized coaching, school-based application, and collaborative problem-solving. The 2026-2027 cohort will develop practical leadership skills while building the habits of reflection, communication, and collaboration required to lead purposefully and improve outcomes for students and schools.

Course Objectives

- Develop and apply leadership skills in authentic educational settings.
- Strengthen instructional leadership, strategic planning, and communication practices.
- Use evidence and data to identify problems, evaluate options, and guide improvement.
- Build a positive school culture through ethical, inclusive, and collaborative leadership.
- Practice coaching, feedback, stakeholder engagement, and change management skills.
- Work productively with a team to examine a school-based issue and present an actionable response.

Academy at a Glance

The cohort includes one in-person kickoff, one virtual collaborative session, one individual coaching session, one school visit or virtual alternative, and one in-person closing session with group presentations.

Date or window	Experience	Format	Purpose
September 22, 2026 5:00-7:00 p.m.	Kickoff Session	In person at CSRA RESA	Program orientation, leadership learning, team formation, and introduction to the collaborative project.
October 2026-May 2027	Individual Coaching Session	Virtual	Personalized leadership development using a shared coaching protocol focused on each participant's goals and context.
October 2026-May 2027	School Visit	In person or virtual	One school-based observation and reflection experience scheduled around participant availability. A virtual meeting may be selected in place of the on-site visit.
February 16, 2027 5:00-7:00 p.m.	Collaborative Session	Virtual	Cohort learning, project development, reflection, and leadership-focused assignments.
May 2027 Date TBD, 5:00-7:00 p.m.	Closing Session	In person	Group presentations, reflection, celebration, and graduation.

Learning Framework

Learning is organized around four connected areas. Topics may be emphasized differently during coaching and collaborative sessions based on participant goals and emerging school needs.

Leadership Foundations

- Transitioning from teacher to school leader
- Vision, mission, ethics, and decision-making
- Leadership styles, identity, and self-assessment

Instructional Leadership

- Curriculum alignment and student achievement
- Teacher observation, feedback, evaluation, and coaching
- Data-informed improvement and equitable outcomes

Culture and Community

- Positive school culture and climate
- Family and community partnerships
- Communication, conflict resolution, and stakeholder engagement

Individual Coaching and School Visit

Each participant will receive one individual virtual coaching session and one school visit. The school visit will be scheduled based on the participant's availability; if an on-site visit is not practical, the participant may opt for a virtual meeting instead.

The same coaching protocol will guide both experiences. The protocol remains consistent across the cohort while the conversation, evidence, and next steps are tailored to each participant.

Step	Focus	Participant Practice
1	Identify	Clarify a current leadership goal, challenge, or decision.
2	Examine	Review the context, available evidence, stakeholders, and assumptions.
3	Explore	Consider options, likely effects, and connections to effective leadership practice.

Step	Focus	Participant Practice
4	Commit	Select a practical next step, owner, support, and timeline.
5	Reflect	Capture learning and determine what to continue, adjust, or revisit.

Collaborative Group Project

The group project is designed primarily as a collaboration experience. Teams will practice listening, defining a shared problem, distributing responsibility, making decisions, and communicating a practical response. The emphasis is on how participants work together, not on producing an elaborate final product.

Team Formation and Topic Selection

Teams will be formed during the opening session. Participants will discuss issues they wish were better in their schools or educational communities, then identify a topic their team wants to explore. Facilitators may also offer suggested topics when a team needs help narrowing its focus.

A brief facilitator example will model the process by selecting one issue and using a few slides to show how a team can move from a broad concern to a focused problem, possible responses, and clear next steps.

Suggested Project Process

1. Surface possible issues and listen for shared interests across the team.
2. Select one issue that is meaningful, specific, and appropriate for the time available.
3. Describe the current situation and identify who is affected.
4. Review relevant evidence, experiences, and stakeholder perspectives.
5. Develop a practical recommendation, strategy, or improvement approach.
6. Prepare a concise presentation that explains both the team's idea and its collaboration process.

Presentation Expectations

- A clear statement of the selected issue and why it matters.
- A concise description of the team's proposed response or improvement strategy.
- The evidence, experience, or stakeholder input that informed the team's thinking.
- A realistic first step and the people who would need to be involved.
- A reflection on team roles, communication, decision-making, and lessons about collaboration.

Recommended Presentation Format

Teams can prepare a focused presentation of approximately five to seven slides or a conversation in groups. The presentation can be shared however the team would like. This is the time to have fun and be creative. Presentations will be delivered during the May closing session. The facilitator may adjust presentation length after team size and the final agenda is confirmed.

Participation and Evidence of Learning

- Active participation in the kickoff, virtual session, coaching, school visit or virtual alternative, and closing session.
- Completion of brief reflections or leadership-focused assignments provided during the program.
- Constructive participation in a project team, including shared responsibility and timely communication.
- Application of feedback and coaching to an individual leadership goal or challenge.
- Contribution to the team's closing presentation and collaboration reflection.

Completion

Participants who meet program expectations will receive a certificate of completion. Any Professional Learning Unit requirements or documentation will be communicated by CSRA RESA.

Participant Responsibilities

- Attend scheduled cohort sessions and communicate promptly when a conflict arises.
- Schedule the coaching session and school visit or virtual alternative within the October 2026-May 2027 window.
- Maintain confidentiality when discussing students, staff members, and school situations.
- Bring authentic leadership questions and evidence to coaching and collaborative conversations.
- Honor team commitments and contribute respectfully to shared decisions and deliverables.
- Use feedback to identify and complete the next practical steps between sessions.

Course Embedded Resources

Resources may be selected to support individual and cohort needs. Participants are not expected to use every resource listed below.

Books

- The Principal: Three Keys to Maximizing Impact by Michael Fullan
- Leverage Leadership 2.0 by Paul Bambrick-Santoyo
- School Leadership That Works by Robert J. Marzano

Professional Learning and Research

- Harvard Graduate School of Education leadership learning opportunities
- ASCD leadership development webinars and Educational Leadership resources
- The Wallace Foundation school leadership resources
- National Association of Secondary School Principals research and case studies

Collaboration Tools

Google Workspace or Microsoft Teams may be used for communication, planning, file sharing, and presentation development.

Contact Information

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