



DARDEN SCHOOL  
of BUSINESS



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## **Emily Foose** **Unleashing Potential**

### ***Community Challenge***

“The parents have started a coup,” Emily Foose, a third-generation educator, was told after a few weeks into her first principalship. She had been placed in one of the lowest performing and lowest social-economic schools in the district. The environment was toxic and aggressive. She didn’t even have an assistant principal. “I did a lot of listening and emotional healing, while still trying to set some standards, boundaries, and basic expectations,” Foose recalled. A couple of months later she was invited to the Principals Pursuing Excellence (PPE) program. “I didn’t understand the power behind the program,” Foose said. “I felt overwhelmed by the 90-day plan.” It was daunting. She developed a plan that had four to seven focus areas in it, which was inappropriate. Instead of helping her lead, Foose felt inundated with the competing demands on her time.

### ***Action Taken***

Part of the PPE program was pairing participants with mentors. When Foose’s mentor started visiting her every week, there was a major shift in her leadership. “That created an immense sense of urgency for us that the needs of our system are dire,” Foose said. Facing much staff resistance, Foose’s mentor created a trusting space that made her more willing to keep pushing and trying new things. Beyond that, the meetings and the relationship between principal and coach assured a higher level of accountability and a greater focus on identifiable actions. As Foose worked to build confidence within herself and her staff, it translated into staff members implementing critical actions at a faster rate.

Beyond Foose’s mentorship, having a coach with the time and resources to walk into the building every week served as a strong symbol for other stakeholders in the school. Indeed, the school started moving from a D grade to eventually reach an A grade. When she thought about some of the components that were the greatest index of success, Foose believed it was the 90-day plan—but only because it was paired with weekly visits from the performance coach.

### ***Key Takeaway***

Leadership is lonely and for principals, there is only one of them in each school. The mentor has to convey their principal’s leadership development and the needs of the school are also

critically important to him or her. As the principal grows and develops stronger leadership skills, the coach needs to adjust and adapt. Having a mentor relationship is vital. The power of the mentor relationship makes all the difference to the professional development of educators.