

About Dr. Nelson, Our Principal

Compounded Expertise. Contemporary Innovation.

Dr. David Nelson serves as the Principal of Pine Mountain Middle School, offering a leadership profile defined by a career-long commitment to student growth and a deep dedication to systemic excellence. With a trajectory spanning three decades, Dr. Nelson blends timeless leadership values with the future-facing innovation required to lead in today's world.

A Foundation in Excellence and Stewardship

Dr. Nelson's reputation as a "Systemic Architect" was forged as the Charter Principal of Mary Frances George Junior High in Springdale, Arkansas—the heart of one of the world's most influential corporate corridors, being home to the global headquarters of Walmart, Tyson Foods, and J.B. Hunt. The school was named after the matriarch of the prominent George family (founders of the global enterprise George's Inc.), underscoring the institution's status as a flagship.

It was during his first principalship that Dr. Nelson learned the importance of needing to emulate a culture of high-integrity leadership from the ground up. Built upon the same Professional Learning Community (PLC) framework used today at Pine Mountain Middle School, George Junior High was engineered to meet both the elite professional expectations defined by executive excellence and a fast-paced growing, diversified community.

Dr. Nelson was first hired as a school administrator by Dr. Kenneth James, former Arkansas Commissioner of Education and Chairman of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). Working within a circle of mentors and role models that included Dr. James, Dr. Nelson helped shape high-level strategies for systemic school design. For example, during this era, he worked with mentor Dr. Ronda Siedenwurm to facilitate a statewide ESL Academy, providing teachers with the necessary university and state requirements to teach English learners. His expertise in leadership development was further recognized when he was invited to present on administrator training while a doctoral student with the University of Arkansas' Department of Educational Leadership at the National Association of Professors of Educational Administration.

Cultivating the "Leader Within"

For Dr. Nelson, education is about the "whole child." He founded the Leadership Safari Youth Conference Program to bridge the gap between academic theory and real-world character development. The program's impact was so significant that it drew Ray Simon

(former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education) as a featured speaker and earned Dr. Nelson the Governor's Volunteer Excellence Award. This dedication to nurturing the student's heart and resilience underscores his belief that every student has a "leader within" waiting to be discovered. His instructional precision was further recognized with the Instructional Excellence Award from the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA), eventually leading him to serve as a Keynote Speaker at the Oklahoma NCA (now Cognia) State Conference.

A Legacy of Shared Success

Dr. Nelson is proud to have seen seven of his former assistant principals transition into head principal roles, including four current middle school leaders within the district.

Precision in Student Progress

While many focus on static snapshots of achievement, Dr. Nelson specializes in Student Growth and Value-Add. His training through the National Principals Leadership Institute (NPLI) at Fordham University and the John Maxwell Leadership Team while serving in Cobb County allows him to move the needle with scientific precision. In 2024, the Pine Mountain team achieved Student Progress points in the 90th percentile and was recognized as a State Math Leader with a 100% pass rate in High School Algebra, 7th Grade Growth, and 8th Grade Gateway Growth. This recognition was earned again in 2025.

A Contemporary Civic Liaison

Deeply rooted in the local community, Dr. Nelson is a proud Alumnus of the Cobb Chamber's Leadership Cobb (Class of 2024). He has served on the Kennesaw Police Department Citizen Advisory Board, the Cobb Schools Foundation Principal Advisory Board, and the Kennesaw State University Advisory Councils of Educational Leadership as well as Middle and Secondary Education. Reflecting his personal commitment to the community where his own family resides, he also served as a parent representative on the School Council for his children's local high school.

His commitment to the local community is further evidenced by his long-standing civic involvement, including having been selected to provide the framing for the "Time of Prayer For Our Schools" at the 2014 Cobb County Prayer Breakfast. In this capacity, he served on a program alongside other high-level executives, including Shan Cooper, Vice President and General Manager of Lockheed Martin Aeronautics, further bridging the gap between educational leadership and corporate stewardship.

Additionally, based on his own healthcare journey, he is mindful of the need to support team members to maintain balance in their own lives and serves others as a Patient and

Family Advisor for the Emory Healthcare System. His influence within the healthcare sector extends to academic and operational support; he has been a frequent speaker at Emory's School of Medicine for the Department of Surgery and has assisted the Department of Surgery with both their internal and social media messaging. As a member of the RAND Corporation's American School Leader Panel, he ensures Pine Mountain stays connected to—and helps shape—national trends in educational excellence.

The "Atmospheric Engineering" Philosophy

Dr. Nelson leads with the belief that “atmospheric engineering” is essential to foster innovation and in creating a school culture that is safe, collaborative, and intentional. This commitment to safety and proactive leadership was highlighted when he hosted an Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE) roundtable focused on school safety. His expertise in this area is further recognized statewide, having been recognized as a "Fabulous Four School" and invited to speak on school safety at the Georgia Association of Educational Leaders (GAEL) Statewide Summer Conference. His team has also been recognized as a state leader in personalized learning through the Georgia Department of Education's GRE4T program. Because of the success in implementing these student-centered strategies, he was invited to speak with leaders across the state as part of the Principal's Learning Network, helping other administrators navigate the shift toward personalized instructional models.

This hallmark of community trust was also evident during his tenure at Daniell Middle School, which rose to become the second-highest parent-perceived middle school in the district and the only Cobb middle school to achieve three consecutive years of gains on the CCRPI. During this time, his team created the Daniell Academies, which focused on STEM, Public Law and Safety, and International Spanish, providing rigorous, specialized pathways for student success.

Central to his philosophy is a focus on "atmospheric engineering" within his schools. Dr. Nelson designs environments where the learning experience transcends traditional classroom walls, and teachers are equipped with the specialized tools and space to master their craft. This vision was realized at Daniell through the creation of 'The Shark Tank' and at Pine Mountain through the development of 'The Summit' and grade-level specific commons spaces.

At Pine Mountain, he successfully worked with members of the district communications team to rebrand the school's identity, resulting in a national award for the Branding Identity Package. While at Pine Mountain, the team has earned statewide recognition as a Distinguished PBIS school and has been selected by CobbLife Magazine for five

consecutive years as "Best of Cobb" or among the Top 3. Dr. Nelson has been honored with a Lifetime PTA Membership, and his PTA units have been honored as the third-best in the state. Most recently, his team was recognized for its Comprehensive School Counseling Program, ensuring that every student is known, loved, and supported.

"True leadership is the ability to take everything we have learned and apply it to the challenges of tomorrow—ensuring that every student leaves our halls equipped to lead in a world we are just beginning to imagine." — Dr. David Nelson