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Literature Review Performance Appraisal of Public School Principals

The following is a literature review regarding procedures used to evaluate principals. The methods used to conduct this review included an online ERIC document search, a general Internet search on topics associated with principal evaluation, and a search of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation. This document provides information about policy decisions relevant to the principal evaluation process, various methods typically used, and evaluation plans employed in six school districts located in different regions of the country. The following is a summary of the information obtained from this review.

The consensus of opinion yielded by this review challenges the assumptions and methods currently in place to evaluate principals. Although assessing performance of educational professionals using a detailed checklist of skills is appealing and practical, it reduces a potentially difficult task to one that essentially identifies and observes select and possibly isolated leadership skills. A more valid and reliable approach surfacing from this review, is a process that focuses on a standards framework for school principals that provides a more useful basis for making judgements about the quality of a principal's work. An approach using performance standards will be described later. Before describing various evaluation approaches, the steps or policy decisions involved in establishing a principal evaluation process is discussed.

Policy Decisions

Principal evaluation works best when it is not imposed from above. Manatt (1989) proposed a committee of about a dozen people, one half of them principals. This committee examines other principal evaluation programs and drafts a plan of their own which they submit to the Board for approval. An inservice meeting is then held to explain the new evaluation plan and to reduce any fear among participating principals.

Additional policy decisions involved with establishing a new or revising an existing principal evaluation involve the following. These were taken from an article written by Brown and Irby (1998) for the American Association of School Administrators.

- Evaluation should focus on school improvement.
- Evaluation should be performance based. It should require the principal to provide documentation not used in traditional principal appraisals such as an appraisal portfolio.
- Evaluation should be relevant to the principal's job functions.
- Evaluation should clearly define local performance expectations. It must result in a shared vision of leadership within a school district.
- Evaluation should promote "buy-in" and collaboration among all administrators. Collaboration in development of the process makes the success of the process more likely.
- Evaluation should promote principal growth and improved leadership practice.
- Evaluation systems should provide for resources and clearly communicated procedures.

Existing Methods

The following represent various methods typically used in the evaluation of principals.

Paper-and-Pencil Tests. Dozens of instruments including various skill checklists are available to conduct principal evaluations. The ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management or ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation are two resources for such instruments. A 360-degree perspective can be achieved by having a principal's self-evaluation supplemented by collecting responses from various stakeholder groups including supervisors, subordinates, and peers. Strengths of this method include ease of administration and scoring and costs are usually moderate. A principal may be unwilling to confront an issue his supervisor raises but cannot easily dismiss the results of an objectively scored test reflecting agreement among assessment professionals (Lashway 1998). A disadvantage of evaluation tests is that they do not measure real-life performance of the principal. The consensus maintains that they can play a role in the evaluation process but they should not be the sole criterion used to judge the effectiveness of principals.

Assessment Centers. Some experts are of the opinion that the best way to evaluate a school principal is to see the principal in action. The "in-basket task" requires that administrators respond to a series of everyday situations that might confront a principal on a regular basis. Responses are scored by an experienced principal. Such methods are time consuming, expensive, and not practical in a district with over 300 principals to evaluate.

Portfolios. Principals are required to provide specific documentation relating to a variety of performance indicators. The consensus maintains that, portfolio assessment can be less objective than other methods but it does force evaluators to examine concrete data during the evaluation.

Peer Group Evaluation Process. Peer groups use a variety of approaches to observe and to provide feedback to the principal they are evaluating (Gil 1998). These include classroom observation, analysis of student work, formal interviews with key staff and discussions with parent leaders. Results of the evaluation are shared with the

principal during a peer review conference. Strengths of the method appear to be the interactions with other principals that lead to new relationships and principals find support when dealing with difficult issues. A primary weakness of the process is that principals are reluctant to offer criticism to fellow principals.

Student Performance Data. The consensus of the articles used in this review was that principal evaluations should be data driven. However, if test score performance is to be used in the principal evaluation process, it should be balanced with other indicators and not represent the sole criterion. Shepard (1997) also cautioned that, "Judging teachers, principals, or superintendents on the basis of pupil test scores is invalid when there has been no correction for initial differences in student ability. Class differences must be controlled either by random assignment of students to teachers or by statistically adjusting for differences in student ability." Only if a teacher's student achievement after being adjusted for student ability, is very low for several years in a row and other teachers in the same school or similar schools have much higher achievement is the evidence convincing that the teacher is not effective. Other student variables examined for purposes of principal evaluation have included safety infractions, student attendance, tardiness, etc..

Standards-Based Assessment. Several evaluation systems are available that use a standards framework to structure the evaluation. These standards relate to the particular leadership qualities that are critical for success as a school leader. One such standards-based system was recently developed by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC). Thus far, 36 states have adopted these standards and are in various stages of implementing the standards in reforming educational leadership in their state. Originally in 1994, membership of the consortium included 24 states and professional organizations, including the American Association of School Administrators. This group established the following six common standards for school leaders.

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by...

- facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.
- advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.
- ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.
- collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.
- acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.
- understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

The ISLLC maintains that the above represent a common set of standards that applies to all leadership positions in education, not just principals. Each standard also includes a set of statements relative to the type of knowledge, understanding, and dispositions or values productive school leaders are required to have in order to successfully address each of the six standards. Four levels of performance (e.g., rudimentary, developing, proficient, and accomplished) are used to rate the school leader on four central themes that are said to unify the six standards.

In cooperation with the Educational Testing Service (ETS), six states from the Consortium have developed a portfolio assessment for school leaders based on the ISLLC standards. In addition, the standards are the basis of a Standards Based Professional Development for School Leaders program which includes development materials/activities for school leaders according to the above mentioned standards.

Principal Evaluation Plans from Other School Districts

The following represent a sample of the principal evaluation procedures used in various districts around the nation.

Milwaukee Public Schools. The Milwaukee Public Schools plan has been recognized nationwide as an effective approach. This plan has three levels including systemwide goals, school-based goals, and a school narrative. There are six systemwide goals which focus on student achievement and attendance. Each school site selects five school-based goals which are to focus on specific instructional strategies. These goals are decided upon collaboratively by the faculty, school site council, and principal. The system provides credit based exclusively on improvement thus allowing low performing schools to also receive recognition. The school narrative allows the principal to explain the data and the context or school climate within which the data were obtained.

Chicago Public Schools. Principals in the Chicago Public Schools are evaluated in part by using their student's test scores, attendance rates, and other statistical measures. Principals are evaluated in five areas receiving "grades" of exceeding, meeting, or not meeting expectations. For a rating of "exceeds," at least 50 percent of the students must score at or above the national norms in reading and mathematics on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (elementary schools) or the Tests of Achievement and Proficiency (high schools). A performance level of 15 percent is set to receive a rating of "meets" expectations. In addition to test scores, principal evaluation measures also include safety and cleanliness of the school building and professional development of administrators and teachers.

North Carolina Public Schools. The system in North Carolina was adopted by the State Board of Education in 1998. The evaluation pertains to both principals and assistant principals. The five areas forming the basis of the evaluation include: 1) Progress toward achieving the school's vision; 2) School meets the growth

standards established by the North Carolina ABCs of Public Education accountability model; 3) Maintains a safe, secure, and caring school environment; 4) Fosters a culture of continuous improvement focused upon teaching and learning; and 5) Uses excellent management and leadership skills to achieve effective and efficient organizational operations.

Alabama Professional Education Personnel Evaluation Program (PEPE). School principals are evaluated in four areas including leadership, management, communication, and community relations. A 360 degree evaluation model is used as ratings in these areas are provided by instructional staff, students, parents/guardians, community leaders, and a self-assessment is completed by the principal. The self assessment is composed of 120 items divided into 13 different evaluation areas. A formal interview is also included in the principal evaluation process. The interview examines the principals' responses to questions in seven areas. These areas include collaboration processes and skills, assessment/measurement/evaluation, organizing for results, planning, problem solving, technology management, and portfolio clarification. An additional form is completed during a school management observation. This observation includes the areas of communication, innovations, operations, etc. The principal's immediate supervisor also completes a Supervisor's Review Form addressing the areas of federal/state/local laws, and policies; fiscal leadership and management; management of professional responsibilities, and leadership of human resources. An Evaluation Summary Report is completed which constitutes a compilation of all the evaluation material collected from the various sources. This form lists areas for improvement and whether the principal met performance standards or not and is signed by the principal.

Rock Hill School District (South Carolina). The principal evaluation process in the Rock Hill School District was established by the Principal Evaluation Review Committee and the Expert Panel for Principal Evaluation using the standards and criteria for principal evaluation adopted by the State Board of Education. The district is required to use the standards, criteria, and procedures adopted by the State Board of Education for the purposes of

evaluating principals at least once every three years. Principals are rated on each standard by indicating the principal's performance level and by documentation provided by the principal which is to indicate accomplishment of each standard. Evaluation forms contain operational definitions for a rating of "proficient" and "improvement needed" for each of the nine standards. These standards include: vision; instructional leadership; effective management; climate; school/community relations; ethical behavior; interpersonal skills; staff development; and principal's professional development.

Council of School Supervisors and Administrators: American Federation of School Administrators (AFL/CIO). The principal evaluation system used in New York City was established with agreement from the principals' union (AFL/CIO) and the State Board of Education. This evaluation plan calls for the principal to develop goals and objectives each school year in cooperation with the superintendent. The goals and objectives are to be based on five key areas including instructional leadership, organization leadership, staff development, student support services, and community relations and communication. These goals and objectives represent priority needs of the school as revealed by the performance data from the previous year. At a minimum, there is to be a mid-year consultation with the superintendent using the principal's goals and objectives as a guide. At this time, goals and/or objectives are added or modified. The Principal Evaluation Form specifies performance criteria to be used by the superintendent in evaluating the principal's performance in the five key areas of responsibility. When evaluating the principal's performance the superintendent uses relevant performance data and the degree of improvement the school has made from the previous year. At the end of the year, the superintendent writes a narrative summary describing the principal's overall performance. This summary is to include strengths and specific priorities for next year. The superintendent and principal decide on a professional development plan that addresses any priority development needs identified by virtue of the evaluation process.

In conclusion, the intent of this literature review was not to be an exhaustive examination regarding all there was to know about principal evaluation, but rather it was to capture the flavor of the literature recently published about evaluating principals in public schools. To this end, it revealed that principals should be evaluated on a regular basis just as the performance of all staff is reviewed. Similarly, principal evaluations need to be data driven and based on specific standards organized around the specific responsibilities of school leaders. Areas in need of improvement should result from the evaluation with specific staff development activities recommended to ameliorate any identified weaknesses. Above all, results of the

evaluations should be used to make personnel decisions and not filed away or forgotten about until the same time next school year. These evaluations should be taken seriously and conducted in a manner reminiscent of the scientific method as opposed to a “dog and pony show,” which is how one author referred to the typical principal evaluation process.

The interested reader can obtain copies of the articles used in this review by contacting the M-DCPS Department of Research Services at (305) 995-7503. Bibliographic information for the articles cited in this Information Capsule can be found in the Reference Section below.

References

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