

Principal Assessment: Leadership Behaviors Known to Influence Schools and the Learning of All Students



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Evidence indicating that leadership is a critical component of school improvement has accumulated (Bryk, Sebring, & Allensworth, 2010). Principals are entrusted to lead schools and are, therefore, in many ways, responsible for improving schools. Research about each new generation of school reform starting with effective schools in the late 1970s through today's research has linked effective principal leadership to school improvement (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010; Preston, Goldring, Guthrie, & Ramsey, 2012). Also apparent over these decades are actions of leaders who are connected to highly productive and inclusive schools, institutions in which nearly all students reach ambitious targets of performance and students with disabilities are a meaningful part of these improvement efforts (Billingsley, McLeskey, & Crockett, 2014). In particular, instructionally focused or learning-centered leadership behaviors have routinely been underscored as critical for principals conducting successful school improvement work (e.g., May & Supovitz, 2011; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). These learning-centered leadership behaviors include teacher evaluation and feedback, establishment of a compelling school mission, and management of organizational resources such as instructional time and funding. Admittedly, district-level leaders, state-level educational leaders, and policies influence school-based leadership. However, as Figure 1 illustrates, school-based leaders are pivotal for influencing all teachers and students in general and special education.



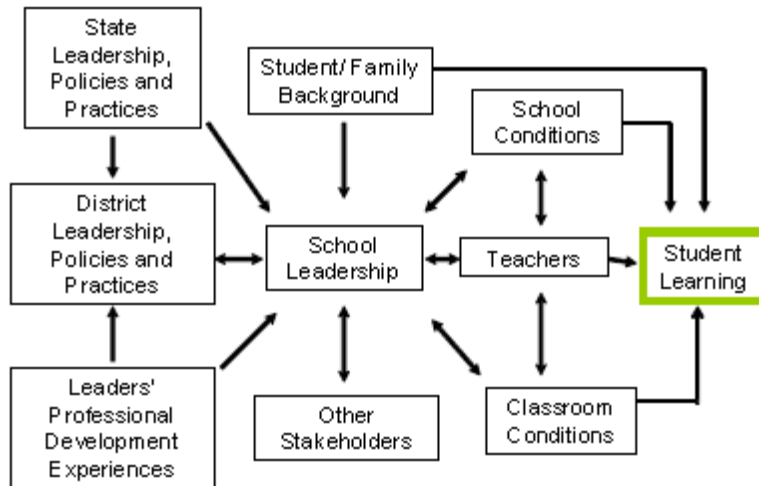


Figure 1. Leadership influence on student learning. Reprinted from *Investigating the Links to Improve Student Learning* (p. 14), by K. Louis, K. S. Leithwood, S. Wahlstrom, and K. Anderson, 2014, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota. Copyright 2010. Reprinted with permission.

For many years, researchers seemed to subscribe to the paradigm that leaders are born and not made. Seminal research, however, suggests that leadership qualities are developed over time and through professional development (PD) experiences and performance assessments (Day, Harrison, & Halpin, 2008). This paper focuses on the assessment of school principals so that the information can be used for evaluation and further PD to promote leadership behaviors. Principals, unlike teachers, are not differentiated as general or special education principals, although principal responsibilities are to oversee both general and special education programs. Researchers have not differentiated them in this regard either, so for the purposes of this paper, we examined research and practices that pertain to all principals who, in turn, influence teachers and all students within their schools.

To advance the understanding of the assessment of principals, we identified measurable constructs that are known indicators of effective school leadership. We then presented a research-based framework that describes a set of leadership behaviors that can help guide the assessment of principal performance. Finally, using this framework and standards for



educational assessments, we provided a brief review of two measures of principal leadership behavior that are technically sound, aligned with professional standards, and sensitive to many aspects of effective special education programs.

Why Principals Matter

As noted in the introduction, researchers over the past 30 years have confirmed that principals matter to school improvement, instructional excellence, and student learning. The cumulative message from increasingly sophisticated research studies is that principals (a) have strong influence on teacher recruitment and retention (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2009); (b) have smaller but significant indirect effects on student achievement (Louis et al., 2010; Witziers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003); and (c) influence the approach and pace of school improvement efforts through local policy implementation (Bryk et al., 2010; Preston et al., 2012).

The relationship between principals' work and special education program implementation has received limited attention in the research literature (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003). By virtue of their positions, principals oversee program compliance with the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) and other laws and, therefore, are responsible for influencing programming. Available research and theory suggest that principals focusing on instructional supports for students with disabilities, providing PD opportunities to teachers, and providing political and financial support for special education programs can improve learning outcomes for students with disabilities (Billingsley et al., 2014; Embrich, 2001). Principals can support improved special education programs by appropriately distributing leadership responsibilities to staff members (or facilitating teams themselves) to develop collaborative planning approaches for student support, and they can develop a school culture emphasizing



inclusion of students with disabilities (Billingsley et al., 2014). Principals have also been shown to influence the retention of special education teachers (Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2013; Prather-Jones, 2011). Research studies suggest that principals who emphasize special education programming can provide support to general and special education teachers to create least restrictive environments and inclusion models to support students with disabilities. For a comprehensive synthesis and translation of research on characteristics of inclusive schools and the impact of leadership on student outcomes, see *Principal Leadership: Moving Toward Inclusive and High-Achieving Schools for Students With Disabilities* (Billingsley et al., 2014).

The Role of Performance Assessment and Feedback in Principal Development

Principal performance assessment and feedback have received national attention in recent years. States typically have required school districts to evaluate principals, and state agencies and/or preparation programs must assess principal candidates prior to certification. Most recently, the U.S. Department of Education has pressed for increased accountability of school principals in Race to the Top state and district competition requirements as well as in the requirements states must meet to be granted No Child Left Behind (NCLB) waivers. These federal requirements have prompted 38 states to pass new, more specific legislation for the evaluation of current principals (Jacques, Clifford, & Hornung, 2012).

Performance assessment, or performance evaluation, is used to gather evidence about the quality of current principal practices to identify areas of strength and improvement. Although federal incentives and state policies emphasize performance evaluation for accountability, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) also recognize evaluation as critical for principal PD (NAESP & NASSP, 2012). Although evidence from studies of leadership development in



business and military settings suggests that performance assessment is important for the development of leadership practice, we located in our review no studies on the effect of performance evaluation on school principal practices. Information about the quality and outcomes of one's performance is important to the development and refinement of practice because it disrupts ineffective behaviors and can increase motivation to develop more effective practices (Kluger & DeNisi, 1998; Thomas, Holdaway, & Ward, 2000).

Performance assessments hold significant promise in providing educators with much-needed information that can be used to improve leadership practices, provide information for accountability purposes, and inform PD choices (Reeves, 2005; Waters & Grubb, 2004). For instance, performance evaluation tools can communicate important practices for leadership of special education and can assess principals on the degree to which they exhibit important practices in their daily work. As such, performance assessment results provide vital information for use by principals and their supervisors, coaches, mentors, and others to determine courses of action for practice improvement. As the framework in Figure 1 indicates, principals directly or indirectly influence many aspects of the school, which means that principal performance could be assessed in many ways. Principal evaluations should be practical and focused on areas of leadership considered to have an important impact on the quality of leadership and, consequently, on the quality of education in schools (Thomas et al., 2000). Unfortunately, current research provides states, districts, and preparation programs little guidance on evaluation system design and instead points to wide variation in the rigor and utility of evaluation systems (Clifford & Ross, 2011). In other words, current research points to the need for improved principal evaluation but provides little information on innovative and impactful performance evaluation approaches.



Several reviews of principal evaluation research and practice indicate that systems improvement is important at the pre-service (Reeves, 2005) and in-service (Clifford & Ross, 2011; Davis, Kearney, Sanders, Thomas, & Leon, 2011; Goldring, Porter, Murphy, & Elliott, 2007) levels. As a result of their review of principal evaluation systems, Goldring and colleagues (2007) identified four problems. First, much of our best understanding has not been constructed using empirically or theoretically grounded understandings of effective leadership or findings from the larger body of school improvement. Second, principal evaluation systems tend to not adhere to professional testing standards (see American Educational Research Association [AERA], American Psychological Association [APA], and National Council of Measurement in Education [NCME], 2014, for personnel evaluation). Many systems fall short on the criteria of employing multiple measures and display a lack of evidence on test score reliability and validity. Third, the process of principal performance assessment, although improving in some areas, is often perfunctory and based on data of unknown technical soundness. Therefore, performance assessment likely does not promote meaningful feedback between principals and their supervisors. Fourth, information from the evaluation system is often not used to direct resources (e.g., PD, coaching) or organizational improvement initiatives (e.g., hiring, compensation incentives) that may guide principals' work and the development of the principal workforce. Essentially, principal evaluation has been separated from school improvement, professional growth, and personnel actions.

Since Goldring and colleagues' (2007) review of principal evaluation approaches, the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE; in collaboration with the Wallace Foundation), NAESP, and NASSP developed guidelines for designing principal evaluation systems. The guidelines are applicable to pre- and in-service principal evaluation and align with



the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation's (1988) recommendation for personnel evaluation. Recommendations from NASBE's (2011) guide, *Improving State Systems for Leadership Development*, include six attributes of successful principal evaluation systems:

- focus on observable behaviors,
- promote change necessary for school improvements,
- are based upon leadership standards,
- are reliable and tested measures,
- account for multiple contexts and circumstances, and
- are linked to PD opportunities to address shortcomings identified in assessment (p. 9).

Similarly, NAESP's and NASSP's (2012) joint policy statement, *Rethinking Principal Evaluation*, recommends that principal performance evaluation systems be

- educative, to foster principal learning and performance;
- valid and reliable, to ensure that accurate and trustworthy information is gathered;
- relevant to the work of principals, as reflected in standards;
- fair to all principals, regardless of school location or context;
- flexible, to address state/district priorities and school needs;
- embedded in a human capital management system that supports professional growth;
- and
- created by and for principals (p. 1).

Following state legislation and federal incentives, states and districts are designing principal evaluation systems, and some may address the NAESP/NASSP and NASBE design considerations. As new principal evaluation systems launch, several states are also considering changes in principal preparation accountability to include the results of principal performance



assessments as one indicator of preparation program performance. In general, emerging principal performance evaluation systems include (a) a framework or rubric that articulates levels of performance on standards and indicators, (b) multiple practice measures that gather information on the quality of principals' work, and (c) multiple outcome measures that provide information on the effectiveness of principals' work.

What Should Be Assessed: Standards and Frameworks for Principal Evaluation

Research indicates that what principals do, which we call *principal practice*, makes a difference to all students and teachers. As state and district professionals develop assessments of principal practice, they are encouraged to create or adopt frameworks that describe levels of performance in observable and measurable terms. With frameworks in place, measures (e.g., observations, surveys) are put in place to provide evidence of performance. The frameworks also provide principals, supervisors, and coaches with the means for talking about feedback and performance.

Studies of effective schools, in which nearly all students reach ambitious performance targets, have identified principal practices that make a difference. In particular, instructionally focused or learning-centered leadership behaviors have routinely been underscored as critical for principals conducting successful school improvement efforts (e.g., May & Supovitz, 2011; Robinson et al., 2008). Although school-based leadership is influenced by district-level leaders and state/federal policies, research consistently shows that principals exhibiting a strong focus on instructional quality, teacher support, and shared school leadership are successful in improving schools and maintaining student achievement (Newmann, 1997).

The learning-centered leadership framework includes two key dimensions of principal leadership behaviors: (a) core components and (b) key processes (see Goldring, Porter, Murphy,



& Elliott, 2007; Murphy, Elliott, Goldring, & Porter, 2007). Core components refer to what principals or other school-level leaders must accomplish to improve academic and social learning for students, and key processes refer to how leaders create and energize the core components. Core components align with the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards for School Leaders (Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2008) and reflect the characteristics of schools that support strong teaching and learning. Key processes are leadership behaviors that raise organizational members' levels of commitment and shape organizational culture. Effective learning-centered leadership manifests itself as observable behaviors in school contexts and is at the intersection of the two domains of core components created through key processes.

Six core components, or areas of focus, have been identified that appear central to school leadership and impact teacher behavior and student achievement. These components are as follows:

- **High Standards for Student Learning.** This is the extent to which leadership ensures that there are individual, team, and school goals for rigorous student academic and social learning. There is considerable evidence that a key function of effective school leadership concerns shaping the purpose of the school and articulating the school's mission (Knapp, Copland, & Talbert, 2003; Murphy et al., 2007). Researchers have consistently supported the notion that high expectations, including clear and public standards, is one key to closing the achievement gap between advantaged and less advantaged students and for raising the overall academic achievement of all students (Betts & Grogger, 2003; Newmann, 1997; Purkey & Smith, 1983).



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- **Rigorous Curriculum.** This refers to the content of instruction, rather than the pedagogy of instruction. A rigorous curriculum is defined as ambitious academic content provided to all students in core academic subjects. School leaders play a crucial role in setting high standards for student performance in their schools. These high standards, however, must be translated into ambitious academic content represented in the curriculum that students experience. Murphy and colleagues (2007) argued that school leaders in productive schools are knowledgeable about and deeply involved in the schools' curricular programs (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). These leaders work with colleagues to ensure that schools are defined by rigorous curriculum programs and that each student's program, in particular, is of high quality (Newmann, 1997; Ogden & Germinario, 1995). Learning-centered leaders ensure that all students have adequate opportunities to learn rigorous content in all academic subjects (Boyer, 1983).
 - **Quality Instruction.** A rigorous curriculum (i.e., ambitious academic content) is insufficient to ensure substantial gains in student learning; quality instruction (i.e., effective pedagogy) is also required (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Quality instruction is defined as effective instructional practices that maximize student academic and social learning. This component reflects research findings from the past few decades about how people learn (National Research Council [NRC], 1997). This research makes clear that teachers' pedagogical practices must draw out and work with the preexisting understandings that students bring to their classrooms. Effective instructional leaders understand the properties of quality instruction and find ways to ensure that quality instruction is



experienced by all students in their schools. Leaders spend time on the instructional programs, often through providing feedback to teachers and supporting teachers to improve their instruction (Marzano et al., 2005).

- **Culture of Learning and Professional Behavior.** Another core component is leadership that ensures that there are integrated communities of professional practice in the service of student academic and social learning—that is, a healthy school environment in which student learning is the central focus. Research has demonstrated that schools organized as communities, rather than bureaucracies, are more likely to exhibit academic success (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Lee, Smith, & Croninger, 1995; Louis & Miles, 1990). Further research supports the notion that effective professional communities are deeply rooted in the academic and social learning goals of the schools (Little, 1982). Often termed *teacher professional communities*, these collaborative cultures are defined by elements such as shared goals and values, a focus on student learning, shared work, deprivatized practice, and reflective dialogue (Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996). School leadership plays a central role in the extent to which a school exhibits a culture of learning and professional behavior and includes integrated professional communities (Bryk, Camburn, & Louis, 1999; Louis et al., 1996).
- **Connections to External Communities.** Leading a school with high expectations and academic achievement for all students usually requires robust connections to external communities. There is a substantial research base that has reported positive relationships between family involvement and social and academic benefits for students (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). A study of standards-based reform practices,



for instance, found that teacher outreach to parents of low-performing students was related to improved student achievement (Westat and Policy Studies Associates, 2001). Similarly, schools with well-defined parent partnership programs show achievement gains over schools with less robust partnerships (Shaver & Walls, 1998). Learning-centered leaders play a key role in both establishing and supporting parental involvement and community partnerships.

- **Systemic Performance Accountability.** There is individual and collective responsibility among leadership, faculty, students, and the community for achieving rigorous student academic and social learning goals. Accountability stems from both external and internal accountability systems (Adams & Kirst, 1999). External accountability refers to performance expectations that emerge from outside schools and the local communities. Simultaneously, schools and districts have internal accountability systems with local expectations and individual responsibilities. Internal goals comprise the practical steps that schools must take to reach those targets. Schools with higher levels of internal accountability are more successful within external accountability systems, and they are more skilled in areas such as making curricular decisions, addressing instructional issues, and responding to various performance measures (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Elmore, 2003). Learning-centered leaders integrate internal and external accountability systems by holding their staff members accountable for implementing strategies that align teaching and learning with achievement goals and targets set by policy.

Six key processes have been evident in much of the research on effective leadership.



Following a systems view of organizations, we acknowledged that the processes are interconnected, recursive, and reactive to one another, but for purposes of analysis, we individually reviewed each one. The six processes are as follows:

- **Planning.** We defined planning as articulating a shared direction and coherent policies, practices, and procedures for realizing high standards of student performance. Planning helps leadership focus resources, tasks, and people. Learning-centered leaders do not see planning as a ritual or overly bureaucratic. They engage in planning as a mechanism to realize the core components of schools. Effective principals are highly skilled planners, and they are proactive in their planning work (Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982).
Planning is needed in each of the core components; it is an engine of school improvement that builds a common purpose and shared culture (Goldring & Hausman, 2001; Teddlie, Stringfield, Wimpleberg, & Kirby, 1989).
- **Implementing.** After planning, leaders implement; they put into practice the activities necessary to realize high standards for student performance. In a comprehensive review of the research on implementation of curriculum and instruction, Fullan and Pomfret (1977) concluded that “implementation is not simply an extension of planning . . . it is a phenomenon in its own right” (p. 336). Effective leaders take the initiative to implement and are proactive in pursuing their school goals (Manasse, 1985). Learning-centered leaders are directly involved in implementing policies and practices that further the core components in their schools (Knapp et al., 2003). For example, effective leaders implement joint planning time for teachers and other structures as mechanisms to develop a culture of learning and professional behavior (Murphy, 2005). Similarly, leaders



implement programs that build productive parent and community relations to achieve connections to external communities (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005).

- **Supporting.** Leaders create enabling conditions; they secure and use the financial, political, technological, and human resources necessary to promote academic and social learning. Supporting is a key process that ensures that the resources necessary to achieve the core components are available and used well. This notion is closely related to the transformational leadership behaviors associated with helping people become successful (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). The literature is clear that learning-centered leaders devote considerable time to supporting teachers in their efforts to strengthen the quality of instruction (Conley, 1991; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). This support takes varied forms, including demonstration of personal interest in staff, providing teachers guidance as they work to integrate skills learned during PD into their instructional behaviors, and talking with students about their learning needs (Murphy et al., 2007).
- **Advocating.** Leaders promote the diverse needs of students within and beyond schools. Advocating for the best interests and needs of all students is a key process of learning-centered leadership (Murphy et al., 2007). Learning-centered leaders advocate for rigorous instructional programs for all students. They ensure that policies in the school do not prevent or create barriers for certain students to participate in classes deemed gateways to further learning. They ensure that students with disabilities receive content-rich instruction. Similarly, effective leadership ensures that all students are exposed to high-quality instruction; leaders manage the parental pressures that often create favoritism in placing students in particular classes. Both the instruction and content of the schools' educational programs honor diversity (Ogden & Germinario,



1995; Roueche, Baker, Mullin, & Boy, 1986). Through advocacy, learning-centered leadership works with teachers and other professional staff to ensure that schools' cultures both model and support respect for diversity (Butty, LaPoint, Thomas, & Thompson, 2001; Goldring & Hausman, 2001).

- **Communicating.** Leaders develop, utilize, and maintain systems of exchange among the members of schools and with external communities. In studying school change, Loucks, Bauchner, Crandal, Schmidt, and Eisman (1982) found that “principals played major communication roles, both with and among school staff, and with others in the district and in the community” (p. 42). Learning-centered leaders communicate unambiguously to all the stakeholders and constituencies both inside and outside the school about the high standards of student performance (Knapp et al., 2003; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982). Leaders communicate regularly and through multiple channels with families and community members, including businesses, social service agencies, and faith-based organizations (Garibaldi, 1993; Marzano et al., 2005). Through ongoing communication, schools and communities serve as resources for one another that inform, promote, and link key institutions in support of student academic and social learning.
- **Monitoring.** Monitoring refers to systematically collecting and analyzing data to make judgments that guide decisions and actions for continual improvement. Early on, the effective-schools research identified monitoring school progress in terms of setting goals, assessing curricula, and evaluating instruction as a key role of instructional leadership (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Purkey & Smith, 1983). Learning-centered leaders monitor the schools' curricula, assuring alignment between rigorous academic standards and curricula coverage (Eubanks & Levine, 1983). They monitor students' programs of study



to ensure that all students have adequate opportunities to learn rigorous content in all academic subjects (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Learning-centered leadership also undertakes an array of activities to monitor the quality of instruction such as ongoing classroom observations (Heck, 1992). Monitoring student achievement is central to maintaining systemic performance accountability.

The learner-centered framework provides an evidence-based approach to support the assertion that effective school leaders must have a repertoire of behaviors. Within the 36 cells of the model (i.e., six core components and six key processes), there are potentially dozens of observable behaviors for performance evaluation purposes that may influence school conditions and student learning. We have provided a theory of action showing the relationship among principal behaviors, school conditions, and student learning (see Figure 2).

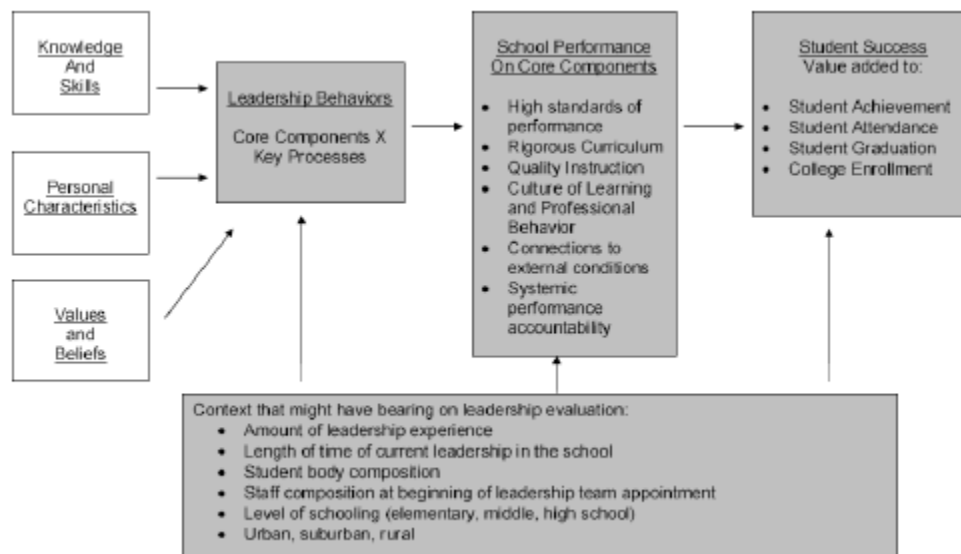


Figure 2. Theory of Change Model for principals' leadership behaviors and school improvement.

In addition to research on principal practice, the past decade has seen the development and large-scale adoption of national professional standards for principal practice that can inform principal assessment frameworks. The ISLLC Standards for School Leaders (CCSSO, 2008)



represent a small set of core domains of principal practice that emphasize instructionally focused or learning-centered leadership behaviors. The ISLLC standards are as follows:

- Facilitates development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by all stakeholders.
- Advocates, nurtures, and sustains a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.
- Ensures management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.
- Collaborates with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizes community resources.
- Acts with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.
- Understands, responds to, and influences political, social, economic, legal, and cultural contexts.

The ISLLC standards are accepted as articulating what principals should do and have been adopted by states as standards for principal professional practice (McCarthy, Shelton, & Murphy, in press). In addition, the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation's (CAEP, 2013) principal preparation program accreditation process reviews preparation program curricula and candidate evaluation processes for alignment with ISLLC or other research-based standards (Roach, Smith, & Boutin, 2011).

The ISLLC standards do not specify that principals should do something differently to support general and special education programs. Cooner, Tochtermann, and Garrison-Wade (2003) argued that the ISLLC standards do address principals' roles in supporting special education programs, although special education programs are not named in the standards.



Although no one is suggesting that principals need to be disability experts or specially certified to administer special education programs, researchers note that principal preparation programs lack course work, including reviews of pertinent education policies; field experiences; and performance assessments in special education, which would provide supervised opportunities to develop a working knowledge of disabilities and special education program administration (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2004; Pazey & Cole, 2013).

The use of the ISLLC standards and indicators for performance evaluation purposes is somewhat challenging because they have not been articulated into behavioral indicators. Several ISLLC-aligned frameworks have been used to convert standards into behavioral indicators. These frameworks are currently available and are being adopted or adapted for principal performance assessment and feedback (see Clifford, Fetters, & Yoder, 2014; Stronge, Richard, & Catano, 2008, for examples). Although most purport alignment to ISLLC standards, one of the frameworks (i.e., the learning-centered leadership framework) appears applicable to both pre- and in-service contexts because it contains observable behaviors in those contexts. Similar to ISLLC, however, the learning-centered leadership framework does not specifically address principals' roles in supporting special education programs.

In summary, principal evaluation frameworks are the backbone of a principal evaluation and feedback system because they describe practice in observable and measurable terms. We have provided an overview of the ISLLC standards and a nationally recognized framework for principal evaluation. We noted that the ISLLC standards and frameworks that we reviewed do not specifically address principals' roles in providing students access to excellent special education programs or monitoring special education program quality. Rather, the standards and frameworks are intended to address leadership actions as they apply to all students.



How Principal Performance Is Assessed: Review of Principal Practice Measures

Performance assessment instruments or measures gather evidence leading to judgments about principal performance. Practice measures gather information about the quality of principals' leadership as it may be observed by themselves or others. Practice measures may include observations of principals' interactions with staff during meetings or surveys of staff about principals' roles in creating school safety. Outcomes measures measure the results of principals' work as school-level leaders. Outcomes measures may include student learning gains or school climate surveys. For this report, the Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform (CEEDAR) Center asked us to constrain our review to principal practice measures that specifically include reference to principals' roles in leading aspects of special education programming in schools.

The Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (1988) and policy recommendations of national associations (i.e., NABSE, NAESP, and NASSP) recommend practice measures be developed through appropriate psychometric testing. Based on our review of available research (see Appendix), we identified two principal practice surveys as being psychometrically sound and pertinent to principals' roles in leading special education: The Comprehensive Assessment of Leadership for Learning (CALL) and the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (VAL-ED).

The Comprehensive Assessment of Leadership for Learning

CALL (Halverson & Kelley, 2010) is an online formative assessment and feedback system designed to measure distributed leadership for learning practices in middle and high schools (see www.callsurvey.org). Distributed leadership assumes that leadership tasks flow through schools and may be addressed by multiple formal or informal leaders, including the



principal. CALL addresses the following five domains: (a) focus on learning, (b) monitoring teaching and learning, (c) building nested learning communities, (d) acquiring and allocating resources, and (e) maintaining a safe and effective learning environment. CALL includes several survey items about special education programs in schools, educational equity, and access to resources for students with disabilities. The survey is administered school wide to all instructional staff and administrators, and it provides principals and other school-level leaders with feedback about the distribution of leadership in schools. Although psychometric testing of CALL continues, preliminary studies indicate sound reliability (Camburn et al., 2012), and all initial CALL studies have been peer reviewed by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences. CALL does not, however, have a technical manual that we could publicly retrieve. CALL focuses on the relative distribution of school leadership tasks but does not give principal-specific feedback on performance.

Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education

VAL-ED (Porter, Murphy, Goldring, & Elliott, 2008) is a theoretically driven, evidence-based, multirater scale that assesses principals' behaviors. VAL-ED is intended to be annually (or more frequently) administered to instructional staff, the principal supervisor, and the principal to measure performance, guide professional improvement, and inform performance evaluations. Respondents are asked how effective the principal is at specific actions that affect core components of the learner-centered leadership framework (featured earlier in this paper). The effectiveness ratings range from 1 (ineffective) to 5 (outstandingly effective) for each of the 72 behaviors on the survey. Within the item set, VAL-ED includes items about students with disabilities and the instructional services for them. Respondents also are asked to indicate which type(s) of evidence they reference when completing survey items. If a respondent does not have



any evidence on which to base an effectiveness rating, he/she must rate the principal as ineffective for that item.

VAL-ED was developed through a series of psychometric studies funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences and the Wallace Foundation and was published in a number of academic journals (e.g., Covay Minor et al., 2014; Cravens et al., 2013; Porter et al., 2010a, 2010b). The first and most important step toward the content validity of the VAL-ED scores was the item development phase. In this phase, the authors used an iterative item-writing process based on their 36-cell conceptual framework and the ISLLC standards. The team of researchers repeatedly examined and revised the items to ensure (a) proper fit to the framework and (b) proper grain size. While item writing was ongoing, important decisions were also made about the format of the instrument, the item stem, and other key factors that contributed to the VAL-ED. After initial item writing and instrument development, the authors conducted a series of studies to gather initial evidence about the content and construct validity of the instrument as well as to suggest necessary modifications to the instrument. These studies included a sorting study, a series of cognitive interviews of the paper-and-pencil and online versions, a bias review study, an 11-school pilot study, and an alignment study with the ISLLC standards. After these studies and subsequent revisions, the VAL-ED was deemed ready for a large scale national field test and detailed psychometric examination.

Psychometric evidence supports claims that VAL-ED (a) works well in a variety of settings and circumstances, (b) is unbiased, (c) highly aligns with the ILSSC standards, (d) yields reliable and valid scores, (e) is feasible for widespread use, (f) provides accurate and useful reports of assessment results for summative purposes, and (g) yields a diagnostic profile for



formative purposes. Detailed evidence to support validity and usage claims is provided in the VAL-ED technical manual (www.valed.com).

Summary

In the United States, nearly 90,000 school principals work with 3.5 million teachers and community members to create optimal learning conditions for all students. Research provides sound evidence that principals have measurable influence on teacher development and retention, student behavior and academic progress, and parent/community engagement with schools. Principals are influential because of their leadership practices, and we are learning how leadership practices develop and change through the course of principals' work in leading schools. Studies of principal development suggest that new principals are not school ready because they feel underprepared to lead instruction. Although principal PD will continue to improve, we have argued that performance assessment and feedback are critical and often-missing elements in programs intended to shape principal practice.

In this paper, we synthesized research on key leadership behaviors and discussed the national ISLLC standards, which have been accepted by 48 states. After this introduction, we presented the results of our review of principal evaluation frameworks, which articulate performance standards and levels in observable and measurable terms. We specifically sought a framework that aligned with the ISLLC standards. We identified the learner-centered leadership framework (Murphy et al., 2007) as a performance evaluation framework that met our criteria and described the 36 behaviors observable through this framework.

Knowing which leadership behaviors matter is foundational to the development of performance evaluation systems, but sound measures also must be in place for determining the quality of leadership practice. This paper included results of a review of principal practice



measures. To date, we found no principal observation measures with publicly available testing for our review, but we identified a number of leadership survey instruments with sound psychometric testing to back their designs. The majority of these instruments have been constructed for use in in-service performance evaluation contexts, and two instruments (i.e., CALL and VAL-E) contain items about special education or students with disabilities. Although several rigorously developed surveys are available in the marketplace, these instruments, similar to the ISLLC standards, do not recognize specific skills or competencies of principals working with special education programs, teachers, and students.

Our review of survey instruments identified the CALL and VAL-ED systems as having technical evidence to support their use for performance assessment and feedback and containing items about principals' work in supporting special education programs, teachers, and students. Both survey instruments use rating scales to collect multiple perspectives on principal leadership and address contemporary conceptualizations of school leadership. Of these instruments, VAL-ED has a publicly accessible technical manual and extensive research in peer-reviewed journals. According to research, high-quality performance evaluations are lacking in many states, and, therefore, new and experienced principals are not receiving the type of feedback so critical to shaping their practices. Concerns about the adequacy of principal preparation and performance have prompted greater state, district, and preparation program accountability, and these policy changes continue to emerge. However, new performance evaluation systems will not be an improvement on the old evaluation systems if care is not given to performance measurement. NASBE, NAESP, and NASSP guidelines on principal performance evaluation design stress the importance of psychometrically sound measures that reflect the art and science of leading schools. Our review suggests that more development work and research is needed to



advance performance assessments of principals' leadership behaviors highly sensitive to special education programs and students with disabilities.



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Appendix

Method for Document Review

Method for Document Review. For our review, we sought to identify performance evaluation instruments intended for use with current principals that displayed evidence of validity, reliability, and content specifically addressing principals' roles in overseeing special education programs. Principal practice assessments include surveys, artifact reviews, and observation forms. Principal practice surveys or rating scales ask questions about what the principal does or how the school is led, as opposed to a school climate survey that asks general questions about the condition of a school or feelings about working in a school.

The two principal practice surveys highlighted in this paper were identified through document review. We used a two-step process for identifying instruments:

1. Identify instruments with sound psychometric testing. For this initial scan, we relied on our own previous research (Condon & Clifford, 2012; Goldring et al., 2009).
2. Review constructs and instruments for reference to special education programs, teachers, or students.

A strength of our approach is its ability to identify principal evaluation instruments that specifically address behaviors pertaining to special education program leadership. We recognized that leadership skills applicable to the general instructional program may be associated with leadership in special education.

Goldring and colleagues' (2009) review of principal evaluation instruments concluded that the majority of reviewed surveys lacked appropriate documentation to support their use for principal evaluation. Through a Google keyword and academic journal search, 65 principal assessments were identified, four of which were supported with psychometric testing. These four instruments were included in our review.

Condon and Clifford (2012) conducted a keyword search of Google Scholar to locate school principal performance assessment instruments. More than 5,000 articles were identified by the search, but the majority of articles were not pertinent because they did not contain any psychometric information. Of the 5,000 articles, Condon and Clifford identified 20 instruments with some psychometric test results and a described methodology, and the following eight measure met minimum standards for validity and reliability testing.

- Change Facilitator Style Questionnaire (CFSQ; Vanderberghe, 1988)
- Diagnostic Assessment of School and Principal Effectiveness (Ebmeier, 1992)
- Instructional Activity Questionnaire (Larsen, 1987, reported in Heck, Larsen, & Marcoulides, 1990)
- Learning Practices Inventory (LPI; Kouzes & Posner, 2002)
- Performance Review Analysis and Improvement System for Education (Knoop & Common, 1985)
- Principal Instructional Management and Rating System (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985)
- Principal Profile (Leithwood & Montgomery, 1986)
- Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in education (VAL-ED; Porter, Murphy, Goldring, & Elliott, 2008)

All of the assessments that we (Condon & Clifford, 2012; Goldring, Porter, Murphy, & Elliott, 2007) identified are survey-based assessments. After completing this review, we examined the instruments for items and content pertaining to special education and principals' roles in supporting special education programs. We identified two assessments: The Comprehensive Assessment of Leadership for Learning (CALL) and VAL-ED.

