



The Principals' Partnership
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A Program of Union Pacific Foundation

Research Brief

Evaluation of Principals

Question: What does the research say about the evaluation of principals?
What are some resources for conducting a 360 review?

In A Nutshell

Recruiting and retaining “highly qualified” principals is a priority in every school district. The research is clear about the link between skilled principals and improved student achievement. Effective evaluation systems support school improvement, are performance-based, contain clear expectations about performance, gather data from many sources including supervisors, teachers and other staff, focus on growth and are collaboratively developed and administered.

One approach to evaluation is the 360 Review. The most common models use paper and online processes to collect data from a principal’s supervisor and those they supervise. There are several 360 Review models but the most notable are the [National Association of Secondary School Principals’ Leadership Skills Assessment](#) and the [Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education](#) (VA-ED).

Summary:

Research is clear; principals make a difference in the quality of educational experiences that students in their schools receive. The expectation is that schools have both “highly qualified” teachers and “highly qualified” principals. These expectations lead many districts to examine the research and revise their systems for evaluating principals. In fact, along with resource allocation, developing leadership personnel at the school level is one of the most influential levers available to district level leaders to promote student achievement.

Research on principal evaluation yields two commonly accepted purposes:

- to provide a framework for monitoring school improvement including improved student achievement, and
- to promote principal growth and improved leadership practice.

Characteristics of Effective Evaluation Systems

Successful, research-based principal evaluation systems share several common attributes:

- *Standards (Performance) Based* – They are carefully aligned with district goals and accountability systems, and they focus on outcomes.
- *Collaborative* – The system is developed jointly with principals and provides for meaningful collaboration throughout the evaluation process.
- *Reflective* – They are designed to promote self-evaluation, reflection on performance, and planning for personal improvement.
- *Comprehensive* – They make use of multiple data sources and bodies of evidence.

Policy Recommendations

The American Association of School Administrators ([AASA](#)) advocates seven policy considerations for principal assessment. Evaluation should:

1. focus on school improvement
2. be performance-based
3. be relevant to the principal's job functions
4. clearly define local performance expectations
5. promote buy-in and collaboration among all administrators



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6. promote principal growth and improved leadership practice
7. provide resources and clearly communicate procedures.

Similarly, the Association of California School Administrators ([ACSA](#)) identified five critical attributes of principal performance assessments. They include:

1. Clarity about the expectations for principals. Be explicit about the formative and summative nature of the evaluation system. Regardless of district realities, tight accountability or professional growth, it is essential that the philosophy guiding the system be clear.
2. Examining current practice to determine strengths and areas for improvement. Policies should guide and support fair and equitable practices. In some districts all that is needed is to implement current policy.
3. Focusing leadership development on student achievement. It is essential to link principal performance to the primary role of schools---to provide a high quality educational experience for all students that result in high levels of student performance.
4. Basing performance assessment systems on standards. Be clear about the expectations of principal performance and align assessment systems with those standards.
5. Aligning standards with the real work of schools. Performance standards should match the work that principals are expected to perform and assessment standards, including a rubric articulating varied levels of performance, should be developed.

Components and Effective Evaluation Systems

Effective evaluation models typically contain five components:

1. *Self-Assessment*, including provision of evidence to support assessment.
2. *Goal-Setting with Supervisor*, including a pre-conference to set goals and mid-year data collection and review.
3. *On-Going Data Collection*, utilizing routine data collection procedures and existing data sources. Including 360 reviews
4. *Reflection/Self-Assessment*, including use of evidence and data for self-evaluation.
5. *End of Year Conference*, to review the year, assess progress and set goals for the future.

All evaluation systems must be supported with operational tools and resources:

- Identification of specific measures acceptable as evidence for performance.
- Rubrics for assessing performance related to criteria/standards.
- Forms and procedures for self-assessment, reflection, feedback.
- Opportunity for consultation between principal and supervisor.

Sample Comprehensive Principal Assessment and Development Programs

A number of recently developed assessment systems integrate research-based practices and the latest thinking about principal evaluation and development. Several examples are provided.

The Consortium for Policy Research in Education at the University of Wisconsin – Madison. (CPRE). This plan was developed for the Washoe County School District (Nevada). It has several very high quality features:

- It is standards and performance based.
- It contains a complete rubric for assessing differing levels of principal performance on standards.
- It makes use of a two-phase assessment process – a “minor” evaluation and a “major” evaluation – determined by the experience and performance level of the principals.
- It includes a comprehensive set of plans, forms and materials for all aspects of the evaluation process.



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This plan can be accessed at the CPRE website http://cpre.wceruw.org/principal/washoe_prin_case.pdf. For an overview of the process, the rubric and the forms, go directly to the Appendices, beginning on page 28.

Iowa Principal Leadership Performance Review and ePortfolio Models. This system (<http://www.sai-iowa.org/principaleval/>) is designed to support the principal's work to improve achievement for all students. The evaluation instrument includes a set of descriptors and examples of the evidence, from multiple perspectives, that would be used to measure success on the criteria. The Principal Leadership Performance Review Instrument is available at <http://www.sai-iowa.org/storage/PrinEval.pdf>. Information about the ePortfolio is available at <http://www.education.uiowa.edu/ialeaders/model.htm>.

Alabama Professional Education Personnel Evaluation Program. This program, developed by the Alabama Department of Education, provides an extremely comprehensive, integrated, principal assessment system that is linked directly to state and Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLCC) standards. This program contains a step-by-step plan for conducting principal assessments, instruments (including surveys and data collection forms), and tools that can be used by the principal for reflection, planning, and professional growth. It is one of the most complete systems in existence. The entire program, including all forms and tools, can be accessed at the Alabama DOE website: <http://www.alabamapepe.com/principal.htm>

360 Performance Reviews

Regardless of the system used to evaluate principals there is value in gathering data from multiple perspectives. 360 Reviews are used to describe a system where data is gathered from principals, their supervisors and their employees and constituents (families, students). There are several 360 Review systems designed specifically for school principals.

National Association of Secondary School Principals Leadership Skills Assessment. NASSP provides several tools to support the assessment of secondary school principals. Their system includes a self-assessment organized around the recommendations from *Breaking Ranks* and a set of 360 assessment exercises designed to provide principals with data about their leadership skills from multiple perspectives. Information about the NASSP assessment system is available at <http://www.principals.org/ProfessionalDevelopment/NASSPLeadershipSkillsAssessment.aspx>. The NASSP model includes a mentoring and coaching relationship. More details can be found at <http://www.principals.org/Portals/0/Content/47187.pdf>.

Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (VAL-ED). This assessment uses a 360 review to gather evidence about the effectiveness of school leaders. It measures core components and key processes such as supporting the learning of students and enhancing the ability of teachers to teach. It is a paper and on-line assessment aligned with the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLCC) standards for the preparation of school leaders. The Wallace Foundation funded the assessment and more detail including a sample report is available at <http://peabody.vanderbilt.edu/x8451.xml> and http://peabody.vanderbilt.edu/Documents/pdf/LSI/VAL-ED_Sample_Set_of_Items.pdf.

North Carolina Principal's Executive Program (PEP). This program from the North Carolina Center for School Leadership identified benchmark performance expectations linked to excellence rather than adequacy. A validation process was used to assure that each performance domain was linked to research and practice. A detailed description of the process used to develop the domains and information about their importance in principal performance is available at <http://www.nctsc.org/Principal%20Evaluation%20Booklet%20-%20Fill%20In%20Forms.pdf>.



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Online and Print Resources:

Brown, G. & Irby, B. (2007). Seven policy considerations for principal appraisal. *The School Administrator*.

Danielson, C. (2007). *Enhancing professional practice: A framework for teaching (2nd ed.)*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Kearney, K. (2005, September). Guiding improvements in principal performance: ACSA and WestEd have developed a community of practice aimed at finding ways to improve principal guidance, support and evaluation The Free Library. (2005). Retrieved April 20, 2008 from
www.thefreelibrary.com/Guiding%20improvements%20in%20principal%20performance:%20ACSA%20and%20WestEd%20have...-a0137361082

Kimball, S. (2006). *Case study of the initiation of standards-based principal performance evaluation in Washoe County School District*. Madison, WA: Consortium for Policy Research in Education, Wisconsin Center for Education Research. http://www.cpre.wceruw.org/principal/washoe_prin_case.pdf

Lashway, L. (2003). *Improving principal evaluation*. : Clearinghouse on Educational Policy and Management, University of Oregon. <http://eric.uoregon.edu/publications/digests/digest172.html>

Reeves, D. (2003). *Assessing educational leaders: Evaluating performance for improved individual and organization results*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Stine, D. (2001). Developing an evaluation system to improve principal performance and accountability. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Seattle, WA. ED 452 278
<http://eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=ED452278>

Vanderbilt University. - The Evaluation of Principals: What and how do states and districts evaluate leadership? – Vanderbilt University. http://peabody.vanderbilt.edu/Documents/pdf/LSI/AERA_EvaluationPrincipals.pdf

Wallace Foundation (www.wallacefoundation.org) Resources on evaluation of principals

Assessing Leader Effectiveness – Resources from the Wallace Foundation

<http://elan.wallacefoundation.org/TR/KnowledgeCategories/Improving%20Conditions/Assessing%20Leader%20Effectiveness/Pages/default.aspx>

Assessing the Effectiveness of School Leaders: New Directions and New Processes

Wallace Foundation (2009)

<http://www.wallacefoundation.org/KnowledgeCenter/KnowledgeTopics/CurrentAreasofFocus/EducationLeadership/Documents/Assessing-the-Effectiveness-of-School-Leaders.pdf>

Evaluation Systems – Examples of systems for evaluating principals

Alabama Principal Evaluation System

<http://www.alabamapepe.com/textprincipal.htm>

North Carolina School Executive Principal Evaluation Process

<http://www.ncptsc.org/Principal%20Evaluation%20Booklet%20-%20Fill%20In%20Forms.pdf>



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Center for Educator Compensation Reform, University of Wisconsin
<http://www.cecr.ed.gov/pdfs/meeting2009/PrincipalEvaluation.pdf>

School Administrators of Iowa
<http://www.sai-iowa.org/principaleval/>

Berkeley Leadership = 360
<http://www.berkeleyleadership.com/pdf/Principal's%20Observer%20Assessment.pdf>

Overview of NASSP's Leadership Skills Assessment
<http://www.principals.org/ProfessionalDevelopment/NASSPLeadershipSkillsAssessment.aspx>

VAL-ED 360 Assessment
<http://peabody.vanderbilt.edu/x8451.xml>

Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning – Principal Evaluation System
<http://www.mcrel.org/topics/products/392/>

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