Rethinking Principal Evaluation

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A New Paradigm Informed by Research and Practice

A Call to Action

From the Leaders of the Nation's Largest Principal Associations

It's time for a new framework for evaluating principals' performance—one that reflects the complexity of the principalship, measures principals' leadership competencies required for student and school success, and seeks out the insight and experience that only practicing principals can bring to bear.

As the federal government urges states and districts to create principal evaluation systems, largely linked to student achievement, it's also time that principals be part of the conversation. Without the inclusion of the expertise of school and instructional leaders, the new evaluation systems created across the country may not necessarily be improved or attain desired results, and, as a result, principals may not view feedback from these new evaluation systems as informative for improvement of their practice or their schools.

What do principals believe that evaluation systems for their profession should include? The National Association of Elementary School Principals and the National Association of Secondary School Principals led a two-year initiative, organized around a Principal Evaluation Committee comprised of members of both organizations to address that question. The initiative began with an analysis of available research on principal evaluation systems by Matthew Clifford, senior research scientist at the American Institutes for Research, and Steven Ross, professor of education at the Center for Research and Reform in Education at Johns Hopkins University. They discovered that some principal evaluation practices indeed hold great promise for building the capacity of principals and, by doing so, improving schools. But they also identified serious concerns about the consistency, fairness and value of such practices, including the absence of the voice of the principal in evaluation processes.

In response, the joint Principal Evaluation Committee examined best practices from the experience and views of other principals across the nation to examine the existing research and current policy context. With this information, they developed a comprehensive, research-based framework for principal evaluation systems that links evaluation to professional development. The framework outlines six evaluation domains that can strengthen the performance and growth of both principals and schools. Collectively, we believe that principal evaluation systems can be a powerful strategy to improve schools and, ultimately, to support the conditions that lead to improvements in student achievement. Principals create optimum conditions for teaching and learning. We believe that used effectively, principal evaluation systems can create optimum conditions for instructional leadership.

This report brings the voice of principals squarely into the dialogue on what principal evaluation systems need to look like. We recommend states and districts consider the elements of this report when adapting or building principal evaluation systems. But the report is only a first step. Realizing the potential of principal evaluation as a strategy for strengthening leadership and improving schools requires systemic change to ensure that evaluation systems support valid performance results and that principals have a clear path to improve their performance and access to resources that strengthen their leadership.

Gail Connelly
Executive Director, NAESP

JoAnn D. Bartoletti
Executive Director, NASSP

Introduction

Research over the past 30 years clearly demonstrates that principals are important catalysts for shaping school improvements, creating lasting foundations for student learning and accelerating teacher effectiveness. Our nation's 95,000 public school principals influence 3 million teachers and 55 million students, pre-K through grade 12, and are pivotal to ensuring that all students achieve. Conclusions from the Wallace Foundation report *How Leadership Influences Student Learning* (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004) emphasize the critical impact of principals:

> **Leadership is second only to teaching among school influences on student success.**
>
> **The impact of leadership is most significant in schools with the greatest needs.**

However, the research to date on principal evaluation also suggests that many state and district evaluations do not reflect existing principal standards or proven practices, and many principal evaluation instruments are neither technically sound nor useful for improving principal performance—despite the proven importance of the principal to school and student success. An even greater concern is that many principals are never formally evaluated in any meaningful way. As a default, many states and districts are beginning to use student test scores as a way of evaluating principals. But these measures taken alone can seriously distort realities and are woefully insufficient for providing principals and assistant principals the information they need to improve their work and their schools. States and districts are encouraged to avoid an over-reliance on standardized test assessments of student achievement in favor of multiple measures designed to encompass the entirety of a student's learning experience.

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) have come together to express a shared belief that more robust evaluation systems will be informative for school leadership and result in better recognition of excellent leadership practice. The associations believe that creating better evaluation systems requires cooperation and effort from multiple stakeholders and, importantly, from principals themselves. Without principal participation in the national, state and local discourse about performance assessment design, new evaluation systems will not be improved, and principals may not view feedback from these new evaluation systems as informative for improvement of their practice or their schools.

A joint Principal Evaluation Committee of practicing principals—representatives of elementary, middle and high school principals who are members of NAESP and NASSP—convened in 2010 to outline a framework for principal evaluation based on the beliefs that effective principal evaluations are:

- Created by and for principals;
- Part of a comprehensive system of support and professional development;
- Flexible enough to accommodate differences in principals' experiences;
- Relevant to the improvement of principals' dynamic work;
- Based on accurate, valid and reliable information, gathered through multiple measures;
- Fair in placing a priority on outcomes that principals can control; and
- Useful for informing principals' learning and progress.

For nearly a year, this joint committee of principals worked together to create a report that captures the clear and collective voice of principals on the state of principal evaluation in an effort to consider principals' experience and authority and the realities of their daily work. The committee suggested evaluations that include multiple measures of student, school and principal success and that value the context of school environments. According to the committee, such evaluations can advance the field by building a base of knowledge that brings forward a synthesized view of the latest research on principal evaluation. This report outlines a new paradigm for effective principal evaluation and provides a framework for policymakers, researchers and practitioners to rely on when informing, developing or redesigning principal evaluation systems.

Above all, this report responds to the complex issues facing the principalship and identifies the following six key domains of principal leadership that should be incorporated into principal evaluation systems:

- Professional growth and learning,
- Student growth and achievement,
- School planning and progress,
- School culture,
- Professional qualities and instructional leadership, and
- Stakeholder support and engagement.

For the education community, this document seeks to answer many of the questions raised by the recent reform agenda: What does the research tell us about principal evaluation? What constitutes effective practice? Do current policies and trends encourage and uphold effective practice? And, what considerations do NAESP and NASSP propose to ensure that evaluation is used to guide professional development that builds the capacity of principals and improves schools?

Principals from both associations agree that it is time to rethink principal evaluation and put principals and assistant principals at the center of that discussion in an effort to build individual leadership capacity and school effectiveness. Many state systems are defining the effectiveness of teachers and principals based significantly on one outcome: the ability to raise student scores on standardized tests. Unfortunately, this one-dimensional perspective paints an overly simplistic view of teaching and learning, both highly complex processes. While principals expect to be held accountable for increasing student achievement results, summative test scores reflect a narrow definition of "student success." Summative student test scores provide little useful feedback to principals and assistant principals that can result in improvements in leadership practice. Thus, NAESP and NASSP believe that multiple measures are important to include in any effective evaluation system. This paper is intended to incorporate student achievement as one part of a larger evaluation framework that will set the stage for improvements in principal performance.

Until now, there has never been an inclusive, research-driven body of knowledge that includes the voice of practicing principals to inform the field on effective principal evaluation. Policymakers, superintendents and practitioners are encouraged to use this document to rethink principal evaluation and to take action by implementing the framework contained in this report to usher in a new paradigm of practice and put the right policy levers in place to support it.

NAESP and NAESP are committed to working in partnership to advance this new framework and encourage states and districts to review their evaluation designs against the criteria established in this document.

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The Case

For a Better Principal Evaluation System

The research on principal evaluation is surprisingly thin. What does exist varies widely in purpose, topic and methodology. However, some key points identified in recent research provide helpful insights into improved practices of principal evaluation that can be implemented and tested in a variety of district and school improvement efforts. For instance, the existing research does suggest that the quality of *how* principal evaluations are conducted might be even more important than the content of *what* the evaluations contain. "Implementation trumped instrumentation in terms of how well evaluations were conducted, how evaluations were perceived by principals, and how connected effective evaluations were to promoting the principals' professional growth" (Davis, Kearney, Sanders, Thomas, & Leon, 2011, p.8).

Although states and districts require principal evaluation, research suggests that compliance with the law does not ensure that quality performance evaluations are used (Goldring, Cravens, Murphy, Elliot, & Carson, 2009). Two independent reviews of research on principal evaluations concluded that evaluation systems have not been designed or enacted in ways that promote accurate judgments of principal effectiveness (Clifford and Ross, 2011; Davis, Kearney, Sanders, Thomas, & Leon, 2010).

Specifically, research studies indicate that:

- Principals view performance evaluation as having limited value for feedback, professional development or accountability to school improvement (Portin, Feldman, & Knapp, 2006);
- Principal evaluations are inconsistently administered; therefore, performance is inconsistently measured (Thomas, Holdaway, & Ward, 2000);
- Performance evaluations may not align with existing state or national professional standards for practice (Heck & Marcoulides, 1996; Reeves, 2009) or standards for personnel evaluation (Goldring et al., 2009); and,
- Few widely available principal evaluation instruments display psychometric rigor or make testing results public so that validity and reliability can be examined (Clifford, Menon, Gangi, Condon & Hornung, 2012; Condon & Clifford, 2010; Goldring et al., 2009; Heck & Marcoulides, 1996).

Further, in a 2012 report prepared for the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality titled *A Practical Guide To Designing Comprehensive Principal Evaluation Systems*, Clifford, Hansen, and Wraight conclude that "cultivating effective principal evaluation systems is challenging, particularly with the dearth of research-based models and measures currently available. In many states, principal evaluation is not widely or systematically practiced, aligned with state or national professional standards or linked to state or district data infrastructures" (p. 59).

Practitioners point out that strong, trusting and collaborative relationships between principals and district office evaluators are especially important to the success of the evaluation process, and evaluation systems are more effective when based on clear standards and expectations of performance that are aligned with the key goals and needs of principals, schools and districts.

More rigorous studies on principal evaluation are clearly needed. Perhaps more important is that the research that does exist suggests that principal evaluation systems being used today are neither technically sound nor useful for improving principal practice. One of the more comprehensive reviews, the Davis et al. study, *The Policies and Practices of Principal Evaluation: A Review of the Literature* (2011), reports that current principal evaluation systems have not been designed or implemented in ways that yield accurate judgments of principal effectiveness.

Effective leadership will result in more effective schools. Thus, NAESP and NASSP believe it is time to rethink how educators approach principal evaluation and how the results of such evaluations are used. It is imperative that there is a renewed investment to strengthen and support principals and assistant principals to ensure that leadership knowledge, skills and dispositions keep pace with students' needs for 21st century skills and the nation's ever-rising expectations of education. A well-designed evaluation can be a critical tool for strengthening the effectiveness of the 95,000 school principals in the United States today.

Policy Implications of Principal Evaluation on Effective Practice

In an era of high-stakes testing, more rigorous federal and state accountability programs and intense interest among taxpayers and government leaders in school-level performance, the demand for accountability among principals has never been greater.

Principal evaluation is emerging as a national policy focus, although it has been largely overshadowed by controversial developments in teacher evaluation, which have focused the public discourse about the nation's education system squarely on the quality of the teaching force. Creating better evaluation systems has emerged as a cornerstone of education reform, with federal policies highlighting the roles and responsibilities of teachers and principals and emphasizing the need for defining principal "effectiveness."

In 2009, Congress passed an economic stimulus bill that gave the U.S. Secretary of Education unprecedented authority through the $4.35 billion Race to the Top federal competitive grant program. Race to the Top was designed to push massive reforms and compel states to remove legal, statutory or regulatory barriers and to link student achievement data to teachers and principals for evaluation purposes. At the same time, interim final requirements were issued for the School Improvement Grants (SIGs) program authorized under Title I of the ESEA. These final requirements incorporated new authority for SIG funds. States and districts were required to include new teacher and principal evaluation systems as part of the reform.

Specifically, the School Improvement Grants (SIG) program authorized under section 1003(g) of Title I of the ESEA, and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, require the use of rigorous, transparent and equitable evaluations that:

- Take into account data on student growth as a significant factor, as well as other factors such as multiple observation-based assessments of performance and ongoing collections of professional practice reflective of student achievement and increased high school graduation rates; and
- Are designed and developed with teacher and principal involvement.

The law also included provisions for identifying and rewarding school leaders, teachers and other staff who, in implementing this model, increased student achievement and high school graduation rates and identify and remove those who, after ample opportunities to improve their professional practice, have not done so.

Spurred by aggressive reforms as a means to improve our nation's schools, states and districts have been lured to adopt new programs and procedures to comply with the federal government's unprecedented reach into the educator evaluation arena. To date, more than 30 states have also been granted waivers from the current accountability provisions of No Child Left Behind. The conditions of the waivers further compelled states to establish the effectiveness of teachers and principals through new evaluation systems, and districts are moving rapidly to design and implement new systems based on new parameters and measures.

In its Race to the Top documentation, the U.S. Department of Education equates the effectiveness of school principals to student achievement outcomes. The U.S. Department of Education defines "effective principal" as one "whose students, overall and for each subgroup, achieve acceptable rates (e.g., at least one grade level in an academic year) of student growth." Race to the Top goes further, proclaiming that states, local education agencies or schools must use multiple valid measures of performance, provided that principal effectiveness is determined, in significant part, on the basis of growth in student achievement on assessments required under ESEA. Race to the Top also defines some supplemental measures as including high school graduation rates and college enrollment rates, as well as evidence of providing supportive teaching and learning conditions, strong instructional leadership and positive family and community engagement.

Principal evaluation is included in the final requirements and criteria for the Department of Education's Race to the Top district competition, announced in August 2012. The purpose of the district competition is to build on the lessons learned from the state competitions conducted under the Race to the Top program and to support bold, locally directed improvements in learning and teaching that will directly improve student achievement and educator effectiveness. District winners agree to implement a principal evaluation system, along with teacher and superintendent evaluation systems, no later than the 2014-15 school year.

The principal profession seeks to develop school-level systems that foster student and educator learning and ensure that critical decisions about student learning programs are informed by data gathered through multiple measures.

Principal evaluation can be one important source of feedback to support learning and help districts and states make important decisions about leadership and principals' continued employment. Too often, performance assessment practices have emphasized replacing principals of underperforming schools rather than improving principal leadership through professional development and learning. This is a particular issue for rural and other areas where the pool of principals is small. Despite the importance of principal evaluation, state legislators seemed to have proposed and enacted new laws and regulations in partial response to Race to the Top and other federal incentive program requirements. Recently, such federal incentive programs, along with philanthropic efforts, have made additional resources available to supplement state and local funds to support the redesign process.

Because states and districts are moving very rapidly on design and implementation of new principal evaluation systems, there is concern that the voice and perspective of principals is not being included in the design process, and meaningful pilot testing of new evaluation systems will not be available. As a result of this hasty response to quantify "effectiveness," based largely on student standardized assessment scores, there has been a growing movement by state and local evaluation designs to overlook clear and rigorous standards that validate a high-performing principal and discard the multiple measures of student growth and school improvement that practitioners know are critical to a fair and accurate evaluation.

Essential Features of Comprehensive Evaluation Systems

NAESP and NASSP, the nation's key principal associations, share a long-held belief that any policies related to principal evaluation should be based on valid, fair and reliable measurements and used as a collaborative school improvement tool and not for punishment. The following areas have been identified by principals, and supported by research, as essential features of sound evaluation systems:

Created by and for principals. Effective evaluation system designs will be accurate and useful when principals are active contributors to the process.

Systemic support. Effective principal evaluation is part of a comprehensive system of support, including quality professional development, induction support for early career principals and recognition of advanced performance.

Flexibility. Principals' relationships with supervisors, schools and communities impact leadership. Effective processes to evaluate principal practice accommodate local contexts, reflect a principal's years of experience and are job-specific. These processes provide supervisors with sufficient flexibility to accommodate necessary differentiation based on principals' work and grade-level responsibilities.

Relevance. Effective evaluation systems incorporate widely accepted standards of practice so that results are relevant to the improvement of principals' current work. Routine monitoring of principal evaluation systems maintains relevance and facilitates adaptations to reflect the dynamic nature of the profession.

Accuracy, validity, reliability. Supervisors and principals will use evaluation results to inform decisions regarding professional development and continued employment. Consequently, evaluation processes must be collaborative; provide accurate, valid and reliable information; and gather performance data through multiple measures.

Fairness. Fair evaluations are transparent, systematically applied to all principals in a state or district and place a high priority on outcomes principals control rather than those they have limited or no ability to impact. Decisions about continued employment rely on multiple years of evaluation data. And, effective principal evaluation systems treat performance assessment as a positive process that builds principals' capacity, not as a pretext for discipline.

Utility. Meaningful evaluation results inform principals' learning and progress, regardless of summative ratings of practice. An effective formative and summative process is useful to principals and evaluators for creating a holistic description of practice.

Linking Evaluations to Professional Development and Growth

NAESP and NASSP believe that performance evaluations, if meaningful and accurate, can serve also as a tool for professional growth and spark professional reflection and learning. Principals report that while they are attempting to create conditions to support learning for others, their own learning is not well supported. Principals report that they have few trusted sources of feedback on their practice with which to advance their learning about leadership, and they feel isolated from colleagues due to the rigors of their positions (Friedman, 2002). Recommended methodology for designing state and local principal evaluation systems focuses on building the capacity of principals, and the outcomes of any evaluation connect to a trajectory of growth and professional development opportunities on the core competencies of effective school leadership. Further, NAESP and NASSP believe that evaluation must never be used for retaliatory or punitive purposes.

According to Douglas Reeves of the Leadership and Learning Center, "The acid test of the new wave of principal evaluations will be whether they use real time data to narrow the focus. If every conceivable idea that might make for better leadership is evaluated, then the folly of new teacher evaluations will be replicated, prodding an evaluation process that will become a paperwork drill rather than a meaningful evaluation."

Creating Better Evaluation Systems Based on Lessons From Practice

Principals know intuitively and practically that effective evaluation focused on building leadership capacity has great potential to strengthen schools. In short, better principals mean better schools. For evaluation systems to be effective and valid, evaluation criteria and measures must be closely aligned to the practices being evaluated.

NAESP and NASSP members clearly view evaluation as an essential aspect of a principal or assistant principals' work, and they value feedback emerging from a trustworthy process. While some states and districts have engaged principals in rethinking performance evaluation, other states have sought little input from principals, other educators or their associations.

NAESP and NASSP believe that creating better evaluation systems requires cooperation and effort from multiple stakeholders, including principals. Without principal participation in the national, state and local discourse about performance assessment design, new evaluation systems will not necessarily be improved, and principals and assistant principals will not get the informative feedback needed to improve their practice.

Rethinking Principal Evaluation to Define Effective Practice

The American Institutes for Research 2012 report *The Ripple Effect*, Clifford, Behrstock-Sherratt, and Fetters reviewed research on principals' influence on student achievement. The report outlined a framework for understanding a principal's practice, the direct effects of that practice on schools and teachers, and the indirect effects on instruction and learning. Their research provides a useful framework for representing the relationship between principals' practice, school conditions, instructional quality and student achievement. While principal effectiveness research is far from definitive (Kearney, 2010), the emerging framework suggests reasonable ideas and strategies for principal evaluation and professional development designs.

The Ripple Effect: A Framework for Principal Impact
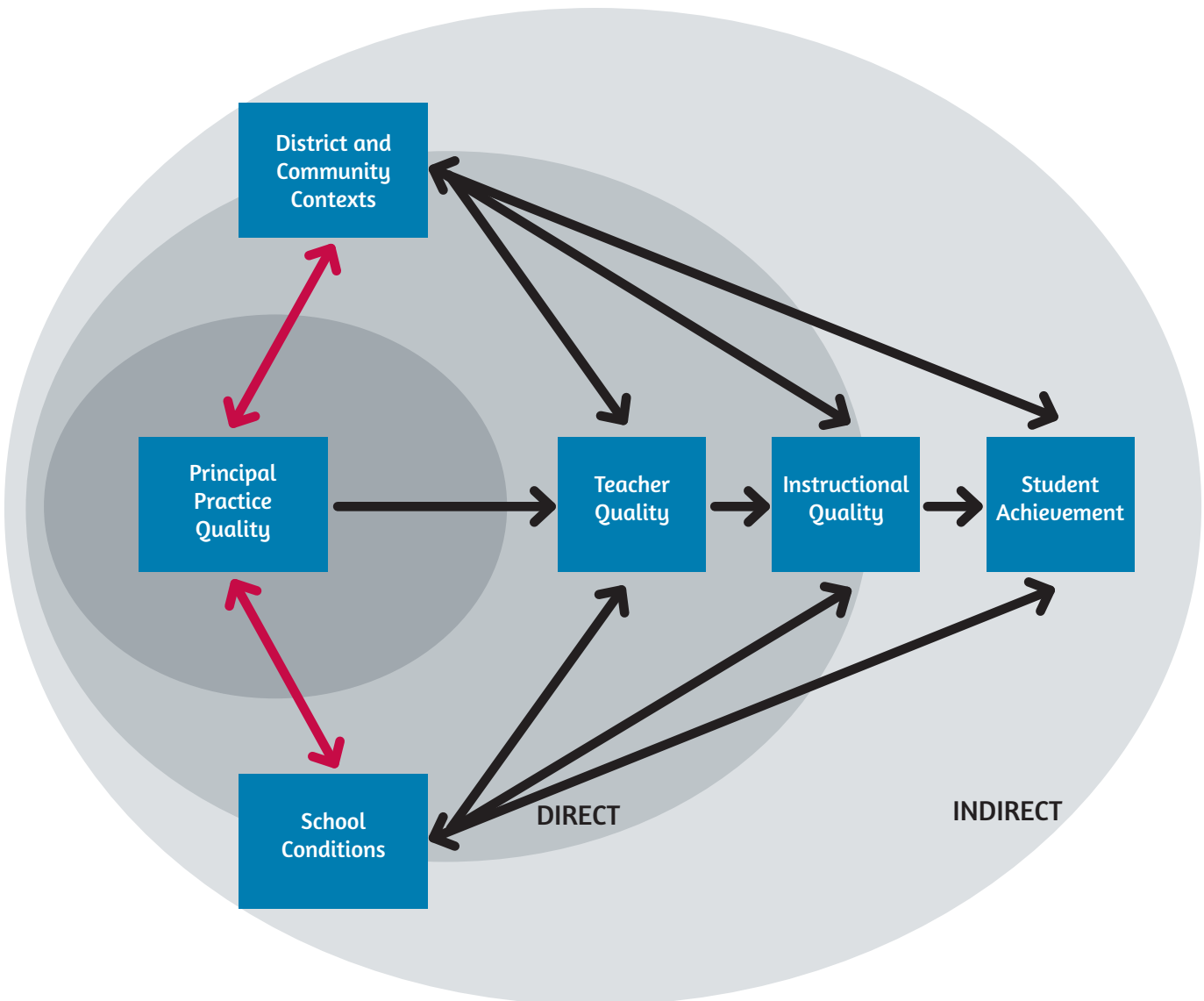
Adapted from: Clifford, Behrstock-Sherratt, Fetters, *The Ripple Effect,* The American Institutes for Research, 2012
Source: Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003

The framework diagram shown on page 10 provides an understanding of principal effectiveness that includes direct and indirect effects of principal practices. As shown, principal practice may directly influence district policies, community relations and school climate/conditions. But as the arrows suggest, principals' practices are also influenced by these same factors. Principals may have an indirect influence over student learning by creating conditions for better teaching and learning to occur. We believe that high achievement and educational success is the primary goal of schools and effective leadership. However, in weighting various indicators of leadership performance, valid and fair evaluation approaches need to be sensitive to an individual principal's ability to influence each area based on contextual factors (e.g., school, student, teacher characteristics), resources and personal variables (e.g., novice vs. experienced).

Research evidence of leadership practices that make a difference in schools has influenced the professional standards that have been widely adopted by states and districts. Some practices identified by research studies include:

- Creating and sustaining an ambitious, commonly accepted vision and mission for organizational performance;
- Engaging deeply with teachers and data on issues of student performance and instructional services quality;
- Efficiently managing resources, such as human capital, time and funding;
- Creating physically, emotionally and cognitively safe learning environments for students and staff;
- Developing strong and respectful relationships with parents, communities and businesses to mutually support children's education; and
- Acting in a professional and ethical manner (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Stronge, Richard, & Catano, 2008).

The six key domains identified by the joint Principal Evaluation Committee outline the key areas ideal principal evaluation systems would include. The joint Principal Evaluation Committee contends that in an ideal evaluation, each of the six domains would be given equal consideration and weighted appropriately with regard to the immediate needs of the school, the context of the learning community and the level of authority of an individual principal.

Six Domains of Principal Leadership To Be Evaluated

The six key domains of principal leadership are described on the following pages, along with how each of these domains might be incorporated into principal evaluations.

1   Professional Growth and Learning

2   Student Growth and Achievement

3   School Planning and Progress

4   School Culture

5   Professional Qualities and Instructional Leadership

6   Stakeholder Support and Engagement

1 Professional Growth and Learning

This domain focuses on measuring a principal's growth and the degree to which he or she has followed through on professional development or learning plans to improve his or her own practice. Recognizing and assessing a principal's efforts to learn and advance as a leader will ensure that evaluation is closely connected to professional development and will promote continuous learning and reflection.

Members of the joint Principal Evaluation Committee believe professional growth and learning is essential to an effective principal evaluation system. Comprehensive evaluations include measures of principal participation and use of professional development resources. Becoming an effective school leader is a continuous learning process applicable to novice and experienced principals alike. While different principals will vary in skill, experience and success in achieving goals for school improvement and educational outcomes, all have the potential to improve.

Heightened accountability requirements under which schools operate have significantly increased the complexity of the work of principals. Consequently, principals must actively pursue additional professional development and learning opportunities. Research conducted by Larry Lashway (2003) found that "leadership development is no longer just a 'front end,' one-time experience, but a lifelong process." Likewise, Jacob Adams and Michael Copland (2005) drew a distinction between a principal's entry-level skills and his or her ability to "tackle the occupation's thorniest problems. The hardest and most consequential tasks require expertise beyond entry-level skills and a concerted effort to develop it" (p. 2).

In *Learning from Leadership Project: Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning* (Seashore Louis, Leithwood, Wahltstrom, & Anderson, 2010), a meta-analysis study conducted by the Wallace Foundation, researchers recommend that policies and programs be developed at the state level to address leadership deficits through professional development.

At the national level, NAESP and NASSP have expended considerable effort to provide professional development resources to increase a principal's leadership capacity through trainings and workshops at annual conferences, state affiliate conferences and meetings, as well as webinars, online courses and guides to best practices. States and districts also offer regional and local trainings and workshops aimed at increasing principal growth and learning.

Measurement examples for professional growth and learning might include:

- Principal self-reflection;
- Deliberate practice;
- Participation in professional development trainings within the state and/or district; and
- Attendance at national professional association conferences and development of portfolio artifacts aligned with core leadership competencies, such as those found in the associations' landmark publications on the profession, including *Leading Learning Communities: Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able To Do* and *Breaking Ranks: The Comprehensive Framework for School Improvement.*

Student Growth and Achievement

Without question, the most fundamental goal of schools is teaching and learning that enables every student to achieve his or her greatest potential. Principals, as leaders of school communities, have a primary responsibility to ensure that student achievement is attained. However, research that establishes a direct causal relationship between principal leadership practice and increased student academic achievement has been problematic due largely to two factors:

● The definition of leadership has not been standardized, and

● Researchers lack available methodologies for determining indirect effects.

Therefore, although student growth and achievement are essential to evaluation systems, the Principal Evaluation Committee noted that while effective principals meaningfully shape teachers' instruction by providing relevant resources and supports that increase learning (Spillane, 2004), there is little research that links principals directly to student achievement (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2009; Hallinger and Heck, 1998). Many of the contextual conditions (such as student and teacher variables) that influence high academic attainment or growth in a given year are also outside the direct control of a principal.

The indirect effects are illustrated in the book *School Leadership That Matters: From Research to Results* (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005), which shared results of a meta-analysis involving 2,802 schools, 1.4 million students and 14,000 teachers over a 35-year period to investigate a correlation between principal leadership practice and average academic achievement of students. The findings show that a principal's influence over student academic achievement accounts for a 0.25 variation in student achievement measures. The study suggests 21 areas for increasing the effectiveness of leadership practice, including:

● Developing a strong leadership team;

● Distributing some responsibilities among members of the leadership team;

● Selecting the appropriate work;

● Identifying the magnitude of change desired; and

● Matching the principal's management style to the change initiative.

Similar findings are documented in *Estimating Principal Effectiveness*, the 2009 study for the Center for the Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research (CALDER) by Branch, Hanushek and Rivkin, which concludes that "understanding the impact of principals on learning is a particularly difficult analytical problem. The non-random sorting of principals among schools and consequent difficulty separating the contributions of principals from the influences of peers and other school factors raise questions about the degree to which principals are responsible for differential outcome" (p. 38).

Specific federal programs ask states to design evaluation systems using student growth models that are based on changes in test scores over time. Value-added models (VAMS) attempt to determine how specific teachers and schools affect growth in student achievement over time and use aggregated means in order to determine principal scores. While VAMS are relativistic and attempt to address the extent to which changes in student performance can be attributed to a specific school and/or teacher, the models are incredibly complex statistically and can be problematic. Therefore, principals recommend that multiple measures of student outcomes be explored and a better approach to VAMS be developed.

Given these findings, the joint Principal Evaluation Committee concluded that it is imperative for evaluators to take into account contextual factors related to student growth, including school, student and faculty demographics; the surrounding community; the school district; and personal factors, such as a principal's length of experience overall and his or her tenure at a specific school.

It is worth repeating that states and districts should avoid an over-reliance on standardized test assessments of student achievement in favor of multiple measures designed to encompass the entirety of a student's learning experience.

District and state evaluators are advised to create a well-rounded set of data points on multiple measures of student outcomes, such as those listed below, rather than using only state assessment scores and those changes over time. And evaluators need to consider how results are interpreted with regard to the many contextual factors previously mentioned.

In addition to test scores, measures of student outcomes might also include:

- Portfolio of artifacts,
- Formative and summative teacher-administered test data,
- Work sample scores,
- Benchmark assessments,
- Use of rubrics,
- Attendance rates,
- Discipline referrals,
- Graduation rates,
- Participation in school clubs and activities,
- ACT/SAT scores,
- Advanced placement scores,
- Scholarships, and
- Special recognitions and accomplishments.

3 School Planning and Progress

This domain focuses on measuring a principal's ability to manage school planning processes for achieving school improvement goals and ensuring quality implementation of the programs and services identified with increasing student success. Emerging research suggests that a well-executed school improvement plan (SIP) may be effective for attaining high student achievement results.

In his 2006 book, *The Learning Leader: How To Focus School Improvement for Better Results*, Douglas Reeves points out that leadership regarding school improvement plans can be effective in supporting student achievement if it is associated with the following specific elements:

- **Inquiry**—the degree to which leaders correctly analyze the underlying causes of deficiencies and successes in student achievement and equity;
- **Implementation**—the degree to which the specific elements of school improvement process are implemented at the student and classroom levels; and
- **Monitoring**—the degree to which the implementation and frequency of an initiative is strongly associated with improvement and equity.

Reeves writes, "Leadership is neither a unitary skill set nor a solitary activity. … Improving the quality of planning, monitoring and implementation is strongly associated with improvements in student achievement."

Therefore, to improve principal leadership capacity to create and support better schools, a principal's involvement in developing, implementing and monitoring effective SIPs makes sense for evaluation. Furthermore, school improvement planning processes are more effective if teachers, administrators, support staff, parents and community and business partners are all involved.

A well-executed SIP includes the principal's development of collaborative processes that:

- Affirm the school's mission,
- Establish goals and processes for gathering significant data,
- Support teacher growth and development,
- Interpret and analyzes data in priority areas, and
- Monitor and develops strategies for achieving school goals.

As supervisors and principals develop goals and evaluation processes for school planning and progress, the joint Principal Evaluation Committee members think it is essential for consideration to be given to school improvement efforts directly under the principal's control, those fundamental to the essential purposes and mission of the school and those proximal to the culminating goals of raising student achievement and preparing students for post-secondary education and careers.

Examples of measurements of school planning and progress might include:

- SIP implementation data,
- Principal self-reports,
- Teacher and staff questionnaires,
- District records, and
- Teacher and staff interviews and focus groups.

4 School Culture

This domain focuses on measuring a principal's ability to develop and maintain a positive school culture that includes not only the tone of a school but also school safety, enthusiasm of students and faculty and level of connectedness with the community.

School culture nurtures school improvement efforts. When the culture is negative, the impetus for making necessary changes is significantly diminished, as are the culminating outcomes of improved student achievement and readiness for college and careers. When the culture is positive, school improvement occurs at a faster pace and is more substantial. Findings reported in various reviews of research and large-scale analyses confirm that leaders strongly influence student learning by creating and sustaining a culture that sets high expectations and enables teachers and students to learn and work collaboratively.

In the 2004 study *Productive Leaders and Productive Leadership*, Hayes, Christie, Mills and Lingard found that productive leaders view schools as learning organizations. Not surprisingly, researchers found that within the realm of productive leadership, several characteristics operate to actively support teachers in their goals to develop productive pedagogies and to create positive school cultures. These characteristics include:

- A commitment to leadership distribution that supports the spread of leadership practices and collaborative decision-making processes;
- Supportive social relationships within the school and among staff and students;
- Hands-on knowledge about how educational theory translates into strategic action;
- A focus on pedagogy in which leadership is focused on improving student learning outcomes and learning within the school as a whole;
- Support for the development of a culture of care that encourages teachers to take risks; and
- A focus on structures and strategies that focus on developing processes that facilitate smooth operations in the school.

Research findings reported by Seashore Louis et al. (2010) found a correlation between schools with high levels of student achievement and high ratings by teachers regarding "instructional climate," which refers to steps a principal takes to set a tone in the building that supports continuous professional learning. Principals who value and successfully apply research-based strategies are more likely to receive high ratings on instructional climate.

The Seashore-Louis study also confirms that principals who use productive leadership practices also can positively influence teacher working conditions, including fostering a school culture that is collegial, trusting, team-based and supportive; promoting ethical behavior; encouraging data use; and creating strong lines of communication. Ladd (2009) found an association between positive teacher working conditions and student achievement. His results suggest that effective principals can affect teacher working conditions by targeting resources toward instruction, creating time for instructional and teacher reflection and engaging with teachers in high-quality professional development.

Clearly, principals can have a direct impact on school culture given their control over school conditions. Influential activities include:

- Establishing a clear vision for school success;
- Communicating expectations for quality teaching and learning;
- Facilitating professional development opportunities for faculty;
- Creating an atmosphere of open communications, collaboration, high expectations, and trust; and
- Developing pride in the school and its surroundings.

Principals who promote a positive school climate set the stage for desired results. This includes teachers being open to new, more effective approaches to instruction; students feeling safe and supported; parents feeling welcome and involved; and evidenced-based curricula and programs being implemented to improve teaching and raise achievement.

Examples of measurements of the principal's role in school culture include:

- School climate surveys of faculty and staff;
- Student, parent, community stakeholder, teacher and staff interviews;
- Observations;
- Recruitment and retention of faculty and students;
- Stakeholder participation in school activities, clubs or functions;
- Stakeholder involvement in other school or community events;
- Appropriate student behaviors;
- Attendance rates; and
- News clippings and other mentions in media and school publications.

5   Professional Qualities and Instructional Leadership

This domain focuses on measuring a principal's leadership knowledge, skills and behavior competencies. While other evaluation features are focused on the outcomes achieved by a principal's efforts, this domain focuses on the improvements a principal makes in their daily practice. Principal professional qualities and practices include the ability to lead instruction, build support for organizational mission and vision, and behave in a professional manner. Including professional qualities and practice in evaluation systems can provide a principal with feedback on their performance as they meet the immediate challenges in their schools. In addition, observing and assessing a principal's skills and actions can promote personal reflection and help a principal to self-identify areas for growth and development.

State and local adoption of research-based leadership standards has been accelerating in recent years, particularly as a means of focusing expectations for a principal's work and practice (Toye, Blank, Sanders, and Williams, 2007). However, there can be a dissonance between a district's adoption of standards and its use of those standards. Like earlier researchers, Catano and Stronge (2007) found this very conflict between adopting and applying. Looking at one state, the researchers saw districts using the leadership expectations that were congruent with state and professional standards, and yet the districts varied considerably in their manner of employing those leadership standards in framing their principal evaluation systems.

Similarly, in their review of district leadership assessment instruments, Goldring, Huff, May and Camburn (2008) and others found that about half of the districts used local, state or national leadership standards, while others lacked reference to such a basis for their leadership expectations.

Members of the joint Principal Evaluation Committee agreed that a principal evaluation system would be incomplete without assessing principal practice but, in doing so, principals want to be sure that evaluation in this domain area is tied to a common set of professional standards and that these measures are established before a review.

At the national level, five sets of standards or processes are being used to evaluate principal qualities and practices at all levels of experience.

- **ELCC 2011 Program Standards.** These standards, published by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA), support the accreditation of college and university programs that prepare entry-level principals and define the knowledge and leadership skills principals should have as they enter the profession. These standards are used by national accreditation agencies such as the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and within state departments of education.

- **ISLLC 2008.** Since this latest revision, 44 states have adopted or adapted the standards from the *ISLLC 2008: Educational Leadership Policy Standards*, developed by the Council for Chief State School Officers and the National Policy Board for Educational Administration in evaluating principal qualities and practice. These standards helped lay the foundation for states to build and support various levels of the educator system— from preparation and induction to professional development and performance evaluation.

- **Leading Learning Communities.** In 2008, the National Association of Elementary School Principals revised its principal standards in *Leading Learning Communities: Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able To Do.* The publication included an expansive set of rubrics to assess principal performance and growth in each of six standards aligned to ISLLC standards. *Leading Learning Communities* standards have been used in a variety of professional development and mentoring opportunities.

- **NASSP 10 Leadership Skills.** For more than 30 years, NASSP has worked to identify and develop the skills necessary for effective leadership. These 10 skills have been delineated in a document published in 2010 titled *Breaking Ranks: 10 Skills for Successful School Leaders.*

- **NBPTS Standards.** In 2010, the *National Board Standards for Accomplished Principals* were developed by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) to define the responsibilities that accomplished educational leaders should know and be able to do at a consistently high level. The nine core propositions reflect the ISLLC 2008 footprint in their design and are used to develop evidence-based assessments that will certify principals as accomplished.

Measurement examples for this domain might include:

- Portfolio artifacts of principal performance aligned to state, district or national professional standards;

- The degree to which a principal achieved goals from the previous year's professional growth plan;

- Observations of principal practice;

- Providing actionable feedback to teachers to improve practice (Darling-Hammond, 2012);

- 360-degree surveys of faculty, staff and evaluators; and

- Self-reflections from principals.

6 Stakeholder Support and Engagement

This domain focuses on measuring a principal's ability to build strong community relationships with stakeholders within and outside the school. Many factors influence student learning outside of the school or classroom, making it imperative that principals engage and gain stakeholder support to serve the wide range of medical, emotional and social needs of students. When these connections are active, students have a better chance of doing well in school.

Parents, community partners, district leaders, teachers and students are key partners for the school programs and services that influence a principal's practice. By including evidence of a principal's ability to collaborate and partner with stakeholders and to identify and mobilize community resources for the good of the school program, community stakeholders become valued participants in the school.

Therefore, to evaluate principals effectively, it is important to determine stakeholder support and engagement. Including this domain in the evaluation process sends a positive message that stakeholder support is an important part of a strong school.

Evaluation systems that include attention to these factors can ensure that principals are given support and resources for developing their cultural competence and communication skills in working with key stakeholders, including students, families and community partners. The evaluation team must select—and modify over time, as needed—measures that will determine how these groups respond to a principal's engagement efforts.

In building robust relationships with these groups, principals are able to influence directly the school's organizational culture by promoting open communication with families, community partners and other caregivers, thereby increasing support for school programs and initiatives (Levin and Fullan, 2008; Miretzky, 2004).

Measurement examples for this domain might include:

- Student, faculty, district staff, parent and community stakeholder surveys, interviews or focus groups;
- Awards and local school recognitions; and
- Newsletters or media broadcasts or other communication feedback measures, and district observations.

A New Paradigm

On Principal Evaluation for Policymakers

The joint Principal Evaluation Committee offers a framework for evaluation that reflects a new paradigm that includes principals' views of what an effective evaluation system looks like. The framework presents a clear roadmap for federal, state and local policymakers and practitioners who are rethinking principal evaluation.

Consider context. Principals and supervisors work collaboratively to develop goals and determine measures that consider the unique student, school and community contexts that influence a principal's job performance. Some key contextual factors to be considered when assessing an individual principal include student socioeconomic status; student mobility; student social, emotional, and behavioral issues; teacher experience; and available resources. Ideally, the district or statewide evaluation process is clearly articulated prior to the evaluation cycle and is flexible enough to accommodate necessary differentiation based on a principal's work and grade-level responsibilities. Every aspect of an effective principal evaluation process assists principals and evaluators alike in creating a holistic and accurate description of each principal's practice.

Incorporate standards that can improve practice. While principals influence a range of school conditions, not all principals have the same roles, responsibilities, authority or autonomy in the school. Strong evaluation systems incorporate widely accepted standards of practice so that results are relevant to the improvement of a principal's work and are routinely monitored and adapted to reflect the complex nature of the profession. Once performance goals have been collaboratively established, principals need the authority and autonomy to meet them. Consideration may be given for identifying specific skills that can be deliberately practiced and improved. Deliberate practice includes identifying a specific task for improvement, a way for measuring performance, and multiple opportunities for practice with immediate and specific feedback (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Deliberate practice is one of many tools that might be used within a comprehensive professional development system.

Use evaluation to build capacity. The purpose of evaluation is to build a principal's leadership capacity and encourage professional development. Results of the evaluation serve as a catalyst for a principal's growth and learning. Capacity-building evaluation systems include comprehensive support structures and resources for professional development, reflective practice, induction support for early career principals, personalized professional growth plans, and advanced certification/recognition for accomplished practice. Employment decisions rely on multiple sets of evaluation data over time, not a one-time supervisory visit. Evaluation results are not intended to be punitive for the evaluation to fulfill its purpose. All evaluators need training to gather precise assessment data and analyze evaluation results within the protocols and rubrics of the design.

Focus on multiple measures of performance data. Historically, principal evaluation systems have focused on measuring principal preparation and practice. Currently, many emerging state evaluation systems are focusing on one outcome: student achievement results as measured by standardized test scores. Because of the myriad of factors involved in student achievement and its measurement and the complexity of a principal's role in student achievement, principals require substantive feedback about much more than outcome measures related to student achievement. Effective feedback is timely, accurate, valid and applicable to building capacity for future performance. Accurate evaluation of a principal's holistic performance within and around the primary domains of leadership identified in this framework requires the collection and analysis of a comprehensive set of real-time data gathered from multiple sources.

Conclusion

Rethinking Principal Evaluation provides a unique contribution to the field of education. Investing in principals is a cost-effective solution to achieving schoolwide improvements in learning. But until now, no inclusive, research-driven framework on effective principal evaluation has been informed directly by practicing principals. The framework design presented in this document provides areas for consideration in developing principal evaluations that recognize the ultimate aim of such evaluations is to enhance individual principal leadership development leading to school improvement and enhanced student achievement.

Rethinking principal evaluation systems according to the framework presented in this document has the potential to create a new paradigm of practice for equipping leaders in the 21st century to improve our nation's schools and propel every student to reach his or her highest potential.

A joint NAESP/NASSP Principal Evaluation Committee created this report as a foundation for district administrators and principals to use together to design goals and target measures within each of six evaluation domains. A core belief underlying this framework is that evaluation feedback be used as a formative tool for building a principal's leadership capacity.

The Principal Evaluation Committee also recommends a design process that includes flexibility for evaluation teams—working collaboratively with input, data and support from other key stakeholders (faculty, community, school board, etc.)—to be able to focus on evaluation design and the subsequent monitoring of targeted goals within one domain area, or as many as six domain areas, during any given evaluation cycle.

States and districts are encouraged to compare their current system of principal evaluation against the criteria presented in this report and identify and share any gaps that need further reflection. This research-based document provides researchers and policymakers a basis for designing better evaluation systems and professional supports for school principals.

APPENDIX I: Methodology of This Report

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) represent the nation's 95,000 school principals. Rethinking Principal Evaluation: A New Paradigm Informed by Research and Practice is a collaborative initiative of these two associations to provide a research-based framework for state and district policymakers and practitioners—informed by the perspectives of principals—to develop principal evaluation systems focused on strong, sustained school leadership in support of student achievement and school improvement. As the national representatives of elementary, middle and high school principals, we believe it is our imperative to capture the clear and collective voice of principals; to respond to the massive shift in policy focusing on principal evaluation practice; and to examine the issues surrounding effective evaluation and its impact on the field and on the future of the profession.

In 2010, NAESP initiated a broad effort to examine the research and recent federal policies on principal competency and evaluation through a partnership with Johns Hopkins University (JHU) and the American Institutes for Research (AIR). Matthew Clifford, Ph.D., American Institutes for Research, and Steven Ross, Ph.D., Center for Research and Reform in Education at Johns Hopkins University, were assigned as lead researchers and writers for this initiative.

In 2011, NAESP expanded its focus to include NASSP. The joint collaboration with NASSP convened principals from each association to serve as members of a Principal Evaluation Committee. Committee members, representing principals at every grade level in large, medium and small school districts, met in person and interacted electronically to review research, engage in robust discussions, vet ideas and develop the framework that appears in this report. In-person and online committee meetings were supplemented by interviews, surveys and focus groups with principals nationwide. With the assistance of researchers from JHU and AIR, gaps were identified in the research and members came to consensus on what is, and is not, working with principal evaluation systems. At every step, their research, analysis and writing was informed by guidance and feedback from a core committee of practicing principals selected by NAESP and NASSP for their exemplary leadership.

An important part of the joint NAESP/NASSP Principal Evaluation Committee's work was to review and discuss feedback gathered from principals around the country. This feedback was aligned and supported by research from the 2010 study by the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation   and the 2011 WestEd study findings on effective evaluation.

The committee's intent was to develop evaluation measures for principals that reflect the realities of practicing principals and embed best practice research. The measures also have been extensively vetted with input from additional principals, researchers, policymakers and others dedicated to improving the quality of principal evaluation systems and school leadership.

In this report, two areas of focus—solid, proven research combined with the insight, experience and wisdom of principals at all levels—merge to create a fresh perspective on the value, purpose and potential of principal evaluation; and in doing so, it provides an innovative, new framework for the design and implementation of principal evaluation systems.

These measures are not intended to articulate a specific principal evaluation process or to replace existing systems. Rather, they are intended to inform discussions and strategies at the state and district levels; encourage partnerships among all educators to create or strengthen evaluation systems that reflect the unique leadership contexts within a given state or district; and capitalize on the human, financial and social assets available in that context.

Primary audiences for this report are practitioners, policymakers and other stakeholders creating or refining principal evaluation systems locally, regionally and nationally. NAESP, NASSP and the members of the committee do not endorse any specific measures or evaluation systems that integrate these measures without an in-depth review of system purposes, alignment, technical soundness and implementation. We welcome your feedback and recommendations for best use of this document as we work together to improve school-level leadership.

Appendix II: Members of the Principal Evaluation Committee

Members of the joint NAESP/NASSP Principal Evaluation Committee include:

Committee Co-Chair
Ken Griffith
NASSP President, 2011–12
Assistant Principal, Guernsey-
Sunrise Junior Senior High School
Guernsey, WY

Committee Co-Chair
Robert Monson
NAESP President, 2011–12
Principal, Parkston
Elementary School
Parkston, SD

David R. Adney
Principal, Minnetonka High School
Minnetonka, MN

Peter Bonaccorsi
Principal, Heron Pond
Elementary School
Milford, NH

Maria Bradley
Principal, North Murray
High School
Chatsworth, GA

Maribel Childress
Principal, Monitor Elementary
School
Springdale, AR

Robyn Conrad
Principal, Playa del Rey
Elementary School
Gilbert, AZ

Beverly Hutton
Principal of Educational Services,
Burlington County Institute of
Technology
Westampton, NJ

Linda Irwin
Retired Principal
Director of Educational
Partnerships, Niswonger
Foundation, Tusculum College
Greeneville, TN

Janice Koslowski
Principal, Potomac Falls
High School
Sterling, VA

Judith K. Martin-Tafoya
Principal, Truman
Middle School
Albuquerque, NM

Jon H. Millerhagen
Principal, Washburn
Elementary School
Minneapolis, MN

Carol Seid
Principal, Fairmeadows
Elementary School
West Des Moines, IA

Anthony M. Strangeway
Principal, Sugar Creek
Elementary School
New Palestine, IN

Fidelia Sturdivant
Principal, Wahlstrom
Early Childhood Academy
East Orange, NJ

Judith Walker
Principal, Robert Moton
Elementary School
Westminster, MD

Thomas Walsh
Principal, Bellows
Free Academy Middle School
Fairfax, VT

Robert J. Watson
Principal, Bozeman
High School
Bozeman, MT

Mark Wilson
Principal, Morgan County
High School
Madison, GA

Principal Evaluation Project Staff
Michael Schooley
Deputy Executive Director
NAESP

Richard Flanary
Deputy Executive Director
NASSP

Honor Fede
Project Manager
NAESP

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It is more helpful if evaluation is purposed for principal motivation and validation. Principals and supervisors need to tailor the six evaluation domains, noted in this report, to the unique needs of each school and apply them to match each principal's areas of responsibility. The context is going to be unique to each site—school and district, but to be effective, local context must be factored into the evaluation equation. I believe this will result in higher achievement for children.

Jon Millerhagen, Principal, Washburn Elementary School, Minneapolis, Minnesota

I believe that the framework proposed expands the evaluation focus on the potential roles of the 21st century principal. If used holistically, it has the potential of increasing the capacity of a principal's knowledge and leadership skills in areas that are not currently defined.

Carol Seid, Principal, Fairmeadows Elementary School, West Des Moines, Iowa

What an individual principal brings to the evaluation process is critical. The personal schema proposed in this document will provide a foundation for professional development. The key will be how principals and supervisors come together to define "reasonable" goals and measure progress.
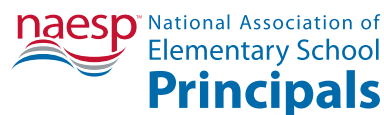
Peter Bonaccorsi, Principal, Heron Pond Elementary School, Milford, New Hampshire

This visionary document provides criterion for what a good evaluation process looks like and how it will influence principal best practices. These practical guidelines address the areas of theory, management, accountability expectations and reform initiatives, with the intent to address the demands that principals face daily.

Judith Martin-Tafoya, Principal, Truman Middle School, Albuquerque, New Mexico

The Principal Evaluation Committee was comprised of principals from urban and rural school districts with schools ranging from small to large. They represented practitioners from all over the nation. Valuable information was gleaned from this group of practicing principals to capture the voice of the principal in the development of fair guidelines for principal evaluation.

Maria Bradley, Principal, North Murray High School, Chatsworth, Georgia