

Evaluating Principals: Balancing accountability with professional growth

Effective principals are those who boost academic achievement for all students, increase the effectiveness of their teaching staffs, and consistently take leadership actions shown to improve outcomes for students. Therefore principal evaluations systems should place 70% of their weight on the ability of principals to increase student achievement and teacher effectiveness outcomes with remaining 30% focused on their demonstration of effective practices and leadership actions. Local school systems should then use these assessments to drive not only key accountability decisions, but also to support professional learning and growth.

Currently, most principals evaluation systems tend to focus too much on the wrong things, lack clear performance standards, and lack rigor in both their design and attention to implementation (see, e.g., Reeves 2009; Goldring et al., 2010). Despite being a critical basis for determining who is an effective principal and for acting on those determinations, principals evaluations systems have simply not been a high priority for most states and local school systems. As a result, these systems do little to advance a powerful vision of principal effectiveness.

This is very concerning because principal effectiveness is central to raising student achievement. Principal and teacher quality account for nearly 60% of a school's total impact on student achievement, and principals alone for a full 25% (Marcano et al., 2005). The Principal's impact is so significant because of the leadership actions principals take to create the school-wide conditions that support student learning—especially those that directly influence teacher effectiveness, including hiring, professional development, evaluation, and retention or dismissal. Even in schools with high rates of students in poverty and students of color, many principals are leveraging these actions to lead dramatic gains in student achievement. However, schools and principals are not achieving these necessary results for our students at scale.

Bringing significant improvements in student achievement and teacher effectiveness to scale will require substantial improvements in the policies and practices that contribute to the effectiveness of principals. This is a large agenda for change and it can only succeed if we accurately and comprehensively measure the effectiveness for our principal corps. The goal of this paper is to provide policymakers with recommendations for the design and implementation of strong principal development and evaluation systems. States and local school systems that pursue these ideas can use principal evaluations to drive a powerful vision of principals effectiveness and, by consequence, improve outcomes for all students.

New Leaders for New Schools. (2010). *Evaluating principals: Balancing accountability with professional growth*. New York, NY.