

SUPPORT THAT PRINCIPALS NEED



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PRINCIPAL EVALUATION CRITERIA

*Creating a Culture, Improving Instruction,
Managing Resources*

School principals play a pivotal role in creating optimal learning environments and supporting systems to ensure that learning occurs for all students. They are responsible for creating the conditions so that teachers can effectively teach their students. This includes overseeing basic operations to ensure that the building and classrooms are clean and furnished; providing teachers access to amenities like books, materials, and technology; and creating schedules that proactively inform teachers what and when they will teach.

In addition, principals must provide, if not lead, professional development that assists staff members in

developing an understanding of the sequential nature of curriculum, in selecting appropriate instructional strategies for a given group of students, and in implementing appropriate and timely assessments for diagnostic and reporting purposes.

ENHANCING EFFECTIVENESS AS LEADERS

The AWSP Leadership Framework (2014) asserts that student achievement is front and center in the principal evaluation process. This evaluation system for principals is based on the eight criteria identified in the framework and was created with the intent to foster instructional leadership that results in optimal

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learning environments for all children.

As noted by Kipp and colleagues (2014), “Today, more than ever before, principals in Washington’s schools are expected to be leaders of learning” (p. 3). We also note that accountability requirements for building principals continue to increase with every new initiative (e.g., closing the achievement gap,

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building teacher capacity using the CEL 5 D framework and conducting high quality evaluations and coaching conversations). With added accountability also comes the need for support.

Given the complexities and the breadth of the job, principals will clearly need support to enhance their effectiveness as leaders. The AWSP evaluation tool addresses the issue by suggesting supports that districts can provide for principals under each of its eight criteria (see Figure 1).

Yet, how principals might view the utility of these suggested supports was unknown. With this in mind, we asked 60 elementary school principals in Washington state to rate the types of supports suggested by the AWSP framework in terms of if they believed that they were critical to their success as instructional leaders and whether or not their districts provided adequate access to those needed supports.

IDENTIFYING AND PROVIDING SUPPORT

Our results indicated that principals see all of the supports identified in the survey as critically important to their effectiveness as school leaders. Those identified as most critical were: *time outside the school day to collaborate with staff on instructional practices and data analysis, receiving professional development in best practices to support the learning of subpopulations of students, and using resources for staff training and in-services*. However, their responses about the adequacy of the availability of these supports were low across all of the suggested supports. Principals reported having the least amount of access to: *having time outside the school day for collaborations and data analysis; training coverage and support for building community involvement; and training in best practices to prevent violence*.

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The pattern of principals' responses indicates that the AWSP Leadership Framework and the suggested supports under each criterion demonstrate an obvious understanding of the professional needs of principals. That said, it appears that we have a long way to go in order to provide our principals with the level of individualized support that they need for their own context.

An obvious place for district leaders to begin would be to target the area in our study that received the highest rating in terms of critical importance, yet the lowest rating in terms of adequacy of access to the support as provided by their districts, i.e., *the ability to have time with staff outside the school day for collaborations and data analysis*. Time for collaborating with staff is well noted as a significant factor for enhancing effective instructional leadership (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker & Many, 2010; Marzano & Waters, 2009).

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The principals in our investigation understand the urgency of the need to work with their teachers to meet the challenges of their student's learning needs and build capacity of teachers to ensure learning and growth, yet need increased support to do so. It is our hope that by giving voice to the principals who participated in our study, these results can be used to create systems of support, professional development

and onboarding for new and experienced principals.

TAILORING PD NEEDS

A more individualized suggestion is that principals themselves analyze the supports under the 8 AWSP criteria and answer the two questions posed by this study. That will help them identify their own need for supports and then they will be better able to communicate with their supervisors how they wished to be supported. Having a clearly identified list of supports based on the AWSP Framework can help principals tailor their own professional learning needs and seek targeted professional development relevant to their work. Doing so would be considered taking responsibility for their own learning and help them become more effective leaders.

Analyzing and identifying supports critical to them and what they are currently being provided, and sharing this with district leaders, can also help districts review and recreate their own principal professional development plans. ■

References

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- Marzano, R. J., & Waters, T. (2009). *District leadership that works: Striking the right balance*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.