



DEFINING PRINCIPAL EFFECTIVENESS: MEASURING THE VALUE OF EFFECTIVE PRINCIPALS USING THE PRINCIPAL EFFECTIVENESS EVALUATION RUBRIC

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ABSTRACT

The evaluation of a campus principal can be a challenging process due largely to the complicated factors that exist to capture an accurate assessment of a principal's leadership effectiveness. Generally, principal evaluations are conducted by district-level officials who often do not have the time or the resources to observe campus principals on a regular basis. Further, principal evaluation systems (PES) are designed to improve the practice of principals (Clifford & Ross, 2012; Davis, Kearney, Sanders, Thomas, & Leon, 2011; Fuller & Hollinsworth, 2014a; Fuller, et al., 2015), and there has historically been an acknowledgement that these evaluations do not always achieve this purpose. Therefore, the overarching purpose of an evaluation is to use defensible criteria to judge the worth or merit of a principal. Critical to this definition is "defensible criteria" as the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (Gullickson & Howard, 2009) recommends that personnel evaluations should rely on defensible criteria to ensure such evaluations are "ethical, fair, useful, feasible, and accurate". The Principal Effectiveness Evaluation Rubric is designed to evaluate the various themes found in the literature to help determine set criteria that is most used to measure principal effectiveness.

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Introduction

The job of school principal is challenging, stressful, and requires significant training and preparation (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Cooley & Shen, 2003; Friedman & Miles, 2002; Grubb & Flessa, 2006; Petzko, 2008; Pounder & Merrill, 2001). The workload of campus leaders continues to increase with new expectations for evaluation and supervision, changing legislative mandates, and mounting pressures for improved school accountability (Wells, 2013; West et al., 2014). Due to these significant factors, the evaluation of a campus principal can be a challenging process due largely to the complicated factors that exist to capture an accurate assessment of a principal's leadership effectiveness. Generally, principal evaluations are conducted by district-level officials who often do not have the time or the resources to observe

campus principals on a regular basis. Further, principal evaluation systems (PES) are designed to improve the practice of principals (Clifford & Ross, 2012; Davis, Kearney, Sanders, Thomas, & Leon, 2011; Fuller & Hollinsworth, 2014a; Fuller et al., 2015), and there has historically been an acknowledgment that these evaluations do not always achieve this purpose.

Origins of the Rubric Design

In 2020, an exploratory study was launched to understand the perceptions of teachers who work in elementary, middle, and high schools in Texas on the qualities of ineffective principals and how these qualities affect teacher retention. A survey was sent to campus-level teachers who work in Texas school districts to understand if these teachers have left previous schools because

of poor campus leadership. The survey contained both closed and open-ended survey questions. A local teacher professional development organization provided access to their membership database and sent a series of emails to teachers, who are members of their organization, asking them to complete the survey. The email described the purpose of the study and provided a link to the survey. Participants accessed the online survey and were asked a variety of questions related to the teacher's past experiences with ineffective campus leaders. Teachers provided data based upon these experiences through analysis of leadership competencies, anecdotal experiences, and survey questions focused on principal leadership traits.

Teachers were given a list of the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) and asked to rank these traits from most effective to least effective. This ranking was offered to provide data on the areas of professional leadership that are most important to campus teachers. After the teachers ranked the PSEL competencies, the survey asked for teachers to self-report if the individual has ever left a school because of ineffective principal leadership. If the individual reported that they had never left a school due to a self-perceived ineffective principal, the survey ended. If teacher reported that they have left a school due to an ineffective principal, the survey continued and asked the participants four key questions:

- 1) What are the three most important areas you feel that principals should be spending most of their professional time?
- 2) Thinking about the principal that you left, what three areas do you feel they performed poorly?
- 3) Thinking about your current principal, what are three traits or areas you feel they do well?
- 4) Thinking about the principal that you left, please provide specific areas or incidents you feel were particularly unprofessional.

The data were analyzed by reading and coding the participants' open-ended survey responses as well as calculating the closed responses. We analyzed the open-ended responses using an open coding process whereby each sentence in the survey was reviewed and assigned a meaning relative to the research

question (Maxwell, 2013). Relationships between codes or clusters of codes suggested larger patterns that we developed into themes (Shank, 2002).

Teacher Perceptions of the School Principal

The job and expectations of a school principal are varied and are clearly subjective. There was not a firm majority in the survey on effective traits for the principal role. Building relationships was the most common trait that teachers reported wanting to see more from their principals or citing as a leadership trait that their current principal is very good at doing their work. While building relationships emerged a clear front runner in the coding of the themes, and all other reported traits were varied and grouped into emergent themes, it is clear to the researcher that teachers know how they want their campus principal to lead. They also have a clear understanding of the functions that are lacking in the skills of the campus leader and are willing to leave the school and possibly the district due to the school leader's discrepancies.

School districts should evaluate their principals on a regular basis to determine if their principals are leading effectively. Human resources departments should conduct exit surveys of their teachers to determine patterns of teacher exodus from schools. Districts should also encourage open and honest communication of campus issues without teaching being afraid of retaliation or losing their jobs. What is most concerning from the data set is the numbers of teachers who report principals having a severe lack of ethics, playing politics, stealing, lying, or cheating. If there was an anonymous reporting system for such incidents, school districts can investigate and resolve these problems before teachers leave or the school district develops a reputation for not addressing ethical concerns.

Teacher complacency also leads to a Fear of Conflict or Fear of Losing the Teaching Position. Teachers in Texas have a right to a contract, which is mostly given on a year-to-year basis. Without collective bargaining rights in the state, many teachers are afraid to speak out against ineffective campus or district leadership and tend to stay at their jobs despite feeling trapped at an ineffective district or school. This fear also drives their complacency to continue at their current job thinking and believing nothing

will ever change even if they were bold enough to report campus issues.

Fear of conflict or losing the teaching position leads to a Lack of Reporting and Principal Accountability. Because teachers may feel afraid of losing their jobs or are afraid to confront the issues firsthand with campus or district leadership, the traits of the ineffective principal continue to go unchecked. This leads to district leaders failing to act and address the issues that may be happening at a school. A lack of reporting creates a lack of awareness of campus issues and leads back to the campus principal feeling empowered to continue their ineffective behaviors they may or may not be aware of.

Review of the Literature on Principal Effectiveness

Current Principal Evaluation Systems

Two survey tools have been designed to measure the effectiveness of a principal's leadership (Player, 2018). The Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) and the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (VAL-ED). Both tools are designed as 360° survey assessments in which feedback from teachers, principal supervisors, and the principals themselves are incorporated to measure the leadership practices of targeted behaviors at the school. Both surveys are designed to provide feedback to the principal from three main sources (player, 2018). The PIMRS was developed by Philip Hallinger and is a 360° survey assessment that focuses on ten instructional leadership areas represented in three primary domains: Defining the school mission, managing the instructional program, and developing the school learning climate program (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). The PIMRS has been used since the 1980's and is found to be a reliable instrument to measure principal practice (Hallinger, 2003).

The VAL-ED measures six components and six domains of instructional leaders (Goff, Salisbury, & Blitz, 2015). The components include standards for student learning, rigorous curriculum, quality instruction, culture of learning and professional behavior, connections to external communities, and performance accountability. The domains that are measured are planning, implementing, supporting,

communicating, monitoring, and advocating (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliott, & Cravens, 2009; Goff, Salisbury, & Blitz, 2015). The VAL-ED is administered as a 360° assessment, where teachers, supervisors, and principals provide specific evidence of each of the assessed domains. The VAL-ED has been shown to be a reliable evaluation system with documented psychometric properties (Porter et al., 2010). The VAL-ED can help determine whether the principals are engaged in practices that are normally connected to student success and achievement. Although principal evaluation holds great potential, few research or evaluation studies are currently available on the design or effects of performance evaluation on principals, schools, or students (Clifford & Ross, 2011).

Conclusion

The Principal Effectiveness Evaluation Rubric is a rubric-based, Likert-scale tool that is developed from researching the “characteristics of ineffective school leaders or the traits of “bad” or “poor” principal leadership” (Burkett, 2020). The characteristics, which are based on survey results from teachers' perceptions of the qualities of effective and ineffective principals (Burkett, 2020), will be used to develop the tool. The results of the research “revealed five key themes relevant to ineffective principal leadership. The emergent themes include a Lack of Professionalism and Ethics, Limited Leadership Skills, Lack of Teacher and Student Advocacy, Limited Listening and Communication Skills, and a Poor School Culture and Climate” (Burkett, 2020, p. 4).

However, whether school districts lack the resources for training their school principals on known continuous improvement models or perhaps because principals become complacent and comfortable in their leadership roles, teachers who demonstrate success in the classroom become frustrated with poor campus leaders and seek other opportunities. The financial cost of replacing and training teachers is expensive. The damage to the school culture and climate, too, often takes years to repair. While standardized test scores may demonstrate the “effectiveness” of the campus leader to produce an acceptable accountability rating, the damage to teachers, students, and the school community is often overlooked and immeasurable.

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