PRINCIPALS
MATTER

Principal Evaluations from a Teacher Perspective

Educators 4 Excellence

Preface

As classroom teachers ourselves, we know: teachers matter.

But our experience in many types of schools, successful and chaotic, district and charter, large and small, tells us something else:

Principals matter, too.

Principals set the tone and culture of a school. As teachers, we know we are better able to help our students when we have real support from our administrators. When principals fail to provide support, teachers feel the consequences. In fact, principals are the biggest factor in teachers' decisions to leave their schools – and leave teaching altogether.

In a city with a massive teacher retention problem, where half of all teachers leave within five years, principal accountability should be a major priority. However, despite a very public recent discussion of teacher evaluations, New York has largely ignored the topic of evaluating principals.

The eighteen teachers on our policy team were drawn to study principal evaluations because we understand the impact principals can have. We want more great principals leading our schools, but we hear little public discussion of how our current principals can improve. In the few discussions that do exist, teacher voices are rarely included, despite principals' direct impact on teacher effectiveness.

We need principals who can set a vision for our schools and help us achieve it. Our students have no time to waste.

Introduction

For New York City to close its wide achievement gaps, we need to ensure that those at the helm of our city schools are motivated, trained, and held accountable.

Principal effectiveness, teacher effectiveness, and student achievement are closely connected, and each link in this chain affects the others – and the education system as a whole. In order to provide students with the best education possible, we need systems that help us, as educators, grow and improve. In 2010, New York State passed a law creating a new framework for principal and teacher evaluations, yet the new systems still have not been implemented in our schools. While much of the recent conversation has been about providing teachers with a comprehensive evaluation and support system, we can't miss this opportunity to improve the accountability and support systems for our principals as well.

Just as teachers need meaningful support to grow as professionals, principals also need feedback to become more effective in their roles. We are not interested in a punitive system for principals; we simply want principals to be evaluated and supported so they can help us help our students.

With that in mind, we developed these recommendations as a policy team over the course of four months. After an extensive application and interview process, we were selected from a strong pool of over 100 New York City teachers and convened for the first time in October 2011. We are a diverse group in terms of experience, type of school, grade level, subject area, and path to teaching. In meetings after school, we examined New York's current principal evaluation system, researched the role of a principal, pored over rubrics, and debated what an ideal principal does. In December 2011, we sent an open online survey to New York City teachers about our initial ideas that received more than 200 responses. We analyzed the results, discussed alternative suggestions that teachers submitted, and modified our vision and recommendations accordingly. This paper is the result of our work and includes the opinions of hundreds of New York City teachers. Most importantly, it is grounded in our experiences in our classrooms.

Recommendations

Grounded in our experiences as New York City classroom teachers, we recommend the following to improve principal evaluations:

1 **Update and improve school climate surveys:** the current surveys used in principal evaluations should be rewritten, with teacher input, to garner better information that will paint a more accurate picture of a principal's effectiveness.

2 **Include effective teacher retention data:** principals should be given credit for their role in ensuring that effective teachers stay teaching.

3 **Use student attendance, school safety information, and student growth data as measures of effectiveness:** these data reflect principals' roles as instructional leaders and as the building's primary influence on school culture.

4 **Implement a system of multiple observations by trained supervisors:** principals, just like teachers, need thorough observations to provide them with meaningful feedback.

5 **Allow principals and evaluators to jointly select evaluation rubrics:** multiple rubrics will ensure fairness and flexibility for different school types and different levels of principal experience.

6 **Mandate that principal goals focus on areas of weakness:** survey and observations results will thereby be incorporated into a principal's plan for improvement.

Current System

The Current System

The new state law creates the opportunity to improve this system, providing principals with clearer expectations and more support.

In 2007, New York City and the principals' union (CSA – Council of School Supervisors and Administrators) signed a landmark contract that gave principals more autonomy in exchange for more accountability. The most significant difference in this new contract was that for the first time school wide student growth data became a factor in evaluating the effectiveness of principals (Table 1 describes the 2007 New York City Principal Evaluation system in more detail).

The landmark 2007 agreement was a model system when it was developed, but now needs to be updated to comply with the 2010 New York State law that was passed as a part of New York's application to win Race To The Top (a federal grant program, which won NY $700 million to implement new principal and teacher evaluation systems). New York City and the CSA are currently at an impasse in their negotiations to revise the principal evaluation system to comply with the new law. The 2010 law mandates that principals are evaluated based on four criteria:

student growth on state tests, student growth on local assessments, supervisory visits, and progress towards meeting goals (Table 2 explains the new 2010 state law in more detail).

The impasse in negotiations has left our principals unsure of how they will be held accountable, which puts our schools in a state of limbo. It is time for the NYC DOE and the CSA to return to the bargaining table. Like teachers, principals need meaningful feedback to help them grow. The recommendations in this paper outline changes that would create a system of trust where both teachers and principals are working toward a common vision of excellence for their school.

New York has always been considered a leader when it comes to its principal evaluations. Our students, our fellow teachers, and our principals all deserve a principal evaluation system that is fair, based on growth, and that provides supports to help our schools continue to improve.

Highlights from the changes mandated by the 2010 New York State Law on principal effectiveness

1 Principals must have yearly "supervisory visits," in contrast to New York City's School Quality Reviews that happen once every three years.

2 One goal in the principal's evaluations must address a "principal's contribution to improving teacher effectiveness."

3 Student growth data must make up 40% of a principals total evaluation.

2007 NYC Principal Evaluation System

Percent of Evaluation	Metric	Description
32%	School Progress Reports	School Progress Reports are created based on the following measures: • 60% is based on a school's growth in performance • 25% is based on a school's absolute performance • 15% is based on school climate (e.g., attendance, school survey results)
31%	Specific Goals and Objectives	Principals and their supervisors set school goals and objectives that must be based on student achievement data. This portion of a principal's score is based on their progress toward these goals.
22%	School Quality Review (SQR)	SQRs are based on a two or three-day visit by experienced educators to a school and include: classroom observations, conversations with school leadership, examinations of student work, and the use of a 5-tier rubric.
15%	Compliance with District Mandates	Principals are measured both based on their compliance with district rules and regulations and on their compliance with the provision of services to targeted populations.

TABLE 2

2010 NYS Law on Principal Evaluations

Percent of Evaluation	Metric	Description
20% (increasing to 25%)	Student Growth Data on State Standardized Tests	Principal evaluations are based on whole school growth on state assessments in ELA and Math. Additional subjects will be added if and when more tests are developed. High school principals will also be measured by a growth model of graduation rates.
20% (decreasing to 15%)	Student Growth Data on Other Local Assessments	Districts may choose from the following options: • Regents exams, AP, IB or other regents equivalents • Graduation rates (Graduation percentage with advanced designation or honors) • Dropout rates • Credit accumulation • Value Added State Test Growth
40% (could be more)	Supervisory Review	The supervisory review must include multiple measures of principal leadership and management actions: • Supervisory observations on approved rubric • Structured feedback from constituents (teachers, students, and/or families) • School visits by other trained independent evaluators • Review of school documents, records, or accountability processes
20% (could be less)	Measurable Goals	At least one goal must address the principals contribution to improving teacher effectiveness, including but not limited to: • Retention of high performing teachers • Student growth scores of teachers granted or denied tenure • Quality of feedback provided to teachers • Facilitation of professional development • Quality of teacher evaluations Any other goals shall address quantifiable and verifiable improvements in academic results or the school's learning environment resulting from principal's leadership and commitment to their own professional growth.

Survey Feedback

At the core of our recommendations lies the belief that teachers' opinions are essential to the principal evaluation process, and a revised community survey will help accurately reflect teacher voice.

To improve the survey, we propose:

1 Convening a task force of teachers, parents, students, and administrators to rewrite the survey questions.

2 Outsourcing the administration of the survey and the collection of data to ensure anonymity and encourage honest feedback

3 Administering the survey twice a year so principals can use the results to improve their practice

4 Using survey data as a percentage of a principals' annual evaluation

The American Federation of Teachers calls for "360-degree" reviews as a way to increase teacher and principal accountability, and an improved survey could play a similar role.[1] According to the NYC Department of Education, the purpose of the current school climate survey is to encourage "a dialogue among all members of the school community about how to make the school a better place to learn," yet the category in which teachers rated their schools the lowest (6.1 out of 10) was communication. A new dialogue among teachers and principals can start with a new survey, guided by four key changes:

A new dialogue among teachers and principals can start with a new survey.

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1. American Federation of Teachers, "AFT Resolutions: Recommendations of the AFT Ad Hoc Committee on the Standards Rollout," 2011, available at http://www.aft.org/about/resolution_detail.cfm?articleid=1612.

Convene A Task Force to Rewrite Survey Questions:

The current survey includes superfluous questions, some of which contribute to misleading data or simply do not provide useful information. By convening a task force of teachers, principals, students, and parents to help revise the survey, we can ensure that questions are focused exclusively on the culture of a school and the principal's role in building it.

Outsource the Administration of the Survey:

In addition to improving the quality of questions, a survey used in evaluations should come with a guarantee of anonymity to encourage truthful – and therefore useful – responses. Currently, many teachers express distrust in how the survey is administered. At

some schools, teachers take the survey in one room, with principals hovering nearby. Outsourcing the administration of the survey will encourage more genuine feedback.

Use Bi-Annual Surveys to Measure Improvement:

The survey should be given twice a year, once in the first two months of school and once in June. Two surveys would allow principals to check on their progress towards their goals and make appropriate changes during the school year. Instead of leaving principals in the dark about how their staff and school community are feeling about their leadership, active and ongoing communication could allow principals

the chance to fix things that aren't working. Two surveys would also more closely mirror the way that teachers and even students are measured, based on performance and growth over the course of a school year instead of a snapshot pass/fail evaluation.

Use Survey Results as a Measure in Principals' Overall Rating:

Current Principal Performance Reviews incorporate data about the percentage of teachers, parents, and students who take the survey, but do not include actual survey results. The content of the survey results is much more meaningful and needs to count as one measure in a principal's overall rating.

Teacher feedback should be a factor in setting a school's goals.

–Elizabeth Jandron

Sixth grade English language arts teacher, the Bronx

Effective Teacher
Effective Teacher Retention Data

Teacher retention in New York City is a significant problem: half of all teachers leave within five years of entering the school system.

In a study of 5,000 New York City teachers who left the profession, more than 40 percent of teachers listed dissatisfaction with administration as the most important factor in leaving the school. The majority of survey respondents who had found a job in another profession responded that their current manager gave them more support and recognition than they received while teaching.[2] Principals have a responsibility to recruit promising, strong teachers, to support and help them improve after they have been hired, and ultimately, keep great teachers in the classroom. According to an E4E survey of NYC teachers, 84 percent of respondents believe that data about whether effective teachers stay or leave a school is "important" or "essential" in a principal's evaluation.[3]

To include effective teacher retention data, however, two systems must be in place: 1) a meaningful teacher evaluation system and 2) a system to collect and track retention data. The Department of Education already has the tools to collect retention data from each school. Meaningful teacher evaluations are hopefully on their way in New York – at the time of publication, Governor Cuomo had recently helped the unions' and Departments of Education at the district and state level resolve sticking points in negotiations on issues such as an appeals process for teachers rated "ineffective" and the role of student achievement data in evaluations. Once a comprehensive, multi-measure teacher evaluation system is in place that allows identification of effective teachers, we need to ensure that principals are doing their part to keep those teachers teaching.

Outgoing teachers should be required to complete an exit survey about their decision to leave a school

How Important is Effective Teacher Retention Data in Principal Evaluations?
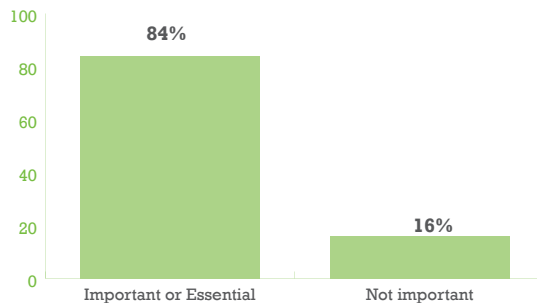
Educators 4 Excellence Policy Teams Survey, December 2011 (n = 197)

2. Donald Boyd, et al., "Teacher Layoffs: An Empirical Illustration of Seniority v. Measures of Effectiveness," Teacher Policy Research, 2010, available at http://www.teacherpolicyresearch.org/portals/1/pdfs/TeacherLayoffs%20July2010.pdf

3. Data was collected from 197 respondents in an online survey given throughout December 2011.

Retention Data

or the profession. The survey could include questions about the level of principal support and effectiveness, the length of time at the school, the length of time spent teaching, and the teacher's tenure status. The specific reason for leaving the school would be helpful qualitative feedback for both the Department of Education and the principal.

Washington, D.C. has begun to use effective teacher retention data in school scorecards, which are publicly available.[4] While D.C.'s system only looks at "highly effective" teacher retention data (based on

D.C.'s IMPACT teacher evaluation system), we recommend New York use data illustrating retention of both "effective" and "highly effective" teachers.

Ultimately, effective teacher retention data can illustrate a principal's ability to support teachers and should be one component of a principal evaluation system. Further, the Department of Education should use this information to pinpoint key qualities of principals that retain great teachers in order to work towards ensuring that all schools are led by administrators with those skills.

4. Bill Turque, "DC Schools' New 'Scorecards' Go Beyond Testing," *The Washington Post*, January 10, 2012, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/dc-schools-new-scorecards-go-beyond-testing/2012/01/10/gIQATS3DpP_story.html.

"The sign of a great principal is that great teachers want to stay." - Luke Goodwin

High school social studies teacher, the Bronx

Instructional Leadership

Data that Reflects Instructional Leadership and School Culture

Principals play a crucial role in establishing the culture of a school and ensuring that there is quality instruction and learning happening in each classroom.

Measures of Instructional Leadership and School Culture

To measure a principal's effectiveness in establishing a positive school culture and ensuring student learning, principal evaluations should include data in three categories:

1 Student attendance

2 School safety

3 Student academic growth

Principals who successfully create a positive school culture and are exceptional instructional leaders often exhibit many traits and intangibles that are difficult to measure. Although observations may reveal some of these traits, we believe additional measures are necessary because culture and instructional leadership are essential in successful schools.

To assess a principal's impact on these complex areas, we propose including multiple data points, such as student attendance, school safety information, and student growth data, in evaluations.

Student Attendance Data:

Attendance data is an important indicator of academic success; students who are not at school are

not learning.[5] Principals have significant control over their attendance data, too: analyzing individual student attendance, implementing attendance outreach systems, and starting school-wide attendance incentive programs can all help boost the number of students at school each day. Great principals know this, and all principals should be held accountable for it.

School Safety Information:

Discipline and safety data is another concrete way of measuring a school's culture. To-

> **Attendance data is an important indicator of academic success: students who are not at school are not learning.**

5. New York's Campaign for Fiscal Equity found that student attendance and achievement in school are "inextricably linked." The Campaign for Fiscal Equity, "Taking Attendance Seriously: How School Absences Undermine Student and School Performance in New York City," 2011, available at http://graphics8.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/nyregion/20110617attendancereport.pdf.

hip and School Culture

gether, principal and superintendent suspensions, school safety log books, reports submitted to school safety supervisors, and surveys of school safety personnel can begin to show how safe a school is. An unsafe learning environment is a major deterrent to student achievement, teacher retention, and parent satisfaction, and a successful principal addresses school safety concerns right away.

Student Academic Growth:

Measuring a principal's instructional leadership boils down to a simple premise: are the students learning? New York has included some form of student achievement data in principal evaluations since 2007. As teachers, we know that student achievement data is an important piece of a multi-measure evaluation system and that we should be evaluated, in part, on our student's academic growth and learning. Similarly, principals, who are responsible for an entire school, should continue to be held accountable for student growth. We recommend continuing to include measures of school-wide student growth on standardized assessments as one measure in a comprehensive principal evaluation system.

"A strong school culture is essential to student learning. Without a strong culture, students can't reach their full potential." -Tamara Gilkes

Sixth and seventh grade science teacher, Brooklyn

Meaningful Observations

Quantitative data sheds light on a principal's performance, but more qualitative elements of school culture can often go unnoticed in a Principal's Performance Review (PPR).

According to the Department of Education, Quality Reviews to balance out the more quantitative metrics of the PPR and "look behind a school's performance statistics," according to the Department.

New York's teacher and principal evaluation law, passed in May 2010, requires that each principal have a "supervisory visit" each year. Currently, only schools that have major drops in their report cards or are in overall danger of failing receive an SQR on a consistent basis. This means that schools whose performance is flat or perform moderately well on their report cards can go up to three years without a review of the day-to-day operations and methods of accelerating student learning that occur.

Every school should have bi-annual observations: one informal review and one formal review, or supervisory visit, in the spring. This will allow principals to receive timely feedback on their school's performance, per the SQR rubric. The informal fall visit

should follow the Peer Quality Review (PQR) framework that is currently offered to schools that do not meet criteria for a SQR. In addition, the PQR should be coordinated by school networks and should be announced at least one month in advance. An annual PQR will give principals a low-risk, honest opportunity to focus their time and resources.

The formal supervisory visit should follow the current SQR framework with five key changes:

1. Principals should be notified of the specific date of their review no more than three weeks in advance, giving reviewers a more realistic picture of the day-to-day of the school.

2. The reviewers, not the principal, should select all participants in the review process in an effort to get a more balanced view of the school community. This can still be done in conjunction with the principal, but the review-

ervations

ers should make the ultimate decision about which teachers to visit. The reviewers should provide evidence and reasoning for their selection (i.e. selecting a balance of novice and experienced, variety of subject areas, etc).

3. In addition to meeting with two teacher teams, as they currently do, the reviewers should also meet with a random sample of teachers from every grade and experience level.

4. Reviewers should meet with a representative sample of students. Current research suggests that a student's opinion of their school and teachers is closely aligned with their achievement.[6] A representative sample of student

feedback could provide another valuable data point in a principal and school's overall rating.

5. Reviewers should meet with a representative sample of parents. Many of the systems necessary to make a school function properly are different within each community. A principal's success in communicating these systems to parents is crucial to a successful community school.

By giving every school at least two observation visits each year, the process will become about continuous improvement, not just accountability. Revising some of the key features of the review process will allow for a more accurate picture of how a school really functions day-to-day and will add more meaningful data points to the overall evaluation.

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6. Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. "Gathering Feedback for Teaching: Combining High-Quality Observations with Student Surveys and Achievement Gains," 2012, available at http://www.metproject.org/

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downloads/MET_Gathering_Feedback_Research_Paper.pdf.

An Improved School Quality Review

1 Principals should know about the review no more than 3 weeks in advance

2 Reviewers should choose *random* teachers to interview

3 Reviewers should choose representative teachers to interview

4 Reviewers should meet with students

5 Reviewers should meet with parents

"Observations should reflect the day-to-day of a school community and provide opportunities for a principal's continuous improvement" -Rob Magliaro
Stephan Hasson

Eighth grade math teacher, the Bronx
Middle school special education teacher, the Bronx

Selecting the Bes

Selecting the Best Rubrics

As with teacher observations, the informed use of a rubric in principal evaluations is essential to ensure fair, consistent evaluations that promote growth.

A rubric should be an active part of the evaluative process, used to develop new professional goals rather than simply give an abstract numerical score. Every point on the rubric should be supported with evidence from the observation of a principal's practice.

The New York State Department of Education has released a list of approved principal practice rubrics that meet the criteria for best educational practices and school growth. Four of these five rubrics are available free of charge to any evaluator or school system. [7] In deference to the wide variety of situations in which a principal might be practicing, we recommend that principals and evaluators familiarize themselves with the strengths and limitations of all four rubrics, and select together the rubric that best fits their school situation and goals, with the Department of Education having final approval.

Using different rubrics for different schools could seem complicated or difficult to implement, but the benefits far outweigh the risk: principals in similar schools can still be compared, and principals who can choose their own rubric are much more likely to be invested in their evaluation.

In comparing four principal evaluation rubrics, we found the following strengths:

- For administrators who are new to their profession or their school, and who are working on developing or improving best practices, Marshall's rubric[8] or Marzano's rubric are strong choices.[9] These rubrics feature clear

7. Available on the New York State Department of Education's website at http://usny.nysed.gov/rttt/teachers-leaders/practicerubrics.

8. Marshall, Kim. "Principal Evaluation Rubrics," 2011, available at http://usny.nysed.gov/rttt/teachers-leaders/practicerubrics/Docs/MarshallPrincipalRubric.pdf.

9. Available at http://usny.nysed.gov/rttt/teachers-

st Rubrics

implementation instructions and concrete goals backed up by evaluators' evidence. In addition, the language of these two rubrics is constructive and conducive to professional growth.

• For principals who have experienced success in a high performing school and wish to make improvements on past growth, the Multidimensional rubric[10] or the Reeves Leadership Performance rubric may prove more helpful.[11] These rubrics are incredibly detailed and

leaders/practicerubrics/Docs/MarzanoPrincipalRubric.pdf.

10. "Multidimensional Principal Performance Rubric," available at http://usny.nysed.gov/ rttt/teachers-leaders/practicerubrics/Docs/ MultidimensionalPrincipalPerformanceRubric.pdf.

11. The Leadership and Learning Center. "Reeves' Leadership Performance Matrix," 2011, available at http://

focus on providing more holistic feedback on a wider variety of principal roles.

The use of multiple rubrics can ensure a greater sense of fairness and flexibility in the evaluation process and allow principals a measure of professional choice in selecting the rubric that best fits their environment. However, the use of these rubrics or any feedback-based evaluative system assumes that evaluations will be performed repeatedly throughout the school year. Just as it is difficult to accurately gauge a teacher's overall effectiveness based on one short classroom visit, administrators cannot receive meaningful feedback on their impact on the school environment based on one rubric evaluation alone. Ideally, evaluators should make several school visits to gather data for feedback.

usny.nysed.gov/rttt/teachers-leaders/practicerubrics/ Docs/HoughtonMifflin_PrincipalRubric.pdf.

Rubric Options for Principals

Type of Principal	Best Rubric Options
Novice or new to a school	**Marshall** and **Marzano** have clear instructions and concrete goals based on solid evidence
Veteran or has demonstrated significant success	**Multidimensional** and **Reeves** are detailed about a principal's various roles and goals for growth

" Rubrics provide the means for principals to build upon their strengths and grow in areas of weakness, working both as a check and as a tool of empowerment. " — Arturo Acevedo

High school Spanish and social studies teacher, Brooklyn

Principal Goals

Principal Goals

Principal goals are an important part of the evaluation system. However, to make them meaningful measures of effective leadership, significant changes are necessary.

In the current system, principals set their goals independently and are evaluated based on a minimum of one visit per year by a district supervisor.

The Goal-Setting Process

First, the goal-setting process itself needs improvement. Principals should set their goals collaboratively with their lead supervisor. If principals are allowed to set goals alone, some principals will be tempted to choose goals that are easier to attain rather than the ones that are most urgent. Every goal should be both ambitious and measurable. An ambitious goal will ensure that the principal is truly pushing the school to the next level, and a measurable goal will allow for principals and supervisors to honestly evaluate performance at the end of the year. The most effective goals will target the areas of highest potential impact for the school.

Every goal should be both ambitious and measurable.

Secondly, the content of the goals should ensure that principals address different facets of their role, and at least one of these goals must address the principal's contribution to teacher effectiveness, as the May 2010 law describes.[12] Other goals should be set using data from the most recent progress report and school survey to measure progress on previous areas of weakness. In E4E's survey of teachers, 81% responded that it was "essential" or "important" for the principal to set goals that are directly related to weaknesses from teacher surveys and supervisor observations.[13] The actual number of goals will

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12. New York State Education Department. "Guidance on New York State's Annual Professional Performance Review Law and Regulations," 2012, available at http://usny.nysed.gov/rttt/teachers-leaders/fieldguidance.pdf.

13. Data was collected from 197 respondents in an online survey given throughout December 2011.

In principal evaluations, how important is it for goals to be related to survey and observation weaknesses?
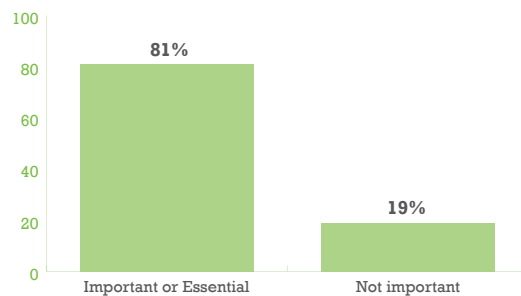
Educators 4 Excellence Policy Teams Survey, December 2011 (n = 167)

depend on the individual principal and school but we believe that three to five is appropriate.

Evaluating Progress

The next critical step is the evaluation of principals' progress towards these goals. Just like the goal-setting process, the evaluation of progress should be done collaboratively with the principal's supervisor. Without this collaboration, principals may have a tendency to overstate their performance. If the goals are truly measurable (specific, quantifiable and verifiable), then principals and their evaluators should be able to objectively determine whether or not a particular goal was met. This will remove much of the subjectivity from the process and ensure that schools are making real progress in serving our students effectively.

We also recommend that principals be required to communicate their goals to the school community. When this communication is present, staff members are more likely to be motivated to work as a team and feel connected to the principal's vision for the school. Transparent goals will allow the evaluation of the principal to be more objective, as more stakeholders will be aware of whether or not the goals have been accomplished.

Providing Individualized Support

Teachers want support from principals as they strive to reach classroom goals, and principals need support in achieving their goals, too. A December or January check-in with principal supervisors can help ensure that principals are on track towards their goals, providing additional feedback and suggestions for improvement. Mid-year peer observations, as referenced in the observations section, will help principals feel supported, too.

Finally, principals need differentiation in their evaluations, just as students and teachers do. As New Leaders for New Schools explains, the best principal evaluation programs "develop performance expectations that are universally high and differentiated in ways that drive continuous improvement."[14] Each principal is in a different stage of his or her professional development, as is each school, and these differences should be taken into consideration during the goal-setting process. A principal at a turnaround school might focus goals around school environment and safety, whereas a principal at a high-performing school might focus on creating partnerships with outside organizations to further expand students' horizons. The key here is to recognize that while principal goals should be both measurable and challenging, they should also be purposeful in targeting the areas that would be most beneficial to their individual school.

14. New Leaders for New Schools, "Evaluating Principals," Executive Summary, 2010, available at http://www.newleaders.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/EP-onepager.pdf.

The goals that I set for myself and my students are an essential part of my classroom. Principal goals should be equally important in improving our schools. — Ryan Hall

Eighth grade math teacher, Brooklyn

Conclusion

Closing the achievement gap between low-income students and their higher income peers is no easy task — and it can't be done by teachers alone.

A large and widely respected body of research has shown that the classroom teacher is the single most important in-school factor in improving student achievement, but teachers aren't superheroes, and we can't expect them to shoulder this responsibility individually.

Great principals who set a positive culture in a school, serve as instructional leaders, and know how to support teachers are essential for the transformation of our schools. As teachers striving to improve our own practice and contribute to our schools' success, we want to see our principals lead by example, and we want their evaluation system to support their growth. It's time for principal evaluations to take the spotlight so that principals can get fair, useful feedback that will benefit all of us – and ultimately help our students fulfill their potential.

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For far too long, education policy has been created without a critical voice at the table - the voice of classroom teachers.

Educators 4 Excellence (E4E), a teacher-led organization, is changing this dynamic by placing the voices of teachers at the forefront of the conversations that shape our classrooms and careers.

With a quickly growing national network of over 3,500 educators united by the E4E Declaration of Teachers' Principles and Beliefs, E4E teachers can learn about education policy and research, network at E4E's event series with like-minded colleagues and important education policymakers, and take action by advocating for teacher-created policy recommendations that lift student achievement and the teaching profession.

Learn more at Educators4Excellence.org.