



Supporting Principals in Implementing Teacher Evaluation Systems

Recommendations from practicing
principals to improve instruction
and learning

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A Call to Action

From the Leaders of the Nation's Principal Associations

Over the past year, policy makers have focused on the implementation of new teacher evaluation systems as a key reform initiative. As instructional leaders, principals bear the primary responsibility of implementing teacher evaluation and believe that evaluation should aim to build teachers' instructional capacity.

Principals know—as does the rest of the educational community—that teacher quality is the single most important school-based factor in student achievement. Principals want their schools and students to achieve. In light of that desire, principals want the teacher evaluation process to be successful. A successful process is predicated on meaningful feedback, mentoring, and coaching, as well as appropriate support for principals to execute evaluation models that accomplish the goal of evaluation—to improve instruction and learning in the school building.

As the leading organizations for the nation's principals representing prekindergarten through 12th grade, we convened a body of practicing school leaders to examine existing research and provide perspective on how the profession is being affected by the widespread state adoption of new teacher evaluation systems. The recommendations that follow—intended for consideration by decision makers at all levels—are the result of their thoughtful discussion and deliberation.

No one is more invested than principals in the quality of instruction throughout the nation's schools. We encourage swift action on these recommendations so that we can accelerate our common goal: helping teachers optimize their instruction so that students can maximize their learning.

Sincerely,



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Introduction

Over the past two years, the onus that teacher evaluation implementation places on principals has been minimally covered by the literature. Prior studies, however, reveal a series of concerns related to a principal's ability to implement effective teacher evaluation models:

- Lack of evidence that the majority of a principal's time spent on teacher observations will lead to improved instruction and learning
- Insufficient training to complete teacher evaluations that will allow principals to differentiate performance and engage in a high level of instructional coaching
- Unclear or narrowly defined rubrics for observations
- Insufficient feedback mechanisms or ways to support meaningful principal-teacher relationships
- Inadequate time provided during the school year for principals to conduct substantive, meaningful teacher evaluations and instructional coaching that will lead to improved teacher performance.

Among the many issues for principals, the "time factor" has emerged as an overwhelming concern, particularly as districts continue to eliminate assistant principals and other instructional support positions. A February 2013 survey of NAESP and NASSP members found that a substantive teacher evaluation requires 11–15 hours per teacher over the course of a school year. On average, principals manage 10 to 40 staff members in smaller schools and upwards of 60 personnel in larger schools. The ability to provide an accurate and actionable evaluation for every teacher poses a growing dilemma for principals given their full range of responsibilities.

Recommendations

▪ **Require states and districts to spend at least 10% of Title II funds from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) on high-quality professional development tied to new federal reforms that have changed school leadership roles and responsibilities.**

- The needs of principals are overlooked in current ESEA provisions as states and districts currently spend less than 4% of Title II "allowable use" of funds on principal professional development. As federal regulation requires principals to direct a variety of new reform initiatives in schools, this drastic misalignment of policy and practice cannot persist.

▪ **Provide high-quality training, credentialing, and ongoing professional development on teacher evaluation for principals.**

- States and school districts must provide programs that have clear definition and metrics on the length, components, and regularity of training and credentialing so that principals are training appropriately as evaluators. For example, Cincinnati (OH) Public Schools requires evaluator training that focuses on the evaluation rubric, citing appropriate evidence to support rubric metrics, avoiding bias, and ensuring accuracy in the evaluation process through videotaped assessments and a companion evaluation to ensure inter-rater reliability. In addition, the Ohio State Board of Education has created a credentialing system that includes three days of face-to-face training along with an online assessment component to certify principals and others as evaluators. If the online assessment is not completed successfully, then the potential evaluator receives additional training until he or she is fully credentialed and well-prepared to conduct meaningful teacher evaluations.

- States and school districts must establish consistent, regular, and fully-funded programmatic support for principals on proper evaluation of non-instructional staff, such as school psychologists or other specialized instructional support personnel.
- States and school districts must annually provide principals with dedicated time during the school year for professional development and engagement with teachers, instructional staff members, and support personnel on the various components of the evaluation systems and related tools. Principals note that states and districts have not consistently provided principals as well as all staff with joint professional development to fully understand and be prepared to go through a teacher evaluation model. Many states and districts are working to address this issue, such as Montgomery County Public Schools (MD), which provides the Teacher Professional Growth System (TPGS). This program requires two six-day, 39-hour courses for principals and any other evaluators as well as teachers to “increase accountability, create a common language for the discussion of what good teaching is, and to develop skills of analysis and critique that will make the dialogue a rich and data driven” effort to improve instructional practices (Leahy, 2012).
- Research has proven that one of the most positive impacts a principal can have in his or her school occurs when they are able to focus on instructional coaching and build strong relationships with teachers. States and school districts must include training for principals on best practices for instructional coaching, including how to improve their ability to mentor and coach teachers to build their capacity to improve. Without instructional coaching, there is no mechanism to support growth and improvement of teacher performance within the evaluation systems.

▪ **Respect the professional judgment of principals in the teacher evaluation process, and ensure sufficient opportunities for principals to provide direct feedback on the teacher evaluation models to verify that the evaluations are leading to improved teaching and learning in schools.**

- Given their unique perspective, principals should have a major role in the decision-making process at the state and local levels regarding the use of evaluation and correlated professional development opportunities, improvement plans, and personnel decisions regarding the instructional staff under their leadership.
- As instructional leaders, principals are uniquely qualified to recognize great teaching in their schools even when it is not a metric on a rubric. A principal from Ohio said, “While the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES) rubric is a holistic tool that has led to richer discussion on instructional practice, it does not measure the moments of magic that occur in a team-teaching situation, nor does it address the tacit exchange of information between the individual student and teacher, nor does it encapsulate the moment a teacher decides to deviate from the lesson plan based on the needs of the class at the moment of frontline instruction, nor does it quantify the teacher-principal relationship.” Great teaching is an art, whose elements are often identified better by professional judgment than by a metric.

▪ **Reduce the number of observations required for teachers who demonstrate effectiveness and focus their evaluation on professional growth plans to maximize the time for principals to engage in instructional coaching.**

- Effective teacher evaluations empower teachers to improve their instruction. Research shows that principals have the

most positive impact when focused on teacher coaching in the evaluation process. Yet, principals spend more time observing than coaching, although coaching is proven to be a better time investment. Reducing the frequency and length of required observations for already highly effective teachers provides schools a greater benefit by allowing principals to work with the teachers who are most in need of support to improve.

■ **Provide consistent funding for schools to hire assistant principals and other school administrators who provide direct support for teachers in every elementary, middle, and high school.**

- As a minimum requirement, a full-time, certified assistant principal should be employed in any elementary, middle level, or high school with more than 400 students. Policy makers might find a model in the Springdale (AR) Public School District, which provides full-time assistant principals for every elementary school regardless of enrollment to support the full range of leadership responsibilities in school.
- Principals and assistant principals are uniquely situated to understand the needs of the students and educators in the building and must retain their authority to recruit, select, and evaluate all instructional staff members and support personnel as an integral component of a high-functioning school. Although some states and districts have had to turn to outside evaluators to conduct observations, NASSP and NAESP strongly believe that schools should have sufficient funding to hire the school-based administrators they need.

■ **Provide personalized professional development for all teachers to support collaboration and best practices within school districts and schools to improve instruction and learning.**

- A 2014 study on the implementation of Connecticut's System for Educator Evaluation and Development (SEED) found that few teachers received specific professional learning opportunities as a result of their evaluation. School districts and schools must provide ongoing professional development and learning at every stage of an educator's career. Principals understand that they fill the crucial need to support teachers day in and day out to improve instructional practices and that a personalized approach is the best way to help them improve their performance.
- In *Breaking Ranks, The Comprehensive Framework for School Improvement*, NASSP recommends that all staff members and their supervising administrators develop personal learning plans (PLPs) that are tailored to meet individual professional development needs and support the school improvement plan.

■ **Provide principals with effective technology and related tools to facilitate efficient observations and support them to disseminate timely feedback to teachers as well as personalize professional development and learning opportunities.**

- Principals must have access to and training on technology for collecting teacher evaluation data and systems that provide professional development resources linked to evaluation metrics. Principals in the Kenai Peninsula (AK) Borough School District piloted a promising instruction and leadership management system, iObservation. iObservation allows principals to conduct and document observations and evaluations of teachers and also provides a vast library of documents

and videos for teacher professional development. Teachers can access print and digital content for their personalized learning needs. Principals can, on the basis of their observations and evaluations, assign articles or videos for an individual or groups of teachers to read or watch. In addition, principals and teachers can use the software to create fully individualized professional development programs that are based on the evaluation metrics.

- Principals with access to the appropriate technology who are properly trained can facilitate the creation of personalized and formalized online personal learning plans to help determine the impact of evaluation on student growth and advance the goals of a school improvement plan.

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About NASSP

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The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) is the leading organization of and national voice for principals, assistant principals, and all school leaders in middle level and high schools from across the United States and in 36 countries. The association connects and engages school leaders through advocacy, research, education, and student programs. NASSP advocates on behalf of all school leaders to ensure the success of each student and strengthens school leadership practices through the design and delivery of high quality professional learning experiences. Reflecting its long-standing commitment to student leadership development, NASSP administers the National Honor Society, National Junior Honor Society, National Elementary Honor Society, and National Association of Student Councils.



About NAESP

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Established in 1921, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) leads in the advocacy and support for elementary and middle school principals in the United States and internationally. NAESP supports principals as the primary catalysts for creating lasting foundations for learning through policy and professional development, advocacy, programs and resources for effective instructional leadership. NAESP advances the profession on behalf of all principals, providing specialized support and mentoring for early career principals. Key focus areas including pre-K-3 education, school safety, technology and digital learning, and capacity-building educator evaluation. For more information about NAESP, please visit www.naesp.org.