

Minnesota Principals Academy - Action Learning Project

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Rethinking Principal Evaluation

Five Years After Legislation: Evaluations that Affirm, Validate, Motivate, and Celebrate

Abstract

This Action Learning Project utilized in-person discussions with twenty-five principal members of the Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association (MESPA) and was conducted by the executive director and staff of the association. It also included three hundred and fifty principal responses to a MESPA member survey conducted in the spring of 2017. This information generated a principal perspective of the implementation practices their districts engaged in since the legislation passed in a 2011 special session. MESPA serves the state of Minnesota with twelve divisions. The principal evaluation discussions were conducted with MESPA's northern and southwest divisions with ongoing plans to connect with the remaining ten divisions. The member survey represents a balanced distribution of principal responses throughout the state.

Vision:

Assess and improve the impact of legislated principal evaluation as experienced by individual principals.

Background / Context:

MESPA serves roughly 1,000 elementary and middle-level, mostly public, school principals throughout Minnesota. The executive director conducted daylong workshops focusing on principal evaluations. The discussion question presented to the two groups of principals was, "In what ways does your principal evaluation, affirm, validate, motivate, and celebrate your performance as a school leader?" These discussions yielded information about current practices for these mostly rural groups. The member survey presented to the entire membership consisted of association satisfaction questions including; how do principals make professional development decisions for their own personal growth.

What we found out:

1. All interviewed principals engaged in annual principal evaluations with their supervisors. This condition did not exist previous to the 2011 legislation.
2. Given that legislation provides for flexibility and local control in the development of principal evaluation models, there seems to be significant variations in how districts conduct evaluations with their principals. Common choices for principal evaluation models were Danielson, Marzano, Bruce Miles, PrinEval, MDE and district designs between superintendents, principals, and school boards. While most of the principal

evaluation models used by districts have the potential to be quite rigorous and focused on student achievement, variations in outcomes for principals were reported to be driven by the strength of the relationship between a principal and their supervisor.

3. While the legislation states, “the evaluation must use longitudinal data on student academic growth as 35 percent of the evaluation and incorporate district achievement goals and targets,” a clear practice in following this part of the statute varies widely from district to district.
4. The legislation also states, “[the evaluation] must allow surveys to help identify a principal’s effectiveness, leadership skills and processes, and strengths and weaknesses in exercising leadership in pursuit of school success.” A clear practice in following this statute is concerning to principals as some school boards and superintendents are solely using anonymous teacher surveys as summative assessments and, in some cases, sharing private performance data from surveys with the public. The Minnesota Department of Education recommendation for use of surveys indicates they be designed for formative data and utilized in a way that adheres to data privacy regulations.
5. While in some cases metro principals have more revenues in their principal budgets, the average amount of \$500-\$1500/year is not enough to support most principals in gaining skills to match their instructional leadership responsibilities.

Implications for practice

- A. Collegial and informed relationships between principals and supervisors yield higher improvement for the students and stronger growth for the principal.
- B. Careful use of survey integrity is important to principals in order to experience fairness and confidence in the evaluation process.
- C. A review of the MDE principal evaluation model and useful tools on their website offers best practices for Principal Evaluation and may result in increased principal satisfaction. <http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/dse/prev/model/>
- D. MESPA principals report high satisfaction and return in participating with colleagues in professional development designed by the association. This includes the Minnesota Principals Academy, MESPA Institute, legal seminars, the MVP Series, and 21CSO.
- E. Minnesota principals embrace the performance evaluation process and seek to accomplish rigorous standards for the sake of student achievement. It is imperative that a high-quality evaluation system offers a trusting relationship with a qualified supervisor along with generous practices in providing release time and revenues to engage in high-quality principal professional development.