

# ILLINOIS PRINCIPAL EVALUATION PLAN (IPEP)

## A Systems Approach for Effective Principal Evaluation

### Introduction

The Performance Evaluation Reform Act of 2010 was passed in Illinois to provide direction for developing *performance evaluation systems* for teachers and principals that *are valid and reliable and contribute to the development of staff and improved student achievement outcomes*. Some of the key requirements for complying with this Act as it pertains to principal evaluation after September 1, 2012 are the following:

- The principal must be evaluated in writing at least once every school year.
- The evaluation must take into consideration the principal's specific duties, responsibilities, management, and competence as a principal.
- The evaluation must specify the principal's strengths and weaknesses with supporting reasons.
- The principal must be rated as *excellent, proficient, needs improvement, or unsatisfactory*.
- The evaluation must provide for the use of data and indicators on student growth as a significant factor in rating the principal's performance.

Some may ask why student growth is being included as a significant factor in rating a principal's performance. This direction is based largely on recent research that has shown that leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school. The leadership of the principal accounts for about 25% of the variance in student achievement. Therefore, it is important to include student growth as a significant factor in rating a principal's performance.

### The Focus of the Illinois Principal Evaluation Plan

It is important to note that the focus of the Illinois Principal Evaluation Plan is on facilitating meaningful and productive systems change rather than on just building leadership capacity or competence. Building leadership capacity or competence is a necessary but not sufficient component of the principal evaluation process. When we look

at principals within the context of current school reform efforts, effectiveness is usually defined as the ability of the principal to raise student achievement or to facilitate student growth. Therefore, the primary focus of the principal evaluation process should be *to determine how effective the principal is as a capacity builder who facilitates meaningful and productive systems change*. Such change is meaningful if it is research-based and reflects the best thinking of members of the school community. It is productive if it results in improved instruction and student growth.

### **The Purposes: Why do we evaluate principals?**

From a policy perspective, the purpose of evaluation is to assure the public that quality principals are leading our schools. Quality principals are those that are proficient with respect to the performance standards for school leaders and successful in continuously improving the quality of student and adult learning in their schools. Therefore, an effective evaluation system is one that provides evidence of how proficient and how successful principals are in continuously improving the quality of teaching and student learning in their schools. Since principals' success in improving teaching and student learning increases as they strengthen or enhance their proficiency as school leaders, the evaluation system must also support their professional learning. The model for principal evaluation to be presented is grounded in these three purposes of principal evaluation:

1. *Accountability* – Are effective principals leading our schools?
2. *Improving System Performance* – Are principals working collaboratively with members of the school community to continuously improve the quality of teaching and student learning?
3. *Professional Learning* – In the words of Stephen Covey, are principals keeping their saws sharp? Are they continuously building their leadership capacity or competence?

### **The Criteria – What do we look at when we evaluate principals?**

Principal evaluation as established by PA 96-0861 requires assessment of both the principal's professional practice and students' growth. Another way of viewing this is as an input/output model. It is an assessment of both the actions of the principal and the results achieved.

## ***Professional Practice - Competency***

If the primary focus of principal evaluation is *to determine how effective the principal is as a capacity builder who facilitates meaningful and productive systems change*, then school leaders should be held accountable for performance standards that contribute significantly to their effectiveness as capacity builders. Therefore, such performance standards were developed for each of the leadership strands listed below. These standards comprise the new Illinois Performance Standards for School Leaders (IPSSL). These performance standard and the rubrics for evaluating principal performance with respect to the standards are included in Appendix A for each of the six leadership strands.

1. Living a Mission and Vision Focused on Results
2. Leading and Managing Systems Change
3. Improving Teaching and Learning
4. Building and Maintaining Collaborative Relationships
5. Leading with Integrity and Professionalism
6. Creating and Sustaining a Culture of High Expectations

It is important to note that the performance standards that were developed for each of these strands are grounded in the 2008 Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Educational Leadership Policy Standards that have been adopted by the Illinois State Board of Education. Although the ISLLC Standards have provided a solid policy foundation to guide school leadership reform in Illinois, they are not outcome-based and not specific enough to guide the principal evaluation process. A set of more specific, outcome-based standards that were aligned with the ISLLC Standards was developed for the Illinois State Board of Education by an Illinois Principals Association Evaluation Design Team in 2007. The work of this Design Team is reflected in the Illinois Performance Standards and Rubric for School Leaders developed in coordination between ISBE, the Performance Evaluation Advisory Council (PEAC), and New Leaders for New Schools.

Professional practice must account for 50-75% of the final summative rating of the principal.

## ***Student Growth***

“Student growth” means a demonstrable change in a student’s or group of students’ knowledge or skills, as evidenced by gain and/or attainment on two or more assessments, between two or more points in time. In its principal evaluation plan, a school district must identify at least two assessments or measures which are able to provide data that meet this

definition of student growth. These may include: assessments scored by a non-district entity and administered either state-wide or beyond Illinois such as Scantron Performance Series, Star Reading Enterprise, College Board's SAT, Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate examinations, ISAT, PSAE and/or the ACT as part of the PSAE and ACT's EPAS® (i.e., Educational Planning and Assessment System); or, an assessment developed or adopted and approved for use by the school district and used on a district-wide basis such as collaboratively developed common assessments, curriculum tests and assessments designed by textbook publishers. In schools serving a majority of students who are not given any of the above, any assessment that is rigorous, that is aligned to the school's curriculum, and that the qualified evaluator and principal determine measures student learning in the school may be used. Examples include teacher-created assessments, assessments designed by textbook publishers, student work samples or portfolios, assessments of student performance, and assessments designed by staff who are subject or grade-level experts that are administered commonly across a given grade or subject.

Evaluators must choose data and indicators of student growth that are tied to the specific job duties of the individual principal or assistant principal. It is appropriate to use data related to attendance or disciplinary referrals, for instance, if an assistant principal has responsibility for student attendance or works as the dean of students.

Student growth must account for 25%-50% of the final summative rating of the principal.

## **Some Guidelines for Implementation**

### **1. Adapt the model to your school district's needs**

The description of the Illinois Principal Evaluation Plan that has been shared is fairly generic. It includes a description of the essential steps and critical features of a quality approach to principal evaluation. This approach needs to be adapted to the context and particular needs of each local school district. In some cases this might include adjusting the language used in some of the rubrics or making reference to particular processes already in place for setting school improvement priorities. IPEP should be adapted to local school district needs using an Evaluation Steering Committee that includes balanced principal and teacher representation. This committee would be responsible for a) adapting the IPEP process to local school district needs (consideration should be given to each individual principal's job description), b) overseeing the implementation of this process, and c) resolving any concerns or problems that might result when the process is implemented.

### **2. Orient principals, evaluators, and teachers to how the principal evaluation process will be implemented in your school district**

Such an orientation would focus on *what* the focus, purposes, criteria, and steps are in the principal evaluation process. As a result of this orientation each party would have a clear

understanding of the various aspects of the process. It is important for teachers to be oriented to the evaluation process since they are critical partners in the principal's school improvement efforts.

### **3. Provide principals and evaluators with the professional development necessary to implement the principal evaluation process effectively in your school district**

The focus here is on the specifics of *how* principals and their evaluators will implement the principal evaluation process. When implementing the new evaluation process for the first time, it is important to discuss each step, share some examples of what is expected at each step, and then walk the principals and evaluators through the process of completing any forms required at a particular step.

### **4. Provide principals and evaluators with the time and other necessary resources to implement the principal evaluation process effectively in your school district**

For the principal evaluation process to be effective, the principal and evaluator need to have the time to work together in a meaningful and productive manner. A major problem in principal evaluation is that evaluators are not able to spend the time they need to with principals. The reason for this is that the evaluators are usually central office administrators who want to, but in practice are just not able to devote the time necessary to principal evaluation.

Another significant problem in principal evaluation is getting principals the resources they need to achieve their school improvement objectives. Without such resources principals cannot or become limited in their ability to build system capacity. Due to current economic conditions, some resources may not be available. Unfortunately, in too many cases the resources are available but the necessary paperwork cannot be processed to access them in a timely manner.

The issues of time and resources are critical since Illinois principals are involved in a high stakes evaluation process. If a school district has not allocated the time and resources necessary to support a principal's evaluation, then it would not be appropriate to rate that principal less than proficient. While some contend that principal ratings have been inflated because of inadequate evaluation procedures, an alternate explanation would be that ratings have been inflated because school districts could not provide the time and resources necessary to support the principal evaluation process. Research in other sectors has shown that for the evaluation process to be effective, the evaluator to manager ratio should be in the 1:5-8 range.

## **5. Make sure principals have well developed strategic action plans to guide the school improvement process**

It is important for schools to be guided by a mission, vision, and core beliefs. But for that vision to become a reality, a strategic action plan needs to be developed based on an analysis of current and desired levels of student learning. Therefore, it is essential for principals to be skilled in data collection, data analysis, and data-informed decision making for the purpose of identifying and prioritizing school improvement needs. Such needs are articulated in a strategic action plan that includes a priority list of school improvement objectives, each with a set of improvement strategies, a timeline, and desired learning outcomes.

Well thought out strategic action plans set the stage for meaningful and productive school improvement initiatives. Developing such plans in collaboration with other members of the school and community takes considerable time. Principals find that it is relatively easy to identify the issues that need to be addressed in such plans (e.g., improve students' problem solving performance in mathematics). The hard part is in developing improvement strategies to address the problem effectively. In some cases, the principal and other members of the school and community may need several months to systematically develop a well thought out plan to address a priority school improvement need. The key here is that such a plan needs to be developed *systematically*. In other words, the principal and other members of the school and community become involved in an ongoing planning process where they explore potential alternatives and get smart about the strategies that have promise for addressing a priority school improvement need.

## **6. Make sure the principal and teacher evaluation processes address the same school improvement priorities**

The school's strategic action plan is the keystone for both the principal and teacher evaluation processes. Since the focus of both processes is to build system capacity, both processes should address the same school improvement priorities in a complementary manner. This is very consistent with the goal of human capital development systems -- to increase the competence of both teachers and principals to strengthen or enhance the productivity of the school organization.

## **7. Make sure school improvement is integrated with the professional learning and teacher and principal evaluation processes**

Increasing the competence of both teachers and principals does not always increase the productivity of the school organization. This only happens when a concerted effort is made to increase competence as it relates to achieving priority school improvement objectives. For many years teachers set objectives individually and were successful in improving their

competence, but the overall impact of these teachers' efforts on the productivity of the school organization was not discernable. These conscientious teachers were working hard, but unfortunately they were not working together toward a defined end.

By integrating professional learning and both principal and teacher evaluation with school improvement, members of the school do work together toward a defined end. The starting point in this process is school improvement. Once school improvement objectives are identified, attention is turned to planning those professional learning experiences for teachers and the principal that must be initiated to support the school improvement process. Then the extent to which these professional learning experiences are impacting both teacher and principal performance as well as student learning are monitored through the evaluation process.

### **8. Place a strong emphasis on principal self-assessment.**

Before principal performance can be improved, principals need to recognize clearly where improvement is needed. Professional development experiences should be provided that enable principals to conduct evidence-based reflections on their performance and then identify priority improvement needs. Self-assessment is most successful when it gets principals to the point where they know how and why they need to change. While the use of 360° feedback is very beneficial in this regard, principals must be guided through the process of analyzing such feedback, identifying areas for improvement, and then setting worthwhile improvement priorities. Additional resources for reflection are the principal's job description as well as the Illinois Performance Standards and Rubric for School Leaders.

### **9. Form professional learning communities or networks where principals have the opportunity to work collaboratively with peers in implementing the principal evaluation process.**

The issue of teacher isolation has been addressed effectively over the year and we now see teachers working productively in professional learning communities to strengthen and enhance teaching and learning. The same needs to be done for principals. Professional learning communities or networks need to be developed that provide a forum where principals can share their accomplishments as well as the problems and frustrations they are experiencing in implementing the principal evaluation process.

In settings where such PLCs/PLNs have been formed, principals have found them to be very helpful. Principals found the sharing of objectives and improvement strategies to be beneficial. They went back to their schools and implemented many of the good things that they saw their colleagues doing. Through discussions with their colleagues, principals developed new insights into the problems they were addressing and were provided with

promising leads regarding potential resources they could explore to resolve such problems. These principals tended to accept responsibility for the performance of all children as well as the challenge of developing program that would enable them to achieve at high levels. Also, principals who worked in PLCs/PLNs helped each other with the logistics and *red tape* associated with getting the resources they needed to move forward with their school improvement initiatives.

The Illinois Principals Association provides opportunities for principals to engage with the largest PLC/PLN of school leaders in the state. Individuals are provided opportunities to network with their peers at various regional meetings, professional development, and as a part of the Association's dynamic online community, IPA Connect ([www.ilprincipals.org](http://www.ilprincipals.org)).

#### **10. Share and celebrate the principal's and teachers' accomplishments in achieving their school improvement objectives**

It is important for the principal to conclude the school year with a summary of what has been accomplished by the professional staff with respect to the school's improvement objectives. This should be captured in the form of a 2-3 page vignette that tells the story of what has been accomplished. This vignette should be shared and celebrated with members of the school and community (*recognition*) and used as a platform for initiating the next year's work (*motivation*). These vignettes should also be shared with the school board.

By developing, sharing, and celebrating such vignettes, the message is conveyed that the teacher and principal evaluation, professional learning, and school improvement processes are important and their impact is being documented. Forms are not just being filed in obscurity. When teachers and principals see this happening, the teacher and principal evaluation processes begin to be perceived as meaningful and productive rather than perfunctory responsibilities.