

# Introduction

With the establishment of state education standards in 1992, the Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP) recognized that student achievement would become the primary measure of a school's effectiveness.

Since then, a significant shift has taken place—a shift that has required the evolution of new school cultures, the understanding of new roles for teachers, and the development of new student accountability performance standards established and measured outside of the classroom.

Pivotal to the success of this ongoing shift is a new type of principal leadership. Today, more than ever before, principals in Washington's schools are expected to be leaders of learning. Principals need to “know strong instruction when they see it; ... encourage it when they don't, and to set the conditions for continuous academic learning among their professional staffs.”<sup>1</sup> AWSP developed a Leadership Framework to align a principal evaluation system with these new leadership expectations.

The Framework is structured around the following eight responsibilities, which were developed by Washington state principals and subsequently adopted by the Washington State Legislature as the state's principal evaluation criteria.<sup>2</sup>

1. **Creating a Culture:** Influence, establish and sustain a school culture conducive to continuous improvement for students and staff.
2. **Ensuring School Safety:** Lead the development and annual update of a comprehensive safe schools plan that includes prevention, intervention, crisis response and recovery.
3. **Planning with Data:** Lead the development, implementation and evaluation of the data-driven plan for improvement of student achievement.
4. **Aligning Curriculum:** Assist instructional staff in aligning curriculum, instruction and assessment with state and local learning goals.

5. **Improving Instruction:** Monitor, assist and evaluate staff implementation of the school improvement plan, effective instruction and assessment practices.
6. **Managing Resources:** Manage human and fiscal resources to accomplish student achievement goals.
7. **Engaging Communities:** Communicate and partner with school community members to promote student learning.
8. **Closing the Gap:** Demonstrate a commitment to closing the achievement gap.

Evaluation systems can be used for accountability and/or as a foundation for professional growth. The purpose of this User's Guide is to help school principals and their district supervisors use the AWSP Leadership Framework in a way that maximizes professional growth and development.

## Structure of the User's Guide

The User's Guide presumes that the AWSP Leadership Framework is implemented within the context of a set of conversations between a school principal and his or her district supervisor. This assumption reflects the view that the Framework is both a model for evaluation (i.e., stating what principals must know and be able to do), as well as a tool that can inform conversations between principals and supervisors focused on the improvement of leadership practice (i.e., what principals can do to improve their practice and what districts can do to support it).

The largest section of the User's Guide is *Preparing for the Evaluation*. It combines planning, action, and reflection in each of the criteria to help principals and their supervisors prepare for conversations and goal setting. Beneath each criterion, the reader will find five stages of this process:

- **Establishing a Focus:** Describes the steps that a principal and his or her supervisor can take to prepare for the evaluation. This includes what evidence to look for, how to collect it, and possible ways to present the information.
- **Preparing for Conversations:** Provides the principal and his or her supervisor with a series of reflective prompts to think through the conversation.

- **Having Conversations:** Provides the principal and his or her supervisor with a series of questions that could be raised in the conversation. Additionally, the section includes a series of model question stems that are aligned with elements of the principal's practice that both parties might want to explore.
- **Reflecting on Conversations:** Provides the principal and his or her supervisor with a series of reflective questions designed to sustain learning beyond the initial evaluation conversations.
- **Identifying Next Steps:** Provides reflective questions for the principal designed to help integrate the evaluation into his or her broader professional learning plan.

This information is reformatted in *Appendix B: Planning at a Glance*, where readers will see—at a glance—the prompts for each stage in the process, organized by the eight criteria.

Following the *Preparing for the Evaluation* section are sections that relate the AWSP Leadership Framework to the roles of assistant principals, teachers and student leaders. These are designed to help principals and their supervisors see the relationship between the eight criteria and other roles within the school community.

## Defining Authority and Support

In preparation for the evaluation, the principal should work with his or her supervisor to identify authority issues and support structures that could impact the results of the principal's leadership. It would be unrealistic to hold principals accountable for decisions that they do not have the authority to make, and would not result in improved leadership practice. At the same time, principals may fail to take advantage of authority they do have if the scope of that authority is not clearly communicated. Similarly, improved principal leadership is dependent upon district support. Identifying needed support in each criterion will make principal success more likely. In short, principals and supervisors should collectively define the degree of freedom that principals have to enact a particular component of the AWSP Leadership Framework within the context of the district or school.

Regarding authority, principals and their supervisors should begin by asking the simple question:

Who makes this decision? If the answer is the principal, then this responsibility should be evaluated within the context of the AWSP Leadership Framework. If, however, the response is that someone else is responsible for making the decision then the evaluator should consider this measure only to the extent appropriate and not penalize principals for decisions that they cannot make. The AWSP Leadership Framework should not be viewed as an across-the-board measure of principal leadership, especially when the principal may not be responsible for the decisions or actions that fall within particular facets of the Framework.

Although principals may have the authority to make decisions, they may not be supported in making those decisions. Thus, as they establish the scope of work, it is important for supervisors to ask whether they have enabled the principal to use his or her authority by providing adequate support (e.g., resources, time, professional development, information). This is not to suggest that the principal cannot nor should act unless fully supported. Rather, it is to suggest that supervisory support (including district support) is as essential to the principal's support as the principal's own initiative and actions.

A final step in this preparatory conversation involves identifying the flexibility that the principal and district have, given the contractual, legal, or policy requirements currently in place. While principals may have the authority to act and supervisors may have provided the support needed for the actions to be successful, other factors may well have influenced the implementation of the actions and precipitated their success or failure. Thus, a discussion of perceived constraints may serve both principals and their supervisors in developing realistic expectations and possible strategies to meet the expectations.

## Effective Conversations

Effective principal leadership begins with effective conversations about principal practice. Unfortunately, research consistently suggests that these conversations rarely happen between principals and their supervisors. The more common approach to evaluating school principals is for a district leader to make an annual visit to the school, meet with the principal for a brief period of time, and simply reflect on the year as a whole. This process assumes that the short, reflective conversation is sufficient for the principal to continue to develop and grow professionally. Unfortunately, these short conversations are often shelved once the evaluation season has passed. As one report conveyed,



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*“The assessment of... leader’s performance is conceived and executed very narrowly. It presumes that what matters about the leader’s influence on school conditions and outcomes can be known from a short conversation, supplemented by the flow of routine information to the central office across the year. It is carried out annually and has the limited purpose of ascertaining whether there is a ‘problem’ or, conversely, some noteworthy performance that deserves special commendation. In between, where most leaders’ performance lies, is a gray area that begs for more thoughtful examination over time, and where clues lie for what could be done to improve the leaders’ performance in significant ways.”<sup>3</sup>*

The AWSP Leadership Framework presumes that effective leadership evaluation rests on a qualitatively different conversation between principals and their supervisors. Evaluative conversations do not start from the premise that principals are unsuccessful, but that principals, like all educators, can and want to grow and learn in response to the changing conditions around them. The AWSP Leadership Framework rests on the assumption that:

- **Effective conversations depend on a growth partnership between the principal and his or her supervisor that spans the principal’s entire career.** Researchers who study the experiences of school principals note that many leaders feel uneasy talking with their supervisor about the challenges they face. Principals perceive that admitting what they don’t know will impact their performance evaluation or the supervisor’s view of them as an effective leader. This fear prevents principals from asking for assistance that could potentially improve their schools and prevents districts from providing assistance to schools that could potentially support principals. The AWSP Leadership Framework rests on a simple assumption:

School principals and their supervisors are equally committed to the principal’s ongoing professional growth. This commitment is encapsulated in a partnership that focuses on improved practice and the delivery of resources and supports, and that creates space for an honest dialogue about challenges and opportunities for principal growth.

- **Reflection and dialogue are critical to supporting the principal’s growth and improvement long-term.** Effective conversations provide principals and their supervisors with the opportunity to reflect on their practice. Reflection involves thinking critically and meaningfully about leadership practices as they are and envisioning practices as they could be. In short, the conversation about a principal’s performance exists between a principal’s current reality and his or her long-term aspirations. Dialogue is central to this process as it provides principals with opportunities to talk about current practices, challenges, and needs in a collaborative way.
- **Asking thoughtful questions and listening actively is essential if supervisors want to promote principal learning over time.** Much has been written about the utility of coaching principals for instructional leadership. Indeed, coaching is in vogue for both classroom teachers and school principals. This User’s Guide provides principals and their supervisors with questions that help them create a space where reflection, dialogue, and coaching can occur. Questions are presented for principals and their supervisors to inform their thinking about the eight criteria. However, like all good tools, the questions are presented broadly so that principals and supervisors in any school district setting can benefit from the questions presented. Principals and their supervisors are free to add to or modify these questions to ensure that the conversation is beneficial for both parties.

1. M.K. Stein & B.S. Nelson, (2003), Leadership Content Knowledge, Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 25(4), p. 424.

2. See Revised Code of Washington, Chapter 28A-405.

3. Portin, B., Feldman, S., & Knapp, M. October 2006. *Purposes, Uses, and Practices of Leadership Assessment in Education*. Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, University of Washington, p. 7.

*Pictured above:* Anitra Pinchback-Jones, principal, Rainier View Elementary (Seattle PS), and Phil Brockman, Superintendent, Sedro-Wooley SD.