

Using Data to Inform Principal Evaluation and Practice

All criteria of the AWSP Leadership Framework provide principals with opportunities to inform their practice with data and communicate their needs and the needs of their school to their supervisors through the evaluation process. Washington state law requires student growth data to play a significant role in three of the evaluation criteria for school principals. Criteria 3.5, 5.5, and 8.3 each reflect that student growth data.

Selecting the “Right” Data

Artifacts vs. Evidence

As building administrators begin looking for evidence to use in their evaluations, it is important that they understand the difference between artifacts and evidence. Artifacts are the agenda, schedules and documents associated with each of the criteria. Evidence is the impact those artifacts had on instruction, curriculum, procedures which result in improved learning opportunities, and student learning. An example would be the master schedule. This by itself is an artifact. If however, the master schedule is designed to optimize opportunities for students, diversify the class offerings, reduce class size or place highly effective teachers in classes working with all levels of learners, then the master schedule and the explanation of the impact would be evidence.

Although principals have access to a multitude of data, selecting the “right” data for the evaluation can be difficult, especially given the time it takes to collect and synthesize the information. Too frequently, principals and their supervisors default to



student achievement data or student assessment scores. The User’s Guide does not presume that principals should only use student achievement data or assessment scores for their evaluation. Rather, the User’s Guide presumes that principals should use an array of data to fully and accurately depict their performance, school context, and specific needs.

As illustrated in the chart on the following page, the AWSP Leadership Framework provides principals with opportunities to infuse data in the evaluation process in a variety of ways. For example, if attempting to explain his or her work as it relates to Criterion 1 (Creating a Culture), the principal might include a survey of classroom teachers about their role in leading the school, as well as the opportunities they have for collaboration. Similarly, a principal might include copies of newly developed norms, team values, or decision-making models to illustrate for his or her supervisor how the school approaches shared decision making. These data points provide the principal’s supervisor with artifacts that might serve as evidence of his or her practice that spans the school year and reflects the breadth of his or her work.

Collecting Data with Surveys

The process for designing and administering a survey involves substantial planning if the survey is to yield valid information. The purpose of the survey needs to be clearly articulated with stakeholders prior to the administration of the survey. Thoughtful analysis of the survey to link questions and results to the eight evaluation criteria will make data more relevant to the evaluation.

Criterion	Examples of Artifacts to Be Examined for Possible Evidence
1: Creating a Culture	Surveys of classroom teachers Copy of norms and team values Copy of decision-making model(s) Copy of the school vision and mission statements Copy of leadership team assignments Copy of master schedule
2: Ensuring School Safety	Surveys of classroom teachers, parents, and students Analysis of school discipline data (e.g., detention, suspensions, referrals to principal's office, etc.) Analysis of student attendance data Copy of school discipline policies Copy of school safety protocols Copy of school handbook
3: Planning with Data	Analysis of school, district, and state assessment data Copies of meeting notes and minutes Copies of data presentations or reports Calendar of school, district, and state assessments
4: Aligning Curriculum	Surveys of classroom teachers and instructional staff Observation notes Walk-through protocols Professional development presentations
5: Improving Instruction	Observation notes Walk-through protocols Schedule of learning walks or walkthroughs Professional development presentations Professional development calendar Student achievement data from a subset of teachers
6: Managing Resources	Survey of classroom teachers and staff Copy of the school's master schedule Copy of the school's budget(s) Schedule of learning walks or walkthroughs Professional development calendar
7: Engaging Communities	Surveys of parents, guardians, and students Copies of parent newsletters Copies of PTA meeting notes or agendas Schedule of parent involvement activities Notes from home visits
8: Closing the Gap	Analysis of gap related student achievement data Copy of school's RTI intervention strategies Survey of parents regarding student learning needs

What do I want to know?

There are a number of places in the AWSP Leadership Framework where perception surveys can provide useful information to the principal about his or her practice, the performance of the school, and the needs of students or staff. However, perceptions are not appropriate for every aspect of the Framework, and, depending on the issue the principal is trying to understand, may not provide the most relevant information.

So, then, what questions can a survey help principals answer? Surveys effectively collect information from respondents about their opinions, perspectives, and recent experiences. Thus, survey questions should be designed to help principals ask questions about the respondents' perspectives, opinions, and experiences. A survey should not attempt to answer questions like, "How do you feel about..." or, "What do you feel about..." Instead, a principal might ask, "To what extent do you agree or disagree..." or, "To what extent would the following benefit you..." Both questions prompt the survey respondent to give an opinion that can be reported without having the respondent there to provide context or additional details.

Is the goal to collect information one time or repeatedly?

Another important consideration is whether the

survey will be used to collect information one time (e.g., to capture the perspective or opinion of staff) or to repeatedly monitor the perspective of staff and the evolving needs of the school, its students, or parents.

Consider the questions illustrated in the table below. The principal can frame questions differently depending on whether the survey will be administered once or multiple times. For example, a principal could collect information regarding his or her performance toward Criterion 1 by asking whether teachers and staff agree or disagree with a series of statements. Similarly, if the principal wanted to determine whether his or her performance had improved, he or she might ask a related question initially and then modify the question for a follow-up survey.

How much time should I allow for analysis, implementation, and impact?

If principals are administering surveys repeatedly, they also need to consider how quickly they can analyze the survey data, prepare the results, and develop a response to the results. If principals are using surveys to inform their leadership, it is highly unlikely that another survey would reflect differences in the participants' perspectives if administered immediately following the implementation of a new program or policy.

Criterion	One-time Survey	Multiple Surveys: Initial and Follow-up	
1	Do you agree or disagree: The principal communicates his or her goals for the school in a clear manner.	Do you agree or disagree: The principal communicates his or her goals for the school in a clear manner.	To what extent has the principal's communication about his or her goals for the school improved?
4	What support do students currently need to meet rigorous academic expectations?	What support do students need to meet rigorous academic expectations?	What additional support do students need to meet rigorous academic expectations?
7	How fully are parents engaged in the school's decision-making processes?	How fully are parents currently engaged in the school's decision-making processes?	How has parent engagement in the school's decision-making processes changed?

As illustrated in the table on page 13, principals should not survey teachers, staff, students, or parents more frequently than twice a year. Doing so risks “deflating” the survey responses and potentially skewing the information collected.

Principals should choose the scheduling of their surveys wisely; administering a survey amidst controversy or at an exceptionally busy time of year often produces predictable responses. The timing of the survey could have a significant impact on the results.

A principal might use survey data to identify issues, needs, or concerns that he or she can address throughout the school year as well as monitor those issues over time. For example, a principal might survey parents and students at the beginning of the year to identify specific learning needs that may not be represented in district or school data. Coupled with this survey, the principal might survey classroom teachers and school staff in preparation for back-to-school meetings or to check-in with staff to see how the year is progressing. Throughout the year, the principal might conduct follow-up surveys with parents, students, teachers, and staff to monitor the issues and adjust his or her leadership practice accordingly. This provides multiple data points for the principal to inform his or her leadership, as well as ample time for the principal to act on the staff responses. More importantly, such a schedule avoids saturating the staff with surveys and potentially reducing the value of their responses.

Observing Principals

Gathering and understanding data is a great way to assess the impact of leadership, but it is not a very good way to understand what needs to be changed. While observing teachers is fundamental for principals to provide feedback to teachers, observing principals is not a common practice for those who evaluate them. There are good reasons for this:

- Leadership is much less episodic than teaching.
- Leadership behavior connected to the eight criteria often happens in informal conversations and interactions that are not planned like a lesson.
- Principal evaluators are usually not on site, so scheduling observation opportunities is more difficult than simply dropping into a classroom.

Sometimes a principal supervisor’s school visit is spent touring classrooms, which is more focused on observing teachers than observing principals.

While observing leadership has its challenges, it is still a good way to understand how to provide specific feedback to help principals grow. AWSP encourages both principals and their evaluators to find opportunities for meaningful observations. Faculty meetings, teacher evaluation pre- and post-conferences, parent meetings, leadership team meetings, and district meetings are scheduled events that can usually provide an opportunity for more constructive feedback than simply analyzing data.