Principal Evaluations and the Principal Supervisor: Survey Results from the Great City Schools

Council of the Great City Schools

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Table of Contents

TABLE OF CONTENTS

OVERVIEW

Principals serve as both instructional and administrative leaders in their schools. Their roles and responsibilities vary from managing school compliance issues to facilitating and assisting teachers with their instructional duties. In order to support principals in public schools, district leaders and others are working to build the kinds of professional development, organizational structures, and supports principals need. Moreover, big city school systems and others continue to debate how to evaluate and hold principals accountable for achieving results.

In the fall of 2012, the Council of the Great City Schools received a grant from the Wallace Foundation to investigate the ways principals are supported and evaluated in large urban school districts and districts that participate in the Wallace leadership initiative. This involves taking a closer look at the roles and responsibilities of principal supervisors—defined here as individuals who directly oversee and/or evaluate the performance of principals.

This interim report summarizes the results of a survey administered to district staff in these positions in the fall of 2012. These results will be followed up with a second report detailing the findings of extensive site visits to the six districts participating in the Wallace Principal Pipeline project. This report does not provide recommendations or identify best practices, but seeks to present an overview of the ways districts support the critical work performed by principals and their supervisors.

METHODOLOGY

The Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS) surveyed its 67 member urban public school districts along with two other school systems that are part of the Wallace Foundation's pipeline initiative but are not members of the Council.[1] The survey was sent to superintendents in each district and was conducted *via* Survey Monkey. Superintendents were asked to forward the survey to staff member(s) who best fit the "principal supervisor" role. The instrument remained in the field between October 10 and November 26, 2012, and multiple reminders were sent to boost response rates.

Surveys with usable data were received from 41 of the 67 CGCS member districts and the two other non-member Wallace pipeline districts for a response rate of nearly 60 percent. It is important to note that most districts have more than one principal supervisor, so the total number of responses involved 135 individuals in 41 districts.

In general, the survey asked for information about the characteristics and roles of principal supervisors, the professional development provided to them, and the perceived effectiveness of their principal-evaluation system. The survey also asked respondents to indicate how these roles and responsibilities had changed between 2010 and June 2012. Otherwise, all results apply to the school year ending in June 2012. Apart from selected data on the numbers of principal supervisors, all other data are reported in the aggregate rather than by district.

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[1] The six pipeline districts are Gwinnett County, Prince Georges County, Charlotte Mecklenburg County, New York City, Denver, and Hillsborough County (FL). Two districts – Gwinnett County and Prince Georges County – are not Council-member districts.

Highlights

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR

- The number of principal supervisors in the responding urban school districts ranged from a low of two in districts like Birmingham, Dayton, and Richmond to a high of 41 in New York City.[2] Responding districts had an average of eight principal supervisors and a median of five. (Figure 1)

- The length of time that principal supervisors had been in their positions in the responding districts ranged from a high of 11 years in Clark County to a low of one year in 23 districts. The average tenure was three years and the median was two. The results suggest that this position is a fairly new phenomenon in many districts or that turnover in the positions has been extensive. (Figure 2)

- The formal titles of principal supervisors varied considerably, but words like director, superintendent, and officer were often contained in the titles. Words like leadership, reform, and assistant were less frequently seen. (Figure 3)

- Prior to their positions as principal supervisors, 97 percent of respondents had at least two years of experience as a principal, 42 percent had over two years of experience as a principal coach or mentor, and 95 percent had over two years of experience as a teacher. Few had experience as either a human resource administrator, operations administrator, or central office instructional administrator. (Figure 4)

- Twenty percent of principal supervisors reported to their superintendent; 15 percent reported to a deputy superintendent; 13 percent reported to a chief academic officer; and 12 percent reported to a deputy superintendent of instruction. On the other hand, five reported to a deputy for operations and five reported to a chief operations officer. (Figure 5)

- The average number of principals supervised by each principal supervisor was 24, with a median of 18. The numbers ranged from three to 100. (Figure 6)

- On average, principal supervisors were staffed with approximately two clerical personnel, one principal coach/mentor, and one special education specialist. (Table 1)

- The top five tasks that principal supervisors reported being engaged in in 2012 were 1) visiting schools, 2) convening principals to discuss instructional issues, 3) evaluating principals, 4) coaching principals, and 5) conducting professional development with principals. All of these tasks except for conducting professional development have increased over the last two years. Respondents indicated that work with assistant principals did not typically fall in their top five tasks, and tasks related to community complaints and operational issues had declined over the last two years. (Table 2)

- To support principals directly, principal supervisors reported being engaged in the following top five activities in 2012: 1) conversing with principals about student performance data, 2) visiting classrooms with principals, 3) conversing with principals about their performance, 4) conversing with principals about teacher performance, and 5) assisting principals in responding to issues raised by parents or community. All of these activities except spending time responding to parent/community issues have increased or stayed the same over the last two years. Other tasks that increased included facilitating professional development on teaching and learning and engaging

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[2] New York City had fewer principal supervisors per student than other districts.

in teacher-evaluation observations with principals. Tasks that showed declines generally involved helping principals with operational issues. (Table 3)

- Additional duties that principal supervisors engaged in included district administrative and compliance responsibilities. These duties increased over the last two years, meaning that these supervisors are taking on more administrative responsibilities at the same time they are being pressed to be instructional leaders. (Table 4)

Figure 1. Number of principal supervisors in districts, n=135
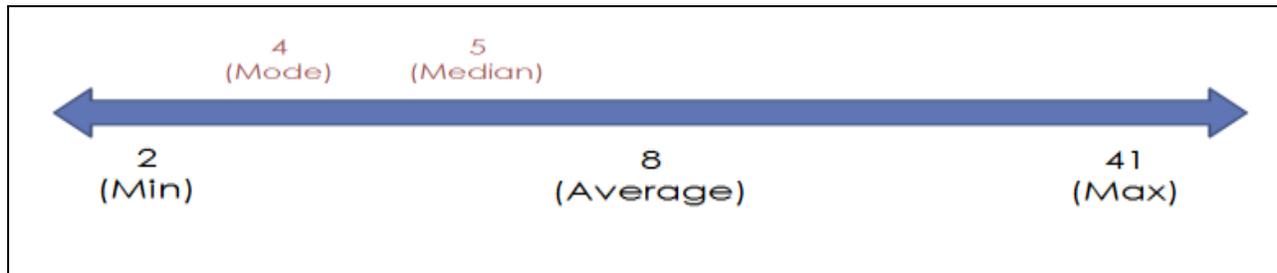
Figure 2. Number of years in current position as principal supervisor, n=133
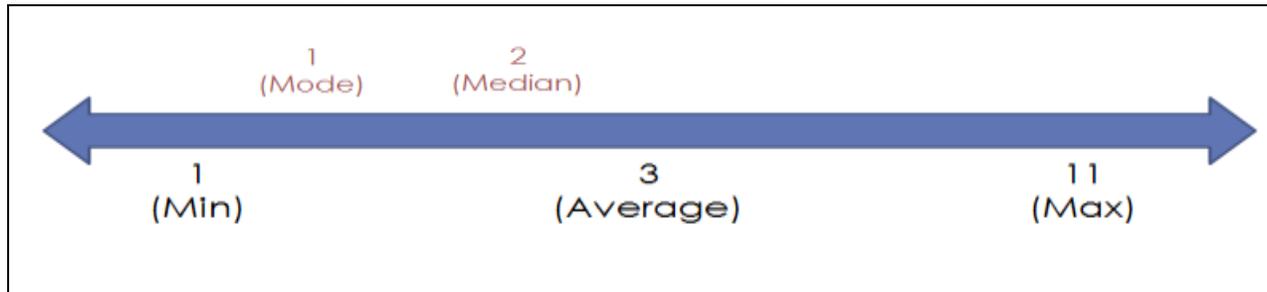
Figure 3. Formal titles of principal supervisors depicted in a word wall*, n=135

*The words that appear larger are those that were used most frequently in the titles of principal supervisors, e.g., a number of respondents held the title of director or superintendent.

Figure 4. Prior positions of principal supervisors, n=135
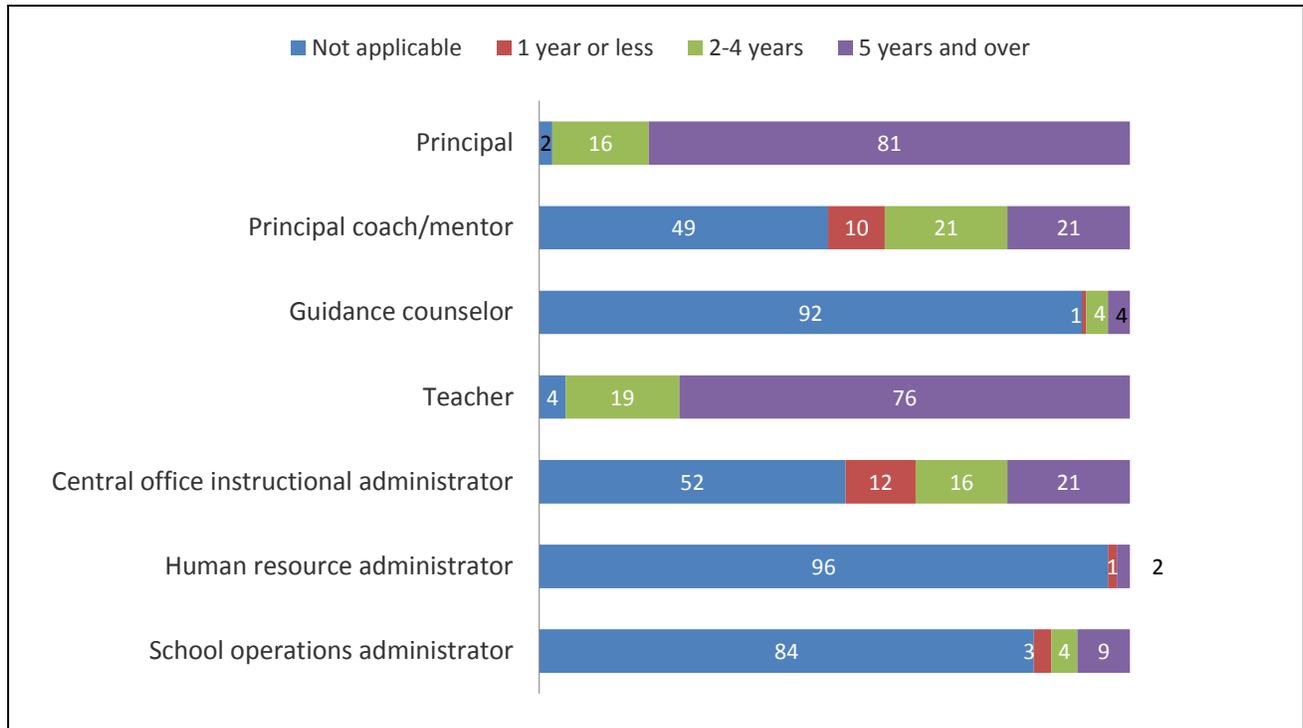
Figure 5. Who principal supervisors report to, n=135
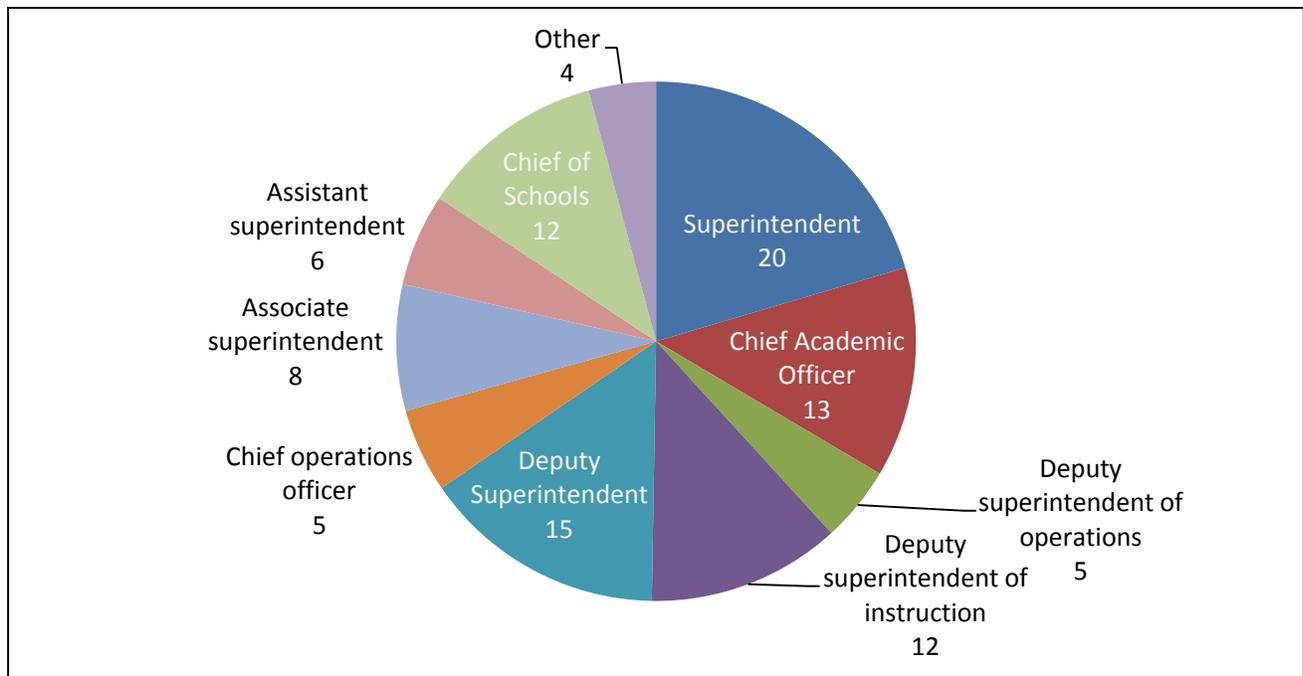
Figure 6. Number of principals reporting to principal supervisors, n=135
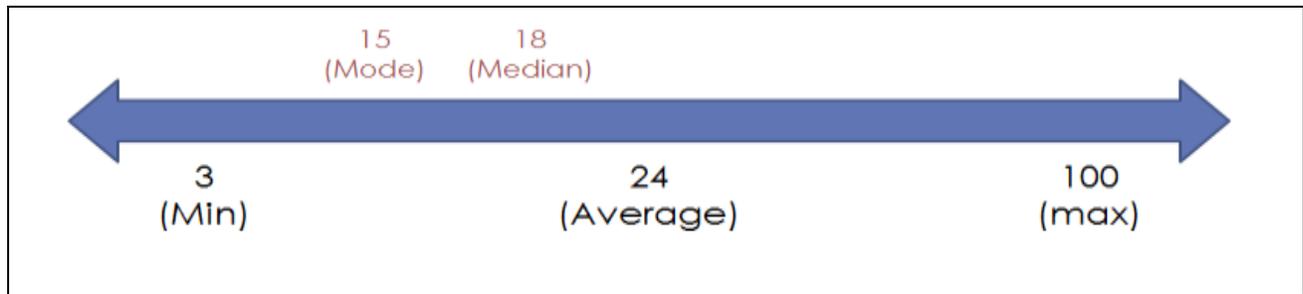
Table 1. Average number of principal supervisor support staff, n=134

	Average number of support staff
Principal coaches/mentors	1.28
Clerical	1.92
Reading/ELA support	.40
Mathematics support	.31
Science support	.20
Operational support	.57
Gifted education support	.04
Special education specialist	1.06
English language learners specialist	.23

Table 2. Top five tasks of principal supervisors in 2012 and over the past two years, n=85

Tasks	Top 5 tasks for school year ending June 2012	Top 5 tasks for the past 2 years
Visit schools	93	88
Convene principals to discuss instructional issues	81	74
Evaluate principals	74	71
Coach principals	73	62
Conduct professional development opportunities with principals	48	49
Provide technical assistance to principals	41	40
Address community complaints	36	45
Address operational issues	32	36
Represent district at community events	13	9
Convene assistant principals to discuss instructional issues	4	5
Coach assistant principals	2	2
Provide technical assistance to assistant principals	2	5
Conduct professional development opportunities with assistant principals	2	6
Evaluate assistant principals	0	2

Table 3. Top five principal supervisor tasks *to support principals* in 2012 and over the past two years, n=85

Tasks	Top 5 tasks for school year ending June 2012	Top 5 tasks for the past 2 years
Converse with the principals about school (student) performance data	89	85
Visit classrooms with principals	78	74
Converse with the principals about their performance	76	76
Converse with the principals about teacher performance	75	67
Assist principals in responding to issues raised by parents or community	46	53
Observe principals participating in or facilitating professional development on teaching and learning with staff	33	29
Assist principals in planning operational issues such as budgeting, facilities management and maintenance	31	35
Observe principals conducting faculty meetings and common planning time sessions	27	25
Engage in teacher evaluation observations with the principal	18	11
Assist principals in school-based budgeting and hiring	16	18
Assist principals in how to engage more parents in school related activities	8	11
Assist principals in scheduling or developing the school calendar	5	5

Table 4. Other designated tasks of principal supervisors in 2012 and over the past two years, n=85

Tasks	Current responsibility	Responsibility 2 years ago
Address district administrative issues	80	76
Address district compliance issues	62	60
I do not have any additional responsibilities	16	14
Responsible for district's special education program	1	1
Serve as district testing coordinator	0	1
Responsible for district's gifted and talented program	0	2

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Over 60 percent of principal supervisors reported that they received professional development in the following areas to improve principal effectiveness and student achievement (Table 5):

  o Reviewing school (student) performance data
  o Observing classrooms with a focus on student learning and student work
  o Understanding the shift in reading and writing expectations and instruction due to new standards
  o Using student performance data to improve classroom instruction
  o Conducting principal evaluations
  o Understanding the shift in mathematics expectations and instruction due to new standards

- Principal supervisors reported receiving less professional development on helping principals work collaboratively with parents, conducting faculty meetings, and handling operational issues than those listed above. Nine percent of principal supervisors report receiving no professional development in helping principals in the prior year. (Table 5)

- Approximately 18 percent of principal supervisors reported needing more time for coaching principals; 15 percent reported needing fewer meetings and more time to visit schools; 14 percent reported needing more professional development on leadership and better time management; and 10 percent reported needing more support with the common core standards in order to improve principal effectiveness and student achievement. (Table 6)

- Approximately 95 percent of principal supervisors reported receiving professional development from their respective districts. Some 50 percent reported receiving professional development from professional organizations; 36 percent received professional development from contractors or publishers; and 26 percent reported receiving professional development from their states or a state regional service center. (Figure 7)

- Principal supervisors who reported receiving professional development on observing classrooms with a focus on student work and student learning were more likely to engage in tasks involving visiting schools, coaching principals, convening principals to discuss instructional issues, and evaluating principals. (Table 7)

Table 5. Percentage of principal supervisors engaging in professional development activities to improve principal effectiveness and student achievement, n=130

Professional development engaged in	Percent of respondents
Reviewing school (student) performance data	79
Observing classrooms with a focus on student learning and student work	71
Understanding the shift in reading and writing expectations and instruction due to new standards	69
Using student performance data to improve classroom instruction	67
Conducting principal evaluations	65
Understanding the shift in mathematics expectations and instruction due to new standards	64
Conducting teacher evaluations	41
Conducting meetings focused on teaching and learning with their teachers	39
Facilitating professional development with staff	35
Planning operational issues such as budgeting and facilities management	28
Conducting faculty meetings, common planning time sessions, etc.	21
Working collaboratively with parents	18
Other	14
I did not receive any professional development related to supporting principals last year	9

Table 6. Types of additional support principal supervisors report they need to improve principal effectiveness and student achievement, n =117

Additional support needed for principal supervisors	Percent of respondents
More coaching time and strategies for providing support to principals	18
Less meetings/ more time (to work with principals, visit schools, plan)	15
Professional development (i.e. leadership training, clarity on role, time management)	14
Support with Common Core State Standards	10
Other	7
Training on effective teaching strategies and curriculum development	6
Evaluation tools and observation strategies	6
Additional instruction personnel and specialist	5
Data on progress	4
Resources and funds	3
No additional training needed; satisfied with currently training	3
Collaboration with other districts and other departments	3
Technology	2
Collaboration and discussion with colleagues to share effective strategies	2
Additional training on students with special needs (i.e. ELL, learning disabilities, behavioral problems)	2

Figure 7. Sources of professional development for principal supervisors, n=129
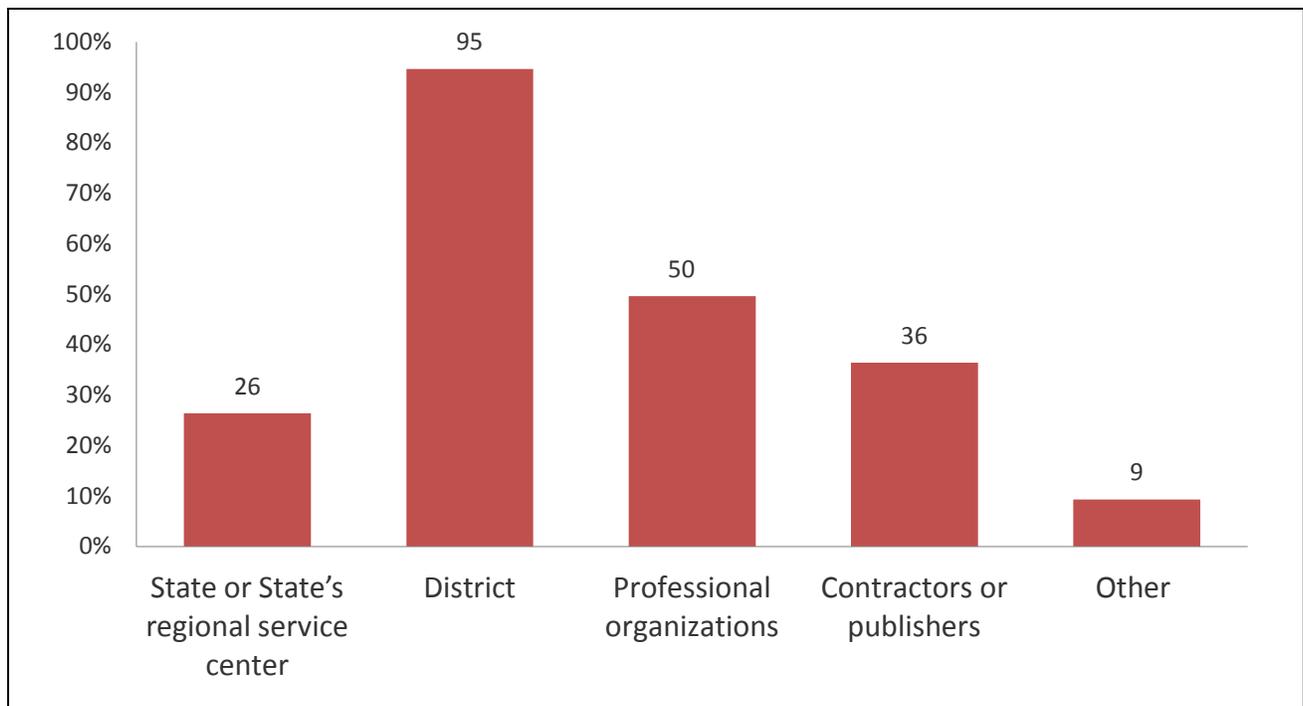
Table 7. Percentage of principal supervisors who engaged in specified tasks by the type of professional development they received, n=108

Tasks	Type of professional development received			
	Conducting meetings focused on teaching and learning with their teachers	Observing classrooms with a focus on student learning and student work	Conducting teacher evaluations	Conducting principal evaluations
Visit Schools	42	79	42	74
Evaluate Principals	35	62	33	62
Evaluate assistant principals	3	1	1	2
Coach principals	33	64	39	56
Coach assistant principals	6	6	2	5
Provide technical assistance to principals	20	36	19	33
Provide technical assistance to assistant principals	3	2	1	2
Convene principals to discuss instructional issues	34	64	33	60
Convene assistant principals to discuss instructional issues	4	3	2	4
Address community complaints	18	31	19	32
Address operational issues	11	27	13	25
Represent district at community events	5	11	6	10
Conduct professional development opportunities with principals	19	35	20	27
Conduct professional development opportunities with assistant principals	6	6	4	7

PRINCIPAL EVALUATIONS

- Principal supervisors reported having *principal*-evaluation systems in place in their districts for an average of seven years. These systems were reported to have been in place anywhere from one year to 31 years. Some 13 districts reported that their principal-evaluation systems had only been in place for a single year, which suggests that this is a new phenomenon for many districts. (Figure 8)

- Principal supervisors reported having an evaluation system in place for *assistant principals* for an average of eight years. The total number of years these systems had been in place ranged from one to 31 years. The similarity in the figures for principals and assistant principals suggests that the evaluation systems for principals and assistant principals were often developed simultaneously. (Figure 9)

- Approximately 96 percent of principal supervisors said that the purpose of their district's principal-evaluation system was to improve principal effectiveness; 79 percent said that the purpose was to identify items for on-going principal professional growth for individual principals; 74 percent said the purpose was to make decisions about principal retention; and 65 percent indicated that the purpose was to identify items for on-going professional growth for all principals. Very few reported that the purpose of the principal-evaluation systems was to make decisions about principal pay, merit pay, or promotions. (Figure 10)

- Sixty-one percent of responding principal supervisors reported that their district's principal-evaluation system was created by their own school district. Some 22 percent indicated that they were required to use their state's system, and 10 percent reported that their districts modified someone else's evaluation system or purchased it from a developer. (Figure 11)

- Ten responding districts (not principal supervisors) reported that their principal-evaluation systems were based solely on their state's standards; three districts said they originated solely from ISLCC (Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium) standards; and one district reported that its system was developed internally. Principal supervisors from 26 districts cited multiple sources. It is highly likely that respondents did not know the origin of their principal-evaluation systems or did not know which state standards were also based on ISLCC. In fact, 18 of the 26 districts indicating that their standards came from multiple sources also cited ISLCC in addition to other standards. (Table 8)

- Over 80 percent of principal supervisors rated the following components of their principal-evaluation systems as being effective or very effective: setting annual principal goals, gauging student performance on state assessments, and having written instruments completed by the principal supervisor. Some 12 percent indicated that having feedback from more than one principal supervisor was not very effective. And components related to teacher retention were most often not included in principal-evaluation systems, a finding that warrants additional investigation because of the need to retain top talent. (Figure 12)

- At least 50 percent of principal supervisors strongly agreed with statements that principals were involved in creating their evaluation systems and there was a mechanism for principals to provide feedback annually to district leaders. They were least likely to agree with statements indicating that their principal-evaluation systems were piloted in a few schools before being rolled out districtwide, and that there were rewards or consequences for performance on the evaluation system. (Figure 13)

- Approximately 35 percent of principal supervisors reported that 31 to 50 percent of their principal-evaluation system was based on student assessment results; and 16 percent stated that they were based on principal evaluation of teachers. Interestingly, 29 percent reported that principal evaluations of teachers were not included in the principal-evaluation systems, suggesting a mismatch between the evaluation of principals and the evaluation of teachers. In addition, the results indicate that

community and parent engagement counted for less than 30 percent of principal evaluations in a substantial number of cases. (Figure 14)

- Some 93 percent of principal supervisors reported that their principals received both written and oral feedback. Five percent or less reported only one mode of feedback. (Figure 15)

- Fifty-eight percent of principal supervisors graded their principal-evaluation systems as excellent or good (A or B); 31 percent graded them as average (C); and 11 percent graded them as poor (D) or very poor (F). (Figure 16)

- Over 50 percent of principal supervisors who graded their principal-evaluation system as an A or B also rated components of that system, such as having written instruments completed by supervisors, self-assessments completed by principals, observations of principal interactions with staff, and annual goals for principals, as effective. (Table 9)

- Twenty-three percent of principal supervisors indicated that principals needed additional supports in leadership development (e.g., teacher development, evaluation strategies, and progress monitoring) in order to be more effective and improve student achievement. (Table 10)

Figure 8. Average number of years principal evaluation system has been in place, n=120
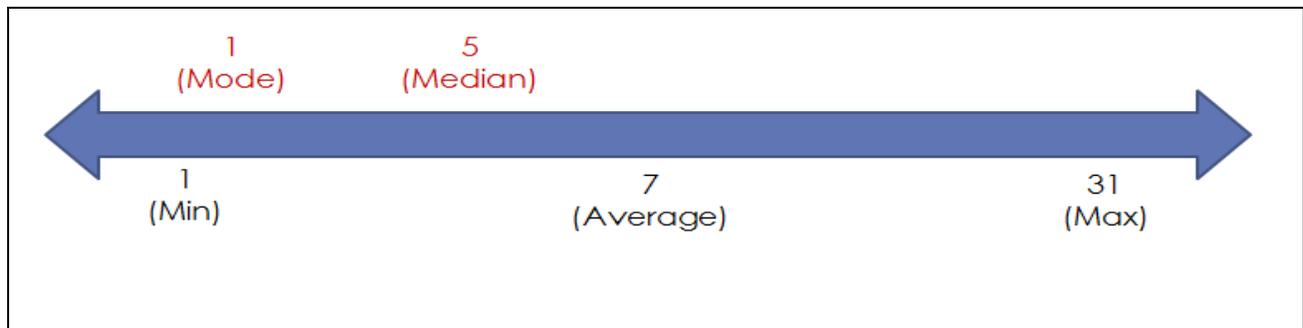
Figure 9. Average number of years assistant principal evaluation system has been in place, n=120
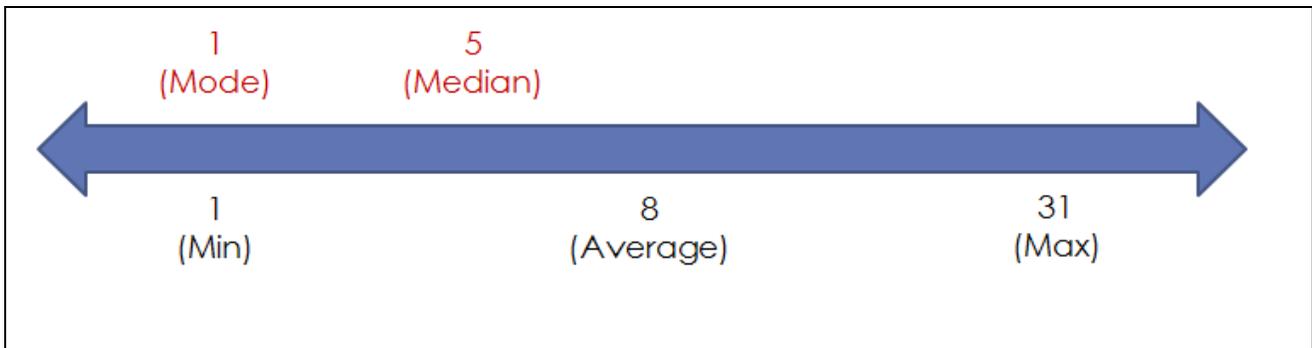
Figure 10. Principal supervisor perceptions of the purpose of their district's principal evaluation system, n=128

Improve principal effectiveness	96
Identify items for on-going professional growth for an individual principal	79
Make decisions about retention of principals	74
Identify items for on-going professional growth for all principals	65
Place principals on probation	40
Make decisions about principal promotions	24
Make decisions about merit pay for principals	11
Other	5
Make decisions about principal's annual pay rate	3

Figure 11. Percentage of principal supervisors indicating the origins of their principal evaluation systems, n=137
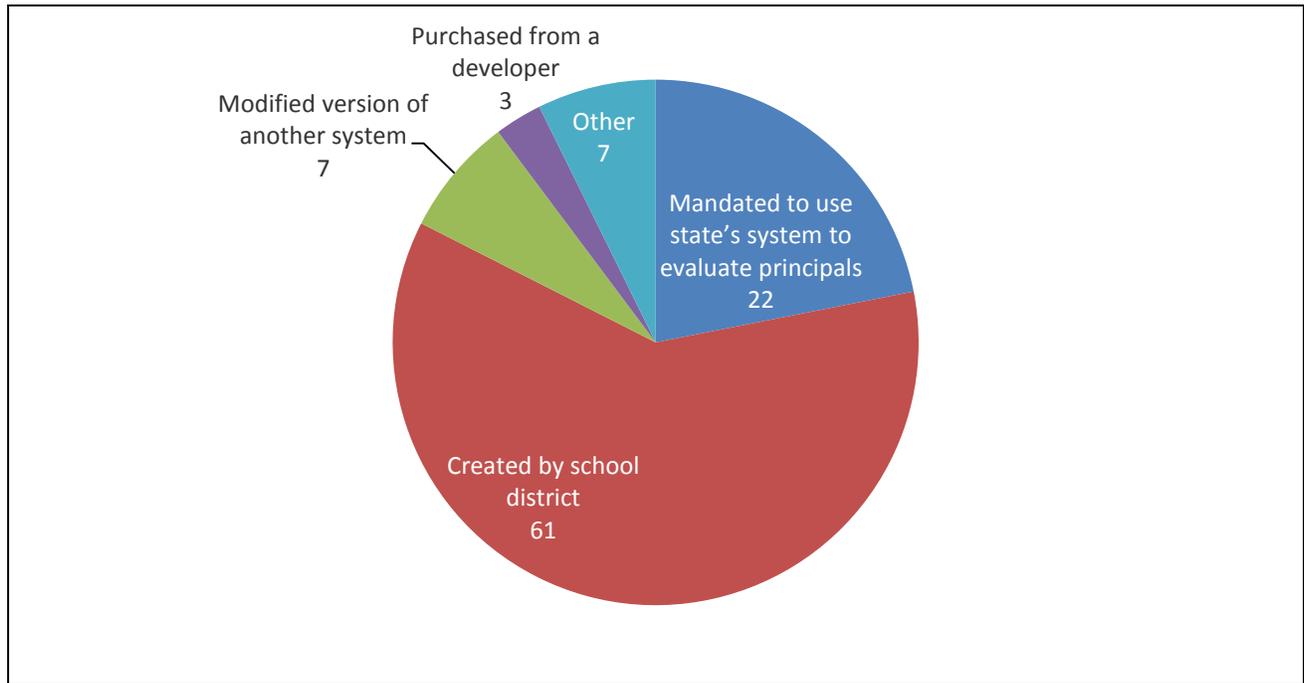
Table 8. Number of districts indicating the origins of the standards used as the basis of their principal evaluation system, n-41

(ISLLC)	Their state's standards	Professional association	Developed internally	Don't know	Multiple responses
3	10	0	1	1	26

Figure 12. Principal supervisor perceptions of the effectiveness of specific components of principal evaluation system, n=127

Component	Not included	Very Effective to Effective	Somewhat Effective	Not Very Effective to Not Effective at all
Feedback from more than one principal supervisor	48	28	13	12
Teacher retention data	29	41	21	9
Teacher effectiveness data –how many students meet a certain proficiency level, or go from one level to the next	20	59	15	6
Improving student achievement of English language learners	19	54	20	7
Student attendance	17	55	23	5
Closing achievement gaps	14	59	17	10
Student performance on district assessments—Math, ELA, Science, Social Studies	20	57	17	6
Student performance on state assessments-- Math, ELA, Science, Social Studies	10	72	14	4
Survey completed by school staff/parents/community	25	46	24	5
Portfolio of principal's work/accomplishments throughout the year	32	49	13	6
Principal's annual goals	6	72	17	6
Observations of principal interactions with staff	17	61	17	6
Self-assessment completed by principal	19	52	21	8
Written instrument completed by supervisor	2	68	23	8

Figure 13. Percentage of principal supervisors indicating agreement with statements about specified components of their principal evaluation system, n=127
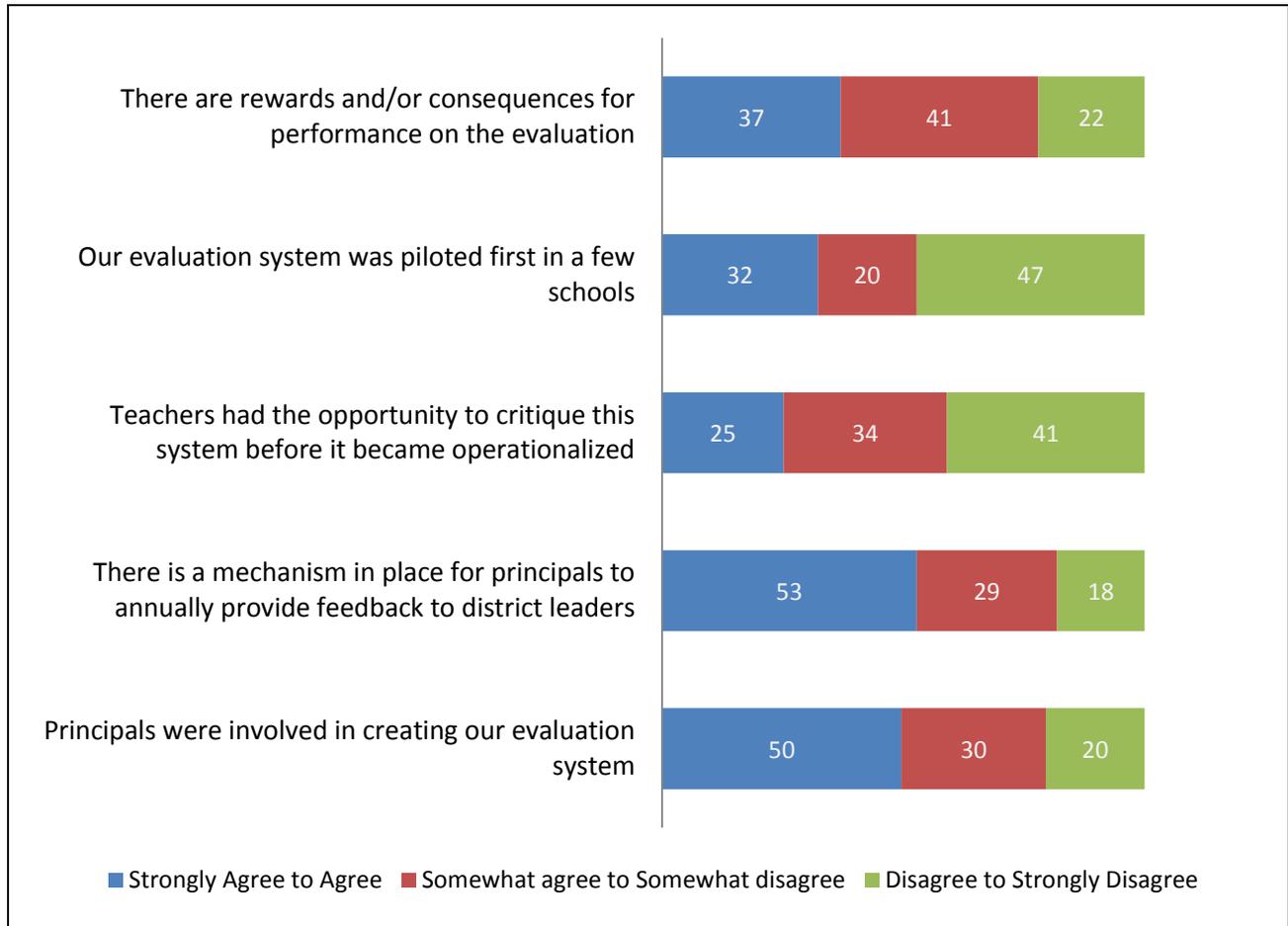
Figure 14. Percentage of principal supervisors indicating the weight given to specific components of their principal evaluation systems, n=127
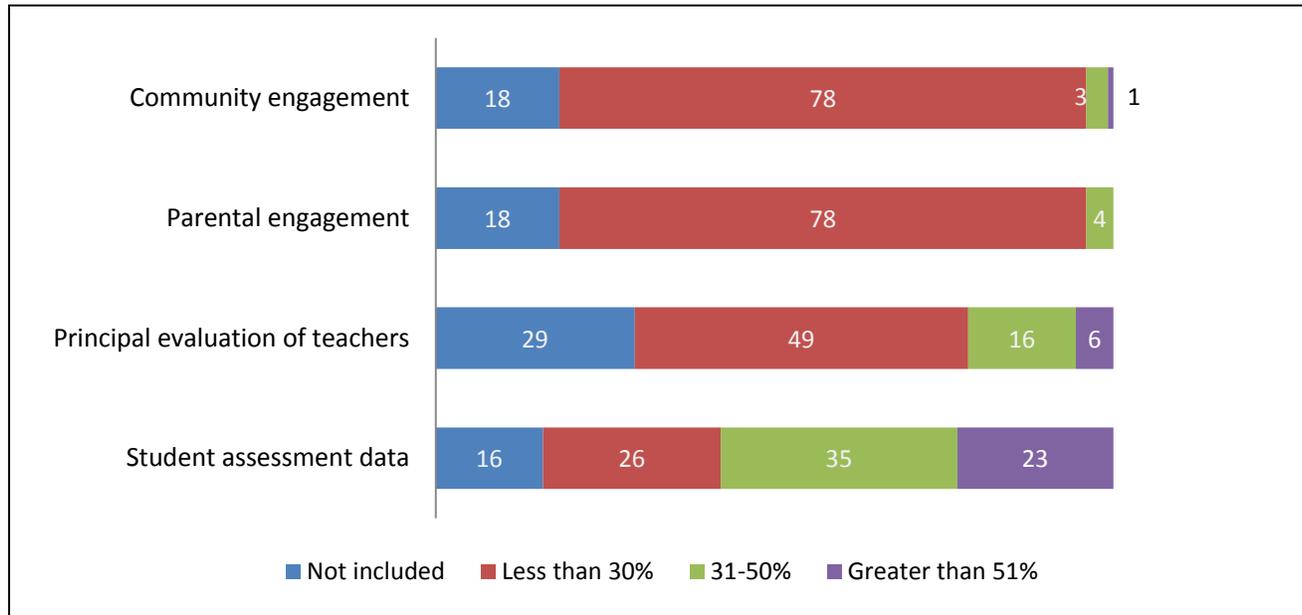

Figure 15. Percentage of principal supervisors providing specified types of feedback to their principals as a result of the evaluation process, n=126
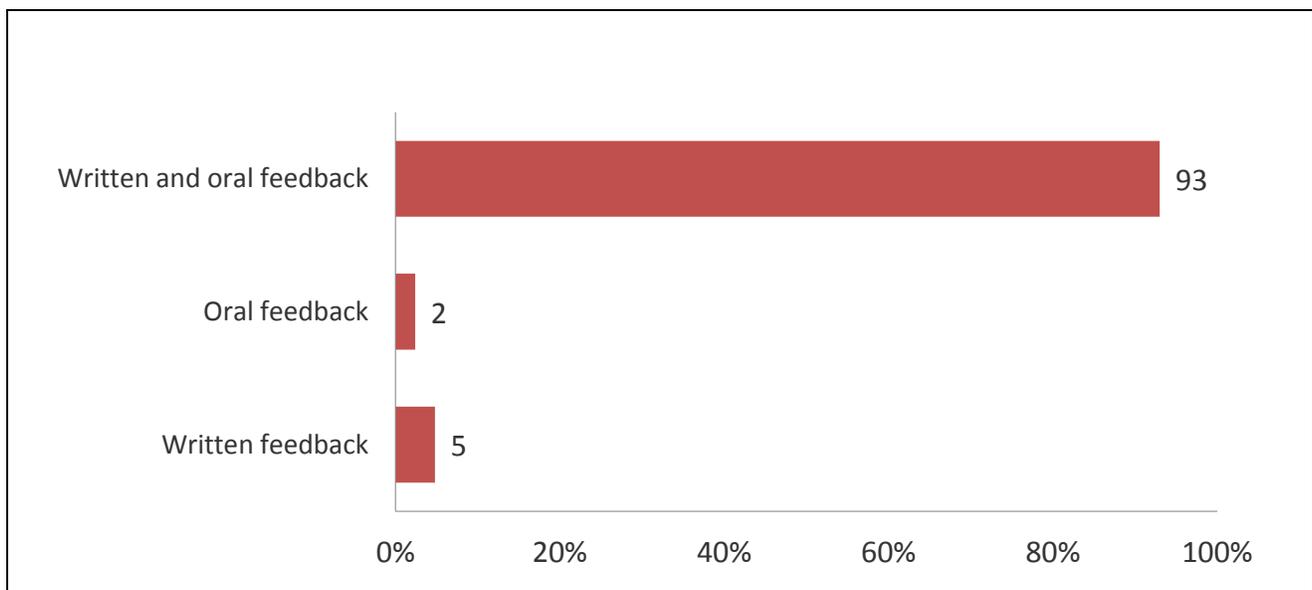
Figure 16. Percentage of principal supervisors giving their principal evaluation system specified grades for quality, n=125
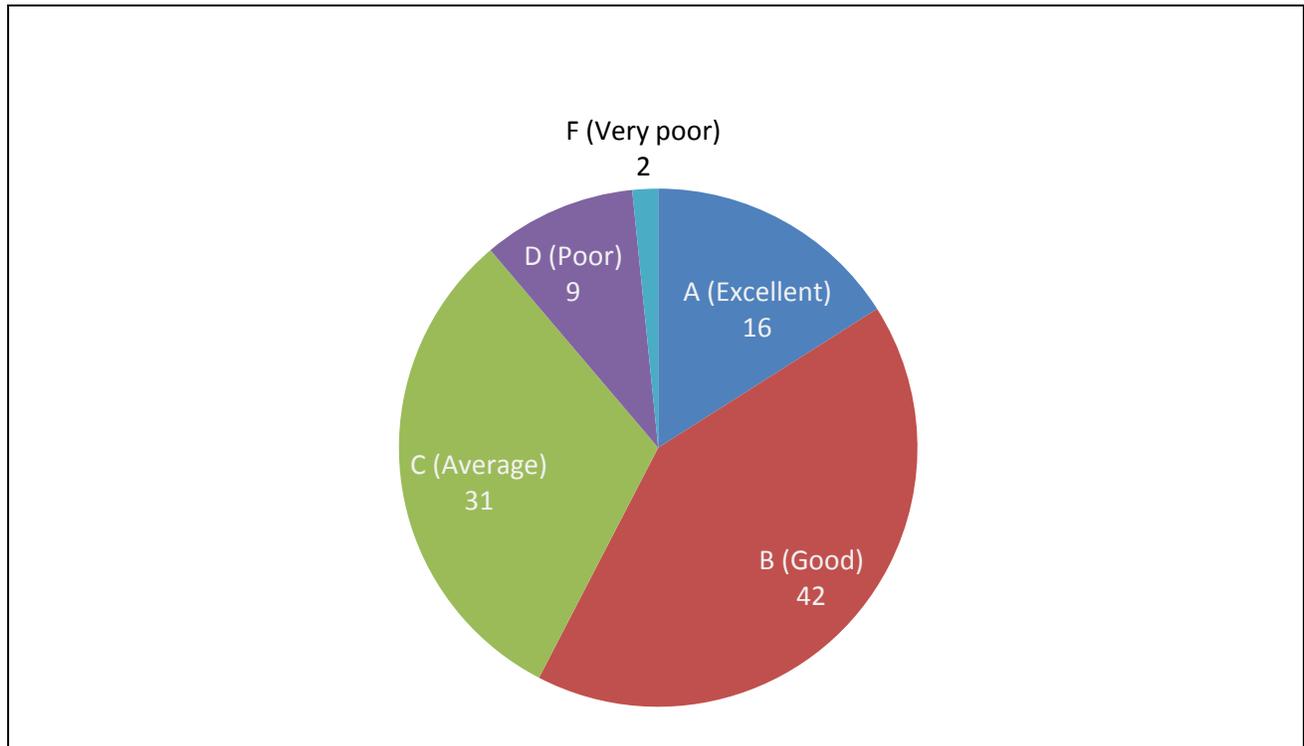
Table 9. Percentage of principal supervisors grading their principal evaluation system A or B by their perceived effectiveness of specific program components, n=72

Principal Evaluation Components	Not included	Very effective	Effective	Somewhat effective	Not very effective	Not effective at all
Written instrument completed by supervisor	3	29	61	6	1	0
Self-assessment completed by principal	11	14	56	15	3	1
Observations of principal interactions with staff	8	25	54	8	3	1
Principal's annual goals	1	35	53	8	3	0
Portfolio of principal's word/ accomplishments throughout the year	29	17	42	6	7	0
Survey completed by school staff/parents/community	15	26	35	21	3	0
Student performance on state assessments-Math, ELA, Science, Social Studies	10	49	40	1	0	0
Student performance on district assessments- Math, ELA, Science, Social Studies	19	36	33	7	4	0
Closing achievement gaps	10	36	39	11	3	1
Student attendance	14	26	40	17	1	1
Improving student achievement of English Language Learners	14	28	43	13	1	1
Teacher effectiveness data- how many students meet a certain proficiency level, or go from one level to the next	13	33	44	6	3	1
Teacher retention data	21	21	36	11	7	4

Table 10. Percentage of principal supervisors indicating the type of additional support principals need to improve their effectiveness and student achievement, n=87

Additional support for principals	Percent of respondents
Leadership development (teacher development, evaluation strategies, progress monitoring)	23
Additional mentorship and coaching	16
More professional development or professional development that is focused and relevant to their needs	11
Curriculum development, instructional strategies, and assessments	9
Fewer meetings/more time to plan and make changes in schools	8
Other	7
Less responsibilities and additional staff (i.e. 12 month assistant principals, instructional specialist, operations staff)	6
More data and information on data management	4
Clarity on expectations and the objectives for students	3
Collaboration (with districts or other principals)	3
Not sure	3
Support with common core	2
Resources	2
None	2

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The results of this first-of-its-kind survey of urban school systems point to the fact that principal supervisors play an increasingly important role in supporting principals and improving student achievement. The data also indicate that individuals who play this role come from a variety of backgrounds, but typically have prior experience as principals, principal coaches, and teachers. In addition, the results indicate that principal supervisors supervise, on average, twenty-four principals with very few support staff.

Survey results also showed that the roles and responsibilities of principal supervisors have shifted substantially over the last two years. Increasingly, principal supervisors are being asked to be instructional leaders and to provide support to their principals by visiting classrooms, interpreting and reviewing performance data, and providing professional development. Moreover, most respondents agreed that their principal-evaluation systems were largely effective and were meant to improve principal effectiveness rather than to allocate merit pay or decide on promotions.

Nonetheless, the data pointed to a number of challenges as their roles were being redefined. First, many respondents indicated that they were under enormous time constraints because of overlapping meetings and lack of clarity about their duties and responsibilities. Survey results indicated that in addition to their growing involvement with instruction at their school sites, supervisors are also taking on more administrative and compliance issues than two years ago, presenting a clear tension between their operational and instructional leadership roles. The need to balance responsibilities of individuals serving in these positions was clearly evident in the data. Second, the Council saw it as positive that principal supervisors saw the principal-evaluation systems as driving improvement rather than just being used to assign incentives or compensation, but we did wonder why teacher-evaluation systems could not be seen in the same ways. It suggests a mismatch in the systems used to evaluate principals versus those used to evaluate teachers. This point is bolstered by the finding that the evaluation of teachers was not an explicit component in many principal evaluation systems. Third, the finding that many principal-evaluation systems lack a component dealing with teacher retention also points to an important gap that fails to hold principals accountable for retaining top teaching talent in their schools.

In short, the role of the principal supervisor is evolving in urban school districts. More emphasis is being placed on instructional leadership and more evaluation tools are being developed and used to hold supervisors and principals accountable for student achievement. This evolution and how it is defined and managed will be an increasingly important lever for urban school systems to boost student achievement in the years ahead.

APPENDIX

Appendix A. Surveys were received from the following districts:

1. Anchorage School District
2. Atlanta Public Schools
3. Austin Independent School District
4. Baltimore City Public Schools
5. Birmingham City Schools
6. Boston Public Schools
7. Broward County Public Schools
8. Charlotte-Mecklenburg County Public Schools
9. Chicago Public Schools
10. Cincinnati Public Schools
11. Clark County School District
12. Cleveland Metropolitan School District
13. Columbus City Schools
14. Dayton Public Schools
15. Denver Public Schools
16. Des Moines Independent Community School District
17. District of Columbia Public Schools
18. Duval County Public Schools
19. Gwinnett County Public Schools
20. Hillsborough County Public Schools
21. Houston Independent School District
22. Kansas City Public Schools
23. Little Rock School District
24. Long Beach Unified School District
25. Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools
26. Miami-Dade County Public Schools
27. Milwaukee Public Schools
28. Minneapolis Public Schools
29. New York City Department of Education
30. Norfolk Public Schools
31. Oakland Unified School District
32. Omaha Public Schools
33. Orange County Public Schools
34. The School District of Palm Beach County
35. Portland Public Schools
36. Prince George County Public Schools
37. Providence Public School District
38. Richmond Public Schools
39. San Diego Unified School District
40. Santa Ana Unified School District
41. St. Paul Public Schools