Measuring Principal Performance

How Rigorous Are Commonly Used Principal
Performance Assessment Instruments?

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Contents

Introduction

Assessing school principal performance is both necessary and challenging. It is necessary because principal performance assessments offer districts an additional mechanism to ensure accountability for results and reinforce the importance of strong leadership practices. After all, school principals are second only to classroom teachers as the most influential school factor in student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Principal performance assessments also provide central office administrators and principals, themselves, information with which to build professional learning plans and chart professional growth. Such assessments are also challenging because principals' practice and influence on instruction is sometimes not readily apparent.

During the past five years, many states have begun using validated measures in summative assessments of novice principal competency as a basis for certification decisions. These measures may be psychometrically sound but often cannot be used for formative performance assessments or professional development planning (Reeves, 2005). To be used as a formative performance assessment, test results would have to be disaggregated, and their underlying constructs would need to be made transparent to readers. In addition, administrative and analytic control would have to be transferred to local educators (see "Formative Versus Summative Assessment: What Is the Difference?" on page 2).

Although standardized tests are used for certification purposes, other types of assessments are being used by school districts to ascertain principal performance and plan professional learning. So, independent of standardized measures, which tend to serve summative purposes, other assessments are being used formatively to judge principal performance. Scanning the field, Goldring et al. (2009) found that school districts often use idiosyncratic and inconsistent measures for principal performance assessment. Districts' principal performance assessments may or may not be aligned with existing professional standards, and they often lack justification or documentation of psychometric rigor (Heck & Marcoulides, 1996). In other words, district performance assessments allow for formative feedback, but the measures vary in quality and rigor. This variance opens up the possibility that scores are inaccurate or performance assessments do not reflect research-based standards of the field.

Superintendents and others who seek to improve principal performance assessment may select one or more of these measures or may develop and validate their own measures. Regardless of origin, assessments should be validated and reliable to ensure accuracy and applicability to principal performance.

This brief reports results of a scan of publicly available measures conducted by Learning Point Associates staff* in 2009. The measures included in this review are expressly intended to evaluate principal performance and have varying degrees of publicly available evidence of psychometric testing. The review of this information is intended to inform decision makers' selection of job performance instruments used for hiring, performance assessment, and tenure decisions. This brief also addresses the importance of standards-based measures, the need for establishing reliability and validity, and the measures that are more widely accepted and psychometrically sound.

New Standards for Principal Performance

Knowledge about what strong principals do to develop and maintain teaching and learning excellence has evolved with the changes in the context of schooling and improved school leadership research. School principals are being asked to ensure that all students have access to high-quality instruction and all educators are held accountable for student learning. These tasks deepen and broaden principals' professional responsibilities beyond their traditional roles as building managers.

New standards for principal performance have emerged and reflect new emphases in the profession. The *Educational Leadership Policy Standards: ISLLC 2008*, for example, are a widely recognized and referenced principals standards list (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008). The ISLLC Standards contain six domains for principal professional practice:

- Setting a widely shared vision for learning
- Developing a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth
- Ensuring effective management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment
- Collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources
- Acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner
- Understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, legal, and cultural context

* Learning Point Associates merged with American Institutes for Research in August 2010.

As the ISLLC Standards suggest, principals must work within a well-formed ethical code to oversee instructional quality; develop teacher talents; establish a learning culture in schools; and work within and beyond the school to secure financial, human, and political capital to maintain and advance organizational operations.

The ISLLC Standards have been integrated into many states' licensure procedures through the following means:

- Alignment of ISLLC Standards with state principal professional standards

- Requirement of all principal candidates to receive a certain score on a standardized examination, which has been validated against ISLLC Standards, as a prerequisite for certification

- Requirement of state-recognized preservice principal preparation programs to display and defend how program activities prepare and determine whether candidates meet ISLLC Standards

Less is known about the integration and alignment of ISLLC Standards, other standards lists, or other promising leadership practices with principal performance assessments.

Reliability and Validity

To be included in the scan, documentation of validity and reliability testing had to be published. Such testing provides evidence of psychometric rigor, which should be considered by purchasers and users of performance assessments.

Assessments are considered *valid* when they measure what they are intended to measure. There are many types of validity, but two of the more salient types in constructing performance measures are content and construct validity. Content validity is established by ensuring that the test items under consideration measure all of the dimensions or facets of a given construct, such as principal performance. Content validity can be established by linking the test or other items to a set of standards, such as the ISLLC Standards, or practices, such as leadership effectiveness.

Construct validity is determined by the degree to which test items measure a "construct," which is the element that the items purport to assess. For example, a construct may be ISLLC Standard 5, "An education leader promotes the success of every student by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner" (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008, p. 15). For this construct, multiple test items or another method for collecting evidence would be needed to determine the degree to which the standard is met. In this case, testing for construct validity would determine how well items and observations measure principals' abilities to act with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.

Reliability is a measure of consistency and stability. A measure has reliability when the responses are consistent and stable for each individual who takes the test. In other words, a principal should receive relatively the same score on multiple administrations of a given test if all factors remain the same.

The Reviewed Measures

Of the 20 school principal performance assessment measures identified through Google Scholar, eight met preestablished criteria for inclusion in the review (see "How Assessments Were Selected for Review").

Some measures, such as the ETS School Leadership Series examinations, provided extensive documentation of reliability and validity testing but no information about the formative use of results in performance assessment, so this measure was not included in the review. Other measures, such as the Chicago Public Schools' principal performance rubric, are clearly intended for use during performance assessments, but no documentation was available about the validity or reliability of these measures.

The following principal performance assessments were included in the review and may be useful resources for superintendents, human resource directors, and others who are charged with gauging principal skills and abilities for hiring, performance assessment, and tenure decisions. Table 1 provides additional information about each of the measures included in this review (see p. 7).

Change Facilitator Style Questionnaire

Vandenberghe (1988) developed the Change Facilitator Style Questionnaire (CFSQ) to measure the extent to which leaders can facilitate change (see School Administrators of Iowa, 2003). In CFSQ, three different approaches have been identified as change facilitator styles: initiator, manager, and responder. Data are categorized into three clusters with two scales/dimensions embedded within each cluster:

- Cluster 1. Concern for People: Scale 1 (Social/Informal) and Scale 2 (Formal/Meaningful)
- Cluster 2. Organizational Efficiency: Scale 3 (Trust in Others) and Scale 4 (Administrative Efficiency)
- Cluster 3. Strategic Sense: Scale 5 (Day-to-Day) and Scale 6 (Vision and Planning)

How Assessments Were Selected for Review

Learning Point Associates staff conducted a keyword search of Google Scholar to locate school principal performance assessment instruments. More than 5,000 articles were initially identified, but the majority of articles were not pertinent. To winnow the list further, publicly available performance assessment support documents had to report that the assessment was

- Intended for use as a performance assessment.
- Psychometrically tested for reliability and validity.
- Publicly available for purchase.

For the purposes of the review, psychometrically sound means that the instrument must be tested for validity and reliability using accepted testing measures. A minimum reliability rating of 0.75 must be achieved. Also, content validity and/or construct validity testing must have occurred.

Using these criteria, 20 assessments were identified, and eight principal performance assessment instruments were included in the final review.

Diagnostic Assessment of School and Principal Effectiveness

Ebmeier (1992) developed this measure to identify the strengths of schools and their leaders so that school improvement plans and principal professional development goals would be better informed. To complete the assessment, separate surveys are completed by students, teachers, parents, principals, and principal supervisors. The measures indicate how these groups view themselves, school leadership, and school performance. Multiple measures are completed by multiple groups to identify matches between school leader traits and school characteristics. These measures can be used separately depending on their purpose. For more information, see Ebmeier (1991).

Instructional Activity Questionnaire

This measure was developed by Larsen (1987) as a performance assessment tool that specifically addresses instructional leadership aspects of principals' work (as cited in Heck, Larsen, & Marcoulides, 1990). The measure was developed through an extensive review of the school principal effectiveness literature.

Leadership Practices Inventory

Kouzes and Posner (2002) developed the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) by extensively interviewing and surveying leaders, including principals, to identify best leadership practices. Thus, LPI views leadership practices as transferrable across professional types. What works to inspire people in business settings also may work in educational settings. LPI's domains are as follows: (1) modeling the way, (2) inspiring a shared vision, (3) challenging the process, (4) enabling others to act, and (5) encouraging the heart. This measure has found widespread appeal across many disciplines, and LPI can be completed as an online or print survey. For more information, see Kouzes and Posner (n.d.).

Performance Review Analysis and Improvement System for Education

The Performance Review Analysis and Improvement System for Education (PRAISE) assessment system was developed through an extensive review of school administrator effectiveness literature. As such, PRAISE domains are not specifically aligned with professional standards. The PRAISE domains are problem solving, relations with teachers, and professional qualities and competencies. PRAISE is a print assessment to be completed by the principal and his or her supervisor. For more information, see Knoop and Common (1985).

Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale

Hallinger and Murphy (1985) developed the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) to determine the degree to which principals serve as instructional managers. PIMRS also provides exemplars of each construct, which may be used by raters to identify changes in their own or others' practices. PIMRS focuses on several constructs, including the dedicated use of time for improving instruction, coordinating curriculum, and evaluating instruction. For more information, see Leadingware (2008).

Principal Profile

The Principal Profile was developed through extensive interview and consultation with principals, teachers, superintendents, and department heads. The authors consulted with practitioners to establish validity and reliability but also to ensure that the measure was practical for use in school/district settings. Two key assumptions inform the tool: (1) student growth should be a benchmark for school leader effectiveness and a factor in performance evaluation and (2) school leader effectiveness is marked by consistency of actions, in that principals need a well-defined set of purposes and the skill and knowledge to achieve them on a consistent basis. For more information, see Leithwood and Montgomery (1986) and Leithwood (1987).

Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education

Since the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (VAL-ED) was developed in 2006, it has become one of the most widely used and respected measures of school leadership performance assessment. Like the Diagnostic Assessment of School and Principal Effectiveness, VAL-ED assesses principal performance by gathering information from principals, teachers, and principal supervisors. The results from VAL-ED produce a quantitative diagnostic profile that is linked to the ISLLC standards. VAL-ED is based on a thorough examination of the research literature including a conceptual framework within which to place the scale. For more information, see Vanderbilt Peabody College (n.d.) and Porter, Murphy, Goldring, and Elliot (2006).

Summary of Findings

Table 1 synthesizes findings from the review of instruments. In the table, the content focus of the assessment (e.g., principal as change facilitator or principal as instructional leader) and evaluation approach (e.g., self-reflection survey or 360-degree evaluation) are indicated in the column labeled "Approach." Validity measures and testing methods are generally described. In the "Reliability" column, a benchmark of 0.80 was used to indicate "moderate" reliability, and a benchmark of 0.90 was used to indicate "high" reliability. Any reliability rating below 0.80 was considered "poor."

Table 1. School Leadership Measures

Instrument	Author(s)	Approach	Time Required	Content and Construct Validity	Reliability
Change Facilitator Style Questionnaire (CFSQ)	Vandenberghe (1988)	▪ 77-item assessment that addresses six domains ▪ Collects information about teachers' view of the principal as leader	Time required is not stated.	Content validity is based on extensive literature review and focus group study used in development. Construct validity is established through empirical validation using confirmatory factor analysis.	Poor: Subscale coefficient alphas range from 0.64 to 0.95.
Diagnostic Assessment of School and Principal Effectiveness	Ebmeier (1992)	▪ 360-degree evaluation focusing on educational leadership ▪ 213-item survey independently completed by students, teachers, principals, and others ▪ Results combined into a score	30–40 minutes per questionnaire	Content validity is substantiated through the development of a conceptual framework and extensive review by graduate students, college professors, and practitioners. Construct validity is established through factor analysis and high inter-item correlations.	Moderate: Alpha coefficients range from 0.80 to 0.97.
Instructional Activity Questionnaire	Larsen (1987)	▪ A 34-item assessment ▪ Covers three subscales that specifically address instructional leadership	Time required is not stated.	Content validity is based on review of literature. Construct validity is empirically validated using confirmatory factor analysis.	Moderate: Alpha coefficient ranges from 0.70 to 0.90.
Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI)	Kouzes and Posner (2002)	▪ 30-item measure of general leadership practices to be completed by the principal and an observer or supervisor ▪ Widely used to measure leadership effectiveness	Time required is not stated.	Content validity is established via extensive interviews and surveys of leaders. Construct validity is established via confirmatory factor analysis. Concurrent validity is established between LPI and other evaluations of managerial effectiveness, such as working with others, credibility, and team cohesiveness.	Poor: Test-retest reliability for school principals is 0.79.

Instrument	Author(s)	Approach	Time Required	Content and Construct Validity	Reliability
Performance Review Analysis and Improvement System for Education (PRAISE)	Knoop and Common (1985)	■ 81-item assessment that includes nine subscales ■ Produces a two-dimensional leadership profile and identification of strengths and weaknesses	15–20 minutes	Content validity is based on thorough review of effectiveness literature and content validation. Construct validity is not examined.	Moderate: Alpha coefficient ranges from 0.88 to 0.98, whereas test-retest reliability ranges from 0.59 to 0.80.
Principal Instructional Management-Rating Scale (PIMRS)	Hallinger and Murphy (1985)	■ 71-item questionnaire that addresses 11 educational leadership subscales ■ Widely used in the field	10–15 minutes	Content validity is based on a review of the instructional leadership literature. Content is validated through extensive expert review. Agreement among raters was 0.80 for each item for inclusion in the scale. Construct validity is shown by higher correlations among items within a subscale than for the same items for other subscales. In addition, PIMRS scores are corroborated by school documents.	Poor: Alpha coefficient is 0.75.
Principal Profile	Leithwood and Montgomery (1986) Leithwood (1987)	■ Interview-based assessment technique that measures leadership effectiveness on certain tasks and characterizes leadership style ■ Used primarily as a diagnostic tool	15–20 minutes	Content validity is based on review of the literature. Construct validity is based on empirical validation using confirmatory factor analysis.	Poor: Inter-rater agreement from 0.50 to 1.00.
Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (VAL-ED)	Porter et al. (2006)	■ 360-degree assessment tool to be administered to principals, teachers, and principals' supervisors ■ Consists of 72 items ■ Produces a quantitative diagnostic profile ■ Linked to ISLLC Standards	20 minutes	Content validity is based on examination of the research literature conceptual framework. Construct validity is based on confirmatory factor analyses, which revealed a great fit for core components and the key processes. There were high component and process intercorrelations (0.73 to 0.90). Concurrent validity is based on the fact that teacher and principal ratings are related ($r = 0.47$).	High: Alpha is 0.98 for all 12 scales on different forms.

Findings

The Internet-based scan of scholarly articles and books conducted identified 20 school principal performance assessments, which were intended for use in hiring, advancement, and tenure decisions. Of the 20 assessments, eight met criteria for rigor, which meant that the assessment development process was transparent and involved some psychometric testing, and measures were provided for review. Two of the eight assessments were developed in the past decade, and the remainder were developed 10–20 years ago.

The scan suggests that, although there is considerable interest in school principal quality and accountability, few principal performance assessments have been rigorously developed or make details of psychometric testing available for public review. An explanation for the finding is that few assessments are being used in the field, but the findings of Goldring et al. (2009) suggest that many principal performance assessments of varying quality are being used. Unpublished assessments were not included in the scan.

In addition, the age of instruments raises questions about their continued validity for assessing principal performance. Given the emphasis on instructional leadership, accountability, data-based decision making, community involvement, and other well-documented changes to the school principal position in the past 10 years, it is plausible that older measures do not capture essential features of the position. Changes in the position and additional research on principal effectiveness raise concerns and may be cause for revalidation of older assessments.

The scan also highlights the different approaches to assessing school principal performance. The eight principal performance assessments measure the degree to which principals complete different roles. For example, CFSQ addresses principals' roles as change facilitators, VAL-ED focuses on principals as instructional leaders, and PRAISE examines principal capacity to improve school-level systems. Each provides test takers and principal evaluators with slightly different perspectives on principal practices.

In addition, the assessments take different approaches to data collection. Several measures use self-assessment questionnaires or rubrics that provide an aggregate score and help principals to answer the following question: "How do I think I am doing, in reference to professional competencies?" Others use more intensive 360-degree surveys from multiple constituents to create an aggregate profile, which can provide comparative information based on multiple perspectives to principals about their performance. The use of different constituencies to rate principal performance is a growing trend (Lashway, 2003). These evaluations answer the following question: "How do I, and others, believe I am doing, in reference to professional competencies?"

In conjunction with student achievement data, the performance assessments that are included in this review hold potential for raising principal accountability and identifying necessary changes in practice. However, principal performance assessment data will achieve desired ends only if principals and their supervisors view the data as credible and actionable and give assessment data considerable weight during principal performance evaluations. Close examinations of the principal performance evaluation process—its frequency and structure—would provide information about how assessments are used. In addition, this process would offer insight for assessment developers about how to structure assessment processes for better effects.

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