Evaluating the School Principal

A Professional Model for Enhancing the Leadership Practices of Alberta's School Administrators

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"Leaders are visionaries with a poorly developed sense of fear and no concept of the odds against them." *—Robert Jarvik*

The Alberta Teachers' Association

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Preface

Throughout the world, education policy makers are constantly looking for ways to prepare school leaders to deal with the complex challenges facing public education in the 21st century. Research has demonstrated a clear correlation between effective school leadership and student achievement. Producing school leaders capable of creating an environment that optimizes student learning involves four major tasks: defining standards for school principals; recruiting and developing leaders; ensuring that principals receive ongoing professional development; and evaluating their performance.

This publication describes a two-year research project that the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) undertook in 2007 in collaboration with Livingstone Range School Division No 68. The purpose of this project was to field-test the ATA's model policy on the professional growth, supervision and evaluation of school administrators. This policy asserts that any approach to the growth, supervision and evaluation of administrators must be based on sound research, must take into account the unique circumstances of each school and must begin with the assumption that an administrator is competent rather than deficient. It also contends that, rather than involving a simple checklist, the evaluation process must be thorough and must involve input from the entire school community.

At the dawn of a new decade, Alberta continues to be admired around the world for the success and vibrancy of its public education system as well as for its willingness to embrace such innovations as the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement. Much of this success can be attributed to the high quality of the leadership in Alberta schools.

The complexity of the school administrator's role cannot be underestimated. As this study shows, any attempt to evaluate a school administrator must take into account the intense intellectual and emotional labour involved in every aspect of school leadership.

The publication of this study is particularly timely, following, as it does, the February 2009 release of The Principal Quality Practice Guideline, an Alberta Education document intended to guide education stakeholders in their efforts to recruit, support and evaluate school leaders.

Gordon R Thomas
Executive Secretary

Introduction

School leadership is a dominant topic on the education policy agendas of Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) countries and their partners. A growing body of evidence suggests that school leaders, by shaping the conditions and environment in which teaching and learning occur, have an important role to play in student learning. Although educational policy is generally established at the provincial and jurisdiction level, the extent to which that policy succeeds or fails ultimately depends on the motivations and actions of leaders at the school level. School leaders are also responsible for forging relationships between the school and the surrounding community (Pont, Nusche and Moorman 2008, 9–20).

Given the importance of school leadership, surprisingly little research has been undertaken with respect to the supervision and evaluation of school leaders (Lashway 2003, 2). Jurisdictions often associate the evaluation of school principals with personnel evaluation and, as a result, incorporate tools and processes from the private sector. The purpose of such evaluation has usually been summative: "to assert and maintain some accountability for the leaders' work; to justify hiring, firing, reassignment; or to inform the renewal of an administrative contract" (Portin, Feldman and Knapp 2006, 2). Although evaluating performance for contract purposes is necessary, evaluations of this type do little to improve the principal's leadership practice throughout his or her career. After reviewing hundreds of leadership evaluation systems and procedures, Reeves (2004) concluded that most of them are failures. Indeed, more than 18 per cent of the leaders he studied had never been evaluated in their current position, and the vast majority of the leaders who had been evaluated found the process to be "inconsistent, ambiguous and counterproductive" (2).

Given the current emphasis on the need for accountability, governments have become very interested in performance appraisals. In terms of assessing leadership, such appraisals can serve three distinct, but interrelated, functions: "personnel management, professional development and organizational improvement" (Portin, Feldman and Knapp 2006, 14). Governments develop leadership standards and policies to articulate their vision of school leadership and to communicate their expectations of school leaders. Ideally, these standards should be flexible enough to allow school jurisdictions to adapt the criteria to accommodate local priorities. Research also demonstrates that jurisdictions that involve the school community in developing locally based criteria tend to be more successful in developing a coherent evaluation system than those that take a less collaborative approach (Portin, Feldman and Knapp 2006, 34).

As Normore (2004) notes, "One of the necessary steps in developing an evaluation system is to clarify the objects, purposes and standards that will be used" (286–87). Reeves (2004) advocates that "the fundamental purpose of leadership evaluation is the improvement of teaching and learning through the building of the knowledge and skills of current and prospective educational leaders" (16).

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Developing a comprehensive, coherent evaluation system involves defining clear leadership standards and levels of performance that take into account the local and school context of the person being evaluated as well as the stage at which the person is in his or her career (Portin, Feldman and Knapp 2006, 18–21). The information used in the evaluation must be authentic and relevant to the standards being judged. Researchers caution against using simple checklists, stakeholder surveys, student achievement data and anecdotal reports to evaluate the complex work of school leaders (Lashway 2003, 2–5; Portin, Feldman and Knapp 2006, 29; Normore 2004, 286). Some researchers encourage evaluators to use portfolios. Portfolios are "conceptual containers" into which principals can place a variety of artifacts or evidence to document their achievements. The benefit of using portfolios is that they encourage the principal being evaluated to engage in self-reflection. He or she must determine the value of the artifact, explain why it is valuable and describe the professional growth that resulted from producing it (Lashway 2003, 5). Another essential component of the evaluation process is candid and challenging feedback provided by a trained evaluator (Normore 2004, 287). Heck, Johnsrud and Rosser assert that a performance system is not as "rational and straightforward as [the] definition suggests; it is rooted in politics. ... Considering the motivation for evaluating performance in public education and the potential effect on individual school administrators, it is crucial that 'the procedures be feasible, fair, and accurate; that is, the process must rise above its political motivation'" (as quoted in Normore 2004, 285).

Recognizing that school leadership plays a crucial role in fostering student learning, the Alberta Teachers' Association, Livingstone Range Local No 14 and Livingstone Range School Division No 68 agreed in 2007 to undertake a collaborative project to develop policies and procedures for the professional growth, supervision and evaluation of administrators. The ultimate goal of these policies and procedures was to support the development of excellent school leaders capable of creating a school environment that optimizes learning for all students.

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School Leadership in Alberta: Principal Quality Practice

According to Canada's constitution, the provinces and territories rather than the federal government are responsible for public education. As a result, each province and territory has developed its own education system, complete with regulations and policies. Alberta students tend to score very high on international education rankings. Among the factors contributing to these high rankings are a strong centralized curriculum, effective teachers and excellent schools. Scholars agree that school principals have an important impact—second only to that of effective classroom teachers—on student achievement (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom, 2004).

Alberta's *Teaching Profession Act* governs the membership, objectives and operation of the Alberta Teachers' Association. By law, all certificated teachers, including school principals, who are employed by public school districts must be members of the Association. The Association is a unicameral organization and, as such, undertakes both professional and union functions with respect to its members. The Association provides school principals with a full range of professional development services, including leadership development programs, mentorship, publications, conferences and professional development workshops. The Association also advocates for its members in meetings with government and school board officials. For many years, the Association has urged the provincial government to develop standards for school principals and to enact provincial policy on how they are evaluated.

In its 2003 report *Every Child Learns, Every Child Succeeds*, Alberta's Commission on Learning recommended that the province develop provincial standards for school principals (122–23). In response to this recommendation, Alberta Education established a stakeholder advisory committee in 2005 and charged it with the task of drafting provincial standards for principals. The committee, which adopted a collaborative, consultative approach, included representatives from the Association, the College of Alberta Superintendents, the Alberta School Boards Association, faculties of education from Alberta universities and the Alberta School Councils' Association.

By December 2007, the committee had developed a draft standard for Principal Quality Practice and released it for field review. Based on feedback from the field, the committee revised the draft, which Alberta Education then published in January 2008 as *Principal Quality Practice: Successful School Leadership in Alberta*. As the introduction explains, the Principal Quality Practice document "can be used to guide many activities including: principal preparation and recruitment, principals' self-reflection and daily practice, principals' initial and ongoing professional growth and principal supervision and evaluation" (Alberta Education 2008, 4). Almost immediately, the Association and other organizations providing professional development began using the draft standard as a reference in designing leadership

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development programs. In addition, some school districts used the standard as a framework for hiring and evaluating school administrators.

Designed to mirror the Teaching Quality Standard that Alberta Education adopted in 1997, the committee's document defines quality practice for school principals in one statement, as follows:

> The principal is an accomplished teacher who practices quality leadership in the provision of opportunities for optimum learning and development of all students in the school. (Alberta Education 2008, 5)

It is worth noting that, by describing a principal as an accomplished teacher, the standard ensures that all principals in Alberta have a valid teaching certificate.

The statement on Principal Quality Practice is followed by a set of seven leadership dimensions, which attempt to capture the multidimensional role of school principals. As the document explains, "Principal Quality Practice and the related role dimensions are interrelated and link to principals' practice. The dimensions and descriptors are not intended to show isolated knowledge or skills and are not presented in order of importance" (Alberta Education 2008, 5). The seven leadership dimensions defined in the document are as follows:

1. Fostering Effective Relationships
2. Embodying Visionary Leadership
3. Leading a Learning Community
4. Providing Instructional Leadership
5. Developing and Facilitating Leadership
6. Managing School Operations and Resources
7. Understanding and Responding to the Larger Societal Context

Each leadership dimension is followed by a list of descriptors intended to describe the leadership behaviours implicit in the dimension and to offer further clarification.

The 62 jurisdictions that make up Alberta's public education system exhibit considerable diversity. Schools within a given jurisdiction, for example, tend to vary in terms of their size, the programs they offer, the resources available to them, the social and cultural demographics of the staff and students, and their history. These factors, in turn, influence the school principal's approach to decision making and leadership. The leadership standard emphasizes that, in deciding whether a principal's practice meets the standard, the evaluator should (1) take into account the context in which the principal is operating and (2) base his or her decision on concrete evidence:

> Reasoned, evidence-based, professional judgment must be used to determine whether Principal Quality Practice is demonstrated in a given context. (Alberta Education 2008, 5)

In early 2009, Alberta Education formally adopted the Principal Quality Practice document and published it under the title *The Principal Quality Practice Guideline: Promoting Successful School Leadership in Alberta.*

The Research Process

The purpose of the two-year project was to evaluate the leadership practice of school principals in a school district in Alberta using a multidimensional evaluation model based on the draft provincial standard for Principal Quality Practice. In undertaking the project, the partners followed an action research model such that at each stage the draft policies and procedures were field-tested, refined on the basis of the feedback received, tested again and then further refined. During year 1, for example, the researchers invited participants to provide feedback on various aspects of the policy as it was developed. The resulting feedback was used to fine-tune the policy and to develop rubrics for evaluating the extent to which principals had achieved each of the seven leadership dimensions outlined in the draft Principal Quality Practice document. A small pilot was then undertaken at the end of year 1 to test the evaluation procedure. The two principals and the superintendent who participated in the pilot were interviewed, and their feedback was used to revise the rubrics and to develop additional documents to support the evaluation procedures. In year 2, the superintendent evaluated 12 principals using the revised procedures and rubrics. The steering committee used the feedback they provided in follow-up interviews to evaluate the effectiveness of the project as a whole. Figure 1 illustrates the cyclical nature of the action research process.

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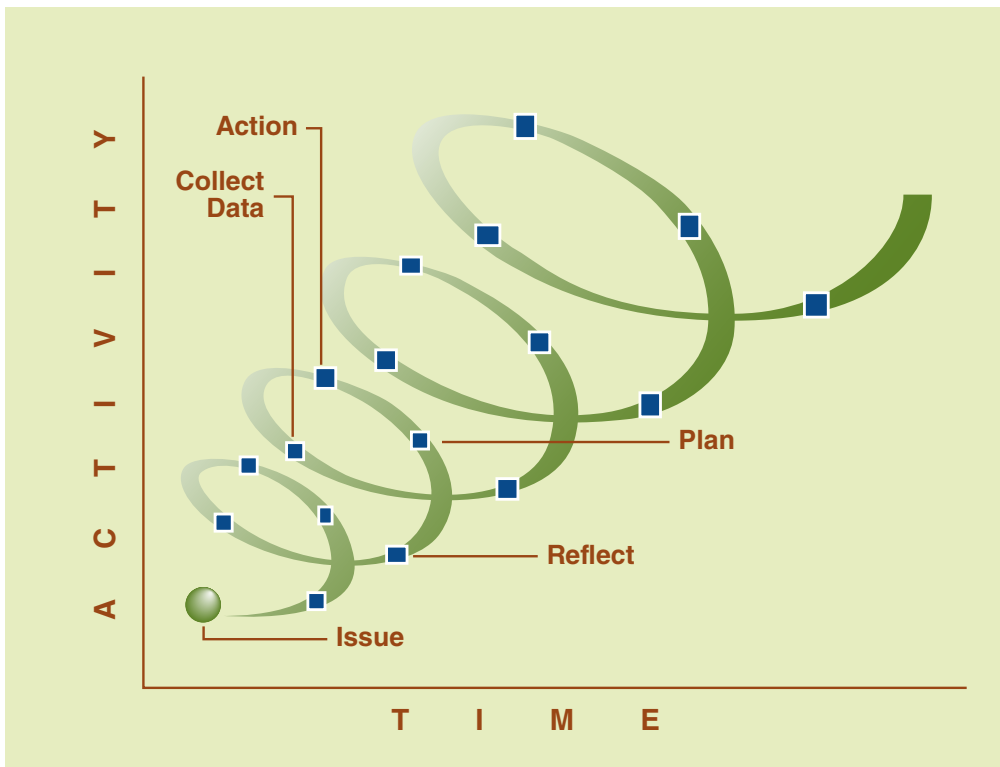

Figure 1

Setting the Stage: The ATA Model Policy

Adopted in 2004, the Association's model policy for the professional growth, supervision and evaluation of school administrators articulates the profession's view of what constitutes a fair and equitable process for evaluating school principals. One reason that the Association developed the policy was to address the numerous concerns that individual administrators had raised about the way in which they were being evaluated by school boards. A second reason was to encourage Alberta Education to develop, for school principals, a comparable policy to the teacher growth, supervision and evaluation policy that the province had adopted in 1997.

In developing its model policy on the professional growth, supervision and evaluation of administrators (available at www.teachers.ab.ca/Resources%20For/ School-Based%20Administrators/Pages/Index.aspx), the Association attempted to mirror the province's policy for teacher growth, supervision, and evaluation. This policy stipulates that, to be eligible for an interim teaching certificate, teachers in Alberta must have completed, at minimum, a four-year baccalaureate degree in education. To become eligible for a permanent professional certificate, beginning teachers must have received, during their first and second years of practice, two successful teacher evaluation reports. Based on these requirements, the policy assumes that teachers having a permanent professional certificate and a continuous contract with a school jurisdiction are competent in their professional practice and, as a result, are not subject to routine or cyclical evaluation of their practice. At the same time, the policy stipulates that teachers will be evaluated if (1) on the basis of supervision, there is reason to believe that a teacher's practice may not be meeting the provincial Teaching Quality Standard, (2) the school district needs an evaluation to make a contract decision, (3) the teacher requests an evaluation or (4) the teacher's growth in a specific area of practice needs to be evaluated. The provincial policy also requires that all certificated teachers complete an annual professional growth plan to continue to enhance their teaching practice. Teachers meet with their principal early in the school year to review their professional growth plan and then again at the end of the school year to discuss the outcome of their professional growth activities. The Association's model policy on the growth, supervision and evaluation of administrators incorporates these processes.

A Collaborative Partnership with Livingstone Range School Division

In the fall of 2007, the Association entered into a two-year agreement with Livingstone Range School Division No 68 to test the Association's model policy on the evaluation of administrators. Livingstone Range is a rural school division situated about an hour's drive south of Calgary. It stretches from Crowsnest Pass on the west to Fort MacLeod on the east (a distance of about 100 kilometres) and from Nanton in the north to Waterton Colony in the south (about 300 kilometres). In 2007/08, the district served approximately 3,850 students, which were enrolled in 16 regular schools and 12 Hutterite

colony schools. In contrast to many school districts in Alberta, Livingstone Range has very few English as an Additional Language students. Approximately half of the students travel to school by bus, while the remainder live in the town in which their school is located. Between 20 and 25 per cent of the students enrolled in schools in Fort McLeod and Pincher Creek reside in the adjacent Blood and Peigan First Nations reserves. The division, which operates on a budget of $45 million, employs 235 certificated teachers and 254 paraprofessional and support staff.

This collaborative project was timely. First, it coincided with the December 2007 release of the draft provincial Principal Quality Practice document described above. Second, because the draft provincial document outlined a standard that supported the Association's model administrator policy, the Association was interested in field-testing its model policy in anticipation of a broader provincial discussion about the preparation, professional development and evaluation of school principals. Third, having successfully implemented a new procedure for the professional growth, supervision and evaluation of teachers in 2006/07, Livingstone Range was ready in the fall of 2007 to develop and implement a parallel procedure for school principals. The jurisdiction was motivated not only by the fact that several of its principals were scheduled to be evaluated but also by a recognition that its past practices with respect to administrator evaluation had been inconsistent.

Project Activities in Year 1

1. Forming a Steering Committee

The project sponsors—the Association, Livingstone Range Local No 14 of the ATA and Livingstone Range School Division No 68—agreed that the first step in undertaking the project should be to establish a steering committee to guide the project. The steering committee consisted of the superintendent and assistant superintendent (representing the school board), a school principal and a vice-principal, two representatives of the local, and two professional development staff officers (representing the provincial Association).

2. Developing Guiding Principles

At its first meeting, the steering committee defined the underlying values and beliefs that would govern its efforts to develop policy and practices for the professional growth, supervision and evaluation of school administrators. Committee members agreed that, to be effective, a policy for the professional growth, supervision and evaluation of administrators should embody the following principles:

1. School administrators are assumed to be competent.

2. Evaluation should take into account the context (that is, the school community) in which the administrator works.

3. School administrators should be actively involved in the process.

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4. Administrators should be fully aware of the process, which should be open and transparent.

5. The process should encourage professional self-reflection.

6. The process should be flexible, allowing for individual choice.

7. The process should be based on authentic evidence, which should stimulate personal reflection and dialogue.

8. Administrators involved in the process should be provided with adequate time and other necessary resources.

9. The processes should result in constructive feedback.

10. Assistant principals should have an opportunity to work toward achieving the provincial standard and leadership dimensions.

3. Developing a District Evaluation Policy

The steering committee's next task was to review the Association's model policy on the professional growth, supervision and evaluation of administrators. The committee concluded that some minor modifications to the model policy would be required to make the new policy consistent with the district's policy template. The committee produced a draft policy for the evaluation of principals and presented it to school administrators at a district meeting to obtain feedback. No concerns were expressed about the proposed evaluation procedures for principals, probably because the procedures mirrored the ones that the district already had in place for evaluating teachers.

4. Identifying Sources of Evidence

The steering committee organized three simultaneous small-group workshops of administrators throughout the district to examine the province's draft Principal Quality Practice document and to discuss how it could be applied in the context of Livingstone Range. These workshops were held via videoconference and facilitated by members of the steering committee. Administrators in each workshop site discussed the standard, the seven leadership dimensions and the supporting descriptors contained in the draft document. Each group was then assigned three of the leadership dimensions and asked to identify the type of data that could be construed as evidence that a school principal was, in fact, meeting the standard with respect to those leadership dimensions. Returning to a large-group format, administrators then reviewed the suggested sources of evidence and selected, for each leadership dimension, up to four sources of evidence that a principal should be required to produce to confirm that he or she was, in fact, meeting the standard.

5 Developing Rubrics for Self-Reflection and Growth

At its next meeting, the steering committee reviewed the sources of evidence that administrators had suggested during the workshop activity for each of the seven leadership dimensions and edited them for clarity. The committee agreed that, if a particular source of evidence is required in an evaluation, then that source of evidence must be an action or a product mandated by provincial or district policy. For example, district policy may require principals to develop a school behaviour code or a school handbook for students and parents. The committee also agreed that sources of evidence not mandated by policy could constitute part of an evaluation but that administrators would have a choice as to whether or not to include them.

The steering committee decided to develop rubrics for each of the seven leadership dimensions outlined in the Principal Quality Practice Guideline. The committee felt that rubrics would prompt principals to engage in self-reflection and dialogue during the growth, supervision and evaluation processes. Just as rubrics help students to become more thoughtful judges of their own work and help teachers make consistent judgments about the quality of student products or performances, so too can rubrics help teachers and principals become more reflective practitioners. However, rubrics are appropriate only when the attribute being assessed can be characterized as existing to a lesser or greater degree. Rubrics are not useful when the attribute in question is simply either present or absent (Bennett and Mulgrew 2009, 2). Livingstone Range had already defined what it expected from teachers as evidence that their teaching practice was meeting each element of the Teaching Quality Standard and had used these expectations to develop reflective rubrics. Because teachers and school principals had worked together in developing these rubrics, they were widely accepted by staff across the district.

Using the rubrics that the district had approved for the evaluation of teachers as a model, the steering committee then set about to develop rubrics for each

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leadership dimension contained in the *Principal Quality Practice Guideline*. The first step in this process was to identify, for each leadership dimension, the sources of evidence that would be accepted in determining the extent to which the principal was meeting the leadership dimension. The sources of evidence in the case of each leadership dimension were divided into two categories: required (these were listed first) and optional. The steering committee then drafted, for each source of evidence, the criteria by which a principal would be assessed as meeting one of three possible levels of performance: "does not meet the standard," "meets the standard" or "exceeds the standard." The steering committee also sought advice from the Alberta Assessment Consortium on how to structure and develop effective rubrics.

The steering committee presented the draft rubrics to school administrators at a district meeting. Working in small groups, the administrators discussed the draft criteria. Based on this feedback, the steering committee revised the rubrics and distributed them to all administrators in the district to begin using as a tool for self-assessment and growth. Principals who were about to be evaluated were encouraged to use the rubrics as a reference to prepare for their evaluation.

6. Testing the Evaluation Process

During the first year of the project, two school principals agreed to test the model by undergoing an evaluation using the draft evaluation procedures and the rubrics associated with each of the seven leadership dimensions specified in the Principal Quality Practice Guideline. The superintendent decided, early on, that evaluating the principals on all seven leadership dimensions was unnecessary and that, instead, she would ask them to choose two or three dimensions as the focus of their evaluation. In November, the superintendent met with each principal to develop an evaluation plan and timeline, to select the dimensions on which they wished to focus, to identify the evidence that would be required to support each of these dimensions and to determine the strategies by which the evidence would be gathered. Among the potential sources of evidence were the superintendent's observations of the way in which the principals handled administrative practices, relevant planning documents and school records, principal initiated review conducted by an external group of peers, self-reflective portfolios, the results of self-evaluation and self-gathered feedback from stakeholders. The superintendent explained that she would systematically gather and record the data associated with the leadership dimensions that the principals had selected for evaluation using the agreed-upon strategies and would provide each principal with feedback during the evaluation period. She also explained that the final evaluation report would contain descriptive and evaluative statements related to the descriptors associated with each selected leadership dimension in the Principal Quality Practice Guideline.

Between November and May, the two principals used the draft rubrics to collect evidence related to the leadership dimensions they had chosen and to reflect on their performance using the criteria. The superintendent scheduled

two additional meetings with each principal to review and discuss the evidence they had collected. During these meetings, the superintendent used the criteria outlined in the rubric to comment on the quality of the evidence that the principals had assembled and to provide them with feedback. She also discussed with them any concerns they had. After each of these meetings, the principals attempted to act on the feedback that the superintendent had provided. At the second meeting, the principals discussed with the superintendent the progress they had made in implementing the feedback received at the earlier meeting. Each principal met with the superintendent one last time to review the final evaluation report that the superintendent had prepared.

At the end of the first year of the project, in June 2008, the steering committee invited an ATA staff officer who had not been involved in the project earlier to evaluate the success of the project to date. The author and the external evaluator developed a set of interview questions designed to elicit information that would enable the evaluator to assess the extent to which the evaluation policy and procedures had met the guiding principles that the steering committee had established at the onset of the project. The evaluator interviewed the two principals who had been evaluated and the superintendent of schools. Each interview was based on questions that had been provided to the participants in advance of the meeting. These questions are contained in Appendix A.

Each of the people interviewed expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the evaluation policy as well as with the processes that had been developed in the first year of the project. The principals commented that the process had been clearly explained to them, that it was fair and that it had been developed collaboratively. They were also pleased that the process not only took into account the context in which they were working but also gave them an opportunity to share personally meaningful information. As one of them put it, the process clarified "what the district was looking for." The principals also observed that the process had provided them with valuable opportunities for personal growth. They felt supported rather than scrutinized during the interview with the superintendent. They shared an appreciation for the level of conversation facilitated by the process. One principal felt that the process was more time-consuming than others he was familiar with but also far more valuable. A principal who was evaluated during the first year of the project described his experience as follows:

> As a first-year principal, I knew that I would be evaluated by the superintendent. Because I was a member of the steering committee, I was familiar with the procedures in the new policy. I was comfortable participating in a collaborative process in which I would work with the superintendent to develop a fair and accurate report. In November, the superintendent asked me to focus on two or three dimensions in the rubric for my evaluation. Being a novice principal, I had difficulty developing a perspective on the relative importance of each dimension; all aspects of the new position seemed to compete for attention. The rubrics played a vital role in helping me to appreciate my job as an administrator and to focus my attention on specific areas at different

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times. In the end, I provided evidence for all seven dimensions in my evaluation. For each dimension, I wrote a reflection on my leadership practice as it applied to my school and developed a goal for growth. I then developed a timeline, identified resources and designed measures for my goal. I found myself reflecting on these documents frequently throughout the first year, each time becoming more familiar with the seven dimensions. This growing familiarity allowed me to have ongoing and informative discussions with my superintendent about my first-year experiences and about how my leadership practice was growing and developing. Throughout the year, I gathered evidence to demonstrate my competencies with respect to each dimension. I saved these artifacts on a CD, which I reviewed with the superintendent at the end of the evaluation period. The superintendent met with me to review my summative evaluation at the end of the school year. The report clearly reflected our earlier conversations. The report also provided me with a strong sense of accomplishment, and I felt very much a professional partner in the process. My ongoing conversations with the superintendent helped me to shape my performance evaluation in ways that had deep personal meaning and significance in the context of my school.

The superintendent also expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the project. She observed that the process not only provided her with the information she needed to assess the performance of the individual principals involved but also created opportunities to discuss their professional practice in more depth. The superintendent also noted that the framework allowed her and the principals to share their expectations, thereby creating "safe spaces" in which to begin a dialogue. She also appreciated the fact that the process encouraged principals to "look at the bigger picture."

Asked how the process could be improved, the participants suggested that more sources of evidence could be specified for each leadership dimension. They also recommended that the scale for assessing a principal's performance with respect to each source of evidence be expanded to include a fourth level. Participants also noted that the process would have been easier had they had access to computer-based templates to generate the various documents required at each stage of the evaluation.

In summary, all the people interviewed expressed a high level of satisfaction with their involvement in year 1 of the project. They remarked that, because the process was clear and transparent, it facilitated effective reflection, sharing and dialogue. The participants concurred that, given the outcomes achieved, the process more than warranted the substantial time and labour that they had invested in it.

Project Activities in Year 2

Based on the feedback collected during the interim evaluation, the steering committee made a number of modifications to the evaluation procedures. One such change was to expand the levels of performance associated with each source of evidence from three to four and to title them "Excellent," "Proficient," "Adequate" and "Limited." The decision to add a level was

based on the observation that three levels, although adequate for summative evaluation purposes, did not provide principals with enough opportunities to assess their professional growth with respect to each leadership dimension. The committee also developed, for each source of evidence, the criteria to be used in differentiating each level of performance from the others. In developing these criteria, the committee applied the following general guidelines:

Excellent: To be considered excellent, a school leader must be visionary, creative and innovative in his or her approach. The person's leadership qualities must be apparent not only in the school but also in the broader educational environment. He or she helps to set the policy and direction of the school.

Proficient: A proficient school leader is proactive and able to synthesize information, take risks and respond in a way that is appropriate to the context. He or she understands the role that leadership plays in facilitating change at the school level.

Adequate: An adequate school leader is meeting the standards and is working to improve his or her professional practice. He or she is able to respond to the day-to-day demands of the role.

Limited: A limited school leader does not have the knowledge, skills and/or personal attributes to successfully meet the day-to-day demands of the role.

A sample rubric for the second leadership dimension (Embodying Visionary Leadership*)* is contained in Appendix B.

Having revised the policy and rubrics to take into account feedback obtained during the year 1 evaluation, the steering committee then presented the draft

policy and rubrics to executive members of Livingstone Range Local and to district administrators. The committee asked school administrators to use the revised rubrics as a tool for self-reflection as they developed their annual professional growth plan for 2008/09. In October, the superintendent notified 12 school principals that they would be evaluated according to the draft evaluation policy. She met subsequently with each principal to select jointly the two or three leadership dimensions that the principal would focus on in the evaluation and to discuss how he or she would provide evidence of practice. The superintendent scheduled three additional meetings during the school year with each principal to review the evidence that the principal intended to present for his or her evaluation.

Participants in the year 1 pilot had suggested that the evaluation process could be improved by providing principals with templates to generate materials required at various stages in the evaluation process. Accordingly, one of the principals on the steering committee designed a set of computer-based templates and posted them on the division's website early in the second year of the project.

In February 2008, the Livingstone Range Board of Trustees reviewed the proposed growth, supervision and evaluation policy for principals and formally adopted it as Administrative Procedure 420 (available at www.lrsd. ab.ca/ppp/policies/Administration%20Procedures/ Personnel%20and%20 Employee%20Relations/420%20%20Principal%20Growth,%20Supervision%20 and%20Evaluation.pdf). The superintendent reviewed the new policy with all principals in the district at the beginning of the 2008/09 school year. Later that year, in April 2009, Alberta Education published *The Principal Quality Practice Guideline* (available at http://education.alberta.ca/admin/resources. aspx) and encouraged school jurisdictions and education stakeholders to use it in designing programs for the preparation, induction, recruitment and evaluation of school leaders.

At the end of year 2, the steering committee asked the same external researcher who had evaluated the project at the end of year 1 to carry out telephone interviews with participants in the project. The evaluator interviewed the superintendent and (before schools closed at the end of June) nine of the twelve principals. The interviews indicated that the participants were very satisfied with the evaluation process: four described it as "fair, balanced, appropriate, transparent, open and clear"; three called it "very positive, powerful, helpful, professional and purposeful"; two said it was "comprehensive"; one described it as "self-directed"; and one called it "time consuming."

Asked how they had prepared for the evaluation, four principals said that they had collected artifacts of their performance throughout the year; one had collected artifacts and attached written reflections; two had created working portfolios from which they had selected the items to be shared; one had kept a journal along with work samples; and one had included on-site observations that the superintendent had made at the request of the principal about his or her performance in a variety of predetermined situations.

Asked whether the process had provided them with high-quality feedback, eight participants said that it definitely had; one said that the feedback was very professional; one said that the feedback was provided through mutual dialogue; and one said that the process had produced high-quality conversations over a period time. Asked how the process could be improved, four participants had no recommendations, two expressed concern about the amount of time that the evaluation process required of the superintendent, one suggested that the rubrics could be further refined, one recommended that the first meeting with the superintendent be held earlier in the year and one noted that the process required principals to be very organized. Asked for additional comments, several participants expressed appreciation for the process, which they described as providing high-quality feedback. One participant suggested that all principals should organize a working portfolio. Another commented that the process might be overwhelming for new administrators.

The superintendent reported that the process had not only helped her gather the kind of evidence that she needed to carry out evaluations but also provided the principals with an opportunity to discuss their practice with her in a very professional way. She observed that giving principals a choice about which dimensions they wanted to work on had stimulated them to become more personally engaged in the process. Remarking that this evaluation process was more "intensive" in terms of the number of visits and the amount of time than other processes with which she was familiar, the superintendent said that, in the end, the process was all "very worthwhile." She emphasized that taking into account the context in which the principals were working was important and helped her to see each one in a different light. She called the process a very professional model that facilitated effective dialogue. She pointed out, for example, that the descriptors attached to each dimension allowed the conversation to remain objective. "It's not about feelings," she said, "it's evidence-based." She observed that one of the best features of the model is the fact that, while giving principals a choice as to the dimensions on which they would like to be evaluated, it also gave her a chance to provide principals with feedback on other dimensions that they may not have selected. As a result, she said, "people felt mentored, coached and supported in the process." Asked how the process could be improved, she suggested that the criteria for defining what constitutes "excellent" performance with respect to some of the sources of evidence should be refined. She noted that, in some cases, the criteria for defining excellence are so stringent as to be unattainable. Looking back at her involvement in the project as a whole, the superintendent summed up her experience as follows:

> The principals as a group shared that they liked to see me in the schools. This has been a year of major change in [school] leadership in our district. I'm glad that the district is in a position to use this process. Anything we can do to coach and mentor [principals] is incumbent on us. It has been a wonderful opportunity to be engaged in this project. I found that this process takes things in a thorough, professional direction. As well, I must share that I have grown professionally as a superintendent.

. . . giving principals a choice about which dimensions they wanted to work on had stimulated them to become more personally engaged in the process.

Conclusion

This collaborative two-year project demonstrated that provincial standards of practice for school principals must be flexible enough to take into account the unique context of the district and/or school in which they are to be applied. The project also suggests that the process for evaluating principals with respect to these standards is most effective when it is embedded in a larger process that challenges principals to reflect on their ongoing professional growth with respect to each of the seven leadership dimensions outlined in *The Principal Quality Practice Guideline.* Engaging in such a process of ongoing reflection and professional growth not only improves the principal's professional practice but also helps to ensure that he or she has the skills necessary to create an environment that optimizes student learning.

Based on results of this project, the steering committee believes that implementation of *The Principal Quality Practice Guideline* will be most effective if school boards apply the following general principles:

1. *Develop a policy for principal growth, supervision and evaluation that mirrors the provincial policy in place for teachers.* Alberta educators generally accept and understand the provincial policy governing the growth, supervision and evaluation of teachers. This policy is based on two fundamental assumptions: (a) that teachers are competent unless evidence exists to the contrary and (b) that the development of professional practice is a career-long process. Adopting a parallel policy for principals will help to ensure not only that all school principals in the district are treated fairly but also that superintendents play an active role in the growth, supervision and evaluation of principals.

2. *Use an inclusive, collaborative approach to develop district policies and procedures.* School administrators who are actively involved in developing district policies and procedures not only will understand the processes more thoroughly but will also be more likely to accept whatever evaluation process is ultimately adopted. Taking a collaborative approach will also build trust between central administrators and school principals.

3. *Involve administrators in developing the criteria that will be used to evaluate them*. To be effective, the evaluation process should take into account the unique context in which each administrator works. Involving administrators in developing evaluation criteria will encourage them to share their best leadership practices, help them to understand what the district expects of them and demonstrate to them that the school district respects their knowledge and experience.

4. *Focus on developing clear, meaningful rubrics*. Far from being superficial checklists, well-constructed rubrics focus on the outcomes, products and processes associated with effective leadership. Rubrics must be flexible enough, on the one hand, to take into account the context in which a principal is working and firm enough, on the other, to ensure consistency across the district. Effective rubrics encourage principals to engage in the kind of intense self-reflection that is a prerequisite to professional growth.

To be effective, the evaluation process should take into account the unique context in which each administrator works.

Evaluating the School Principal

Principals who understand the quality standards and accept responsibility for developing their own leadership skills will become more thoughtful judges of their practice.

5. ***Build an element of choice into the evaluation process.*** Allowing a principal to select the type of evidence to be included in the evaluation and the manner in which that evidence is gathered and presented will help build trust and increase the likelihood that the principal will become meaningfully engaged in the process. By basing their discussing on authentic evidence, the principal and the superintendent will be in a better position to identify those aspects of the principal's practice that are satisfactory and those that require further growth. Allowing a principal to help plan how he or she is to be evaluated will also help reduce the anxiety often associated with the evaluation process.

Future Directions

In 2009, the Association published *Leadership for Learning*, which summarized the results of a study that the Association had commissioned in 2008 on the increasing workload of administrators in Alberta schools. *Evaluating the School Principal* complements that earlier study by suggesting a model that school boards might follow in developing policy and procedures with respect to the growth, supervision and evaluation of administrators. The role of the school principal is constantly evolving as schools themselves evolve in response to new technologies and changes in the social fabric. Despite these changes, however, the school principal will undoubtedly continue to play an integral role in determining student outcomes and fostering community engagement. For its part, the Association will continue to support principals by undertaking research that addresses the various challenges that they face and by drawing other education partners into a discussion of the implications of that research.

Appendix A:

Interview Questions for the Project Evaluation

Questions Asked of the Principals

1. How would you describe the evaluation process?

2. How did you prepare for your evaluation meeting with the superintendent? What types of evidence did you gather?

3. Do you feel that you had enough information to prepare adequately for the meeting?

4. Looking back at the meeting, do you feel that the process provided an opportunity for quality feedback and discussion?

5. What (if anything) worked best in the process?

5. What (if anything) would you change in the process?

7. Do you have any other comments that you would like to share with the steering committee?

Questions Asked of the Superintendent

1. Did this process give you the information you needed to adequately judge the performance of the individual principals?

2. Looking back at the meeting, do you feel that the process provided an opportunity for quality feedback and discussion?

3. How does this process differ from others that you are currently using or have used to evaluate principals? What (if any) are the similarities?

4. How would you rate the effectiveness of this process relative to those that you are currently using or have used to evaluate principals? Why?

5. What (if anything) worked best in the process?

6. What (if anything) would you change in the process?

7. Do you have any other comments that you would like to share with the steering committee?

Appendix B: Sample Rubric

Enhancing Professional Practice

A Framework for Leadership

Why Use the Rubrics?

The leadership dimension rubrics can be used for the following purposes:

- To assist administrators in engaging in self-reflection and self-assessment

- To assist administrators in setting individual professional development goals

- To provide a structure for administrators to use in reviewing their individual growth plans

- To help administrators develop their leadership practice over time

- To help administrators identify areas of their practice that require improvement

- To facilitate mentorship and peer-coaching activities

- To help administrators develop practice with respect to new aspects of the leadership role

- To generate conversation for the purpose of supervision

- To assist administrators in preparing for an evaluation

- To provide a structure for administrators to use in planning their career path

- To promote an understanding of leadership roles

How Are the Rubrics to Be Used?

The rubrics are to be used to assist the superintendent in arriving at a reasoned assessment of the performance of the administrator being evaluated. This evaluation must be based on specific evidence and must take into account the context in which the administrator is working and the stage of the administrator's career.

The leadership dimension rubrics are *not* intended

- to be used as a checklist;

- to be converted to quantitative ratings or rankings;

- to constitute an exhaustive list of leadership knowledge and skills;

- to discourage the collection of other sources of evidence, which will be added over time; or

- to be static or prescriptive.

Definitions

1. *Required* refers to evidence that an administrator must include in an evaluation undertaken by Livingstone Range School Division.

2. *Optional* refers to other sources of evidence that an administrator can choose to include in his or her evaluation.

3. *Excellent* is a level of performance typically demonstrated by administrators who are visionary in their approach and who put forward creative, innovative solutions to problems. Excellent administrators attempt to shape school policy and are viewed as leaders in the broader educational community.

4. *Proficient* is a level of performance typically demonstrated by administrators who appreciate the broader impact of leadership and are able to synthesize information and respond appropriately in a given context. They are able to prioritize and act proactively and are willing to take reasonable risks.

5. *Adequate* is a level of performance typically demonstrated by administrators who meet the standard and are able to respond to the day-to-day demands of the role. They are making progress in developing their practice.

6. *Limited* is a level of performance typically demonstrated by administrators who lack the necessary knowledge, skills and/or personal attributes to successfully meet the day-to-day demands of the role.

2. Leadership Dimension—Embodying Visionary Leadership

The principal collaboratively involves the school community in creating and sustaining shared school values, vision, mission and goals.

Descriptors

The school principal

a. communicates and is guided by an educational philosophy based upon sound research, personal experience and reflection;

b. provides leadership in keeping with the school authority's vision and mission;

c. meaningfully engages the school community in identifying and addressing areas for school improvement;

d. ensures that planning, decision-making, and implementation strategies are based on a shared vision and an understanding of the school culture;

e. facilitates change and promotes innovation consistent with current and future school community needs;

f. analyzes a wide range of data to determine progress towards achieving school goals; and

g. communicates and celebrates school accomplishments to inspire continuous growth.

Evidence	Level of Performance			
	Excellent	**Proficient**	**Adequate**	**Limited**
Is guided by an educational philosophy ☑ Required	Educational philosophy reflects sound research and is **manifested in all aspects of their leadership role**	Is able to articulate educational philosophy that reflects current research and **fosters school improvement**	**Is able to articulate** educational philosophy **that reflects current research**	**Is unable to articulate** an educational philosophy
Establishes school mission and vision ☑ Required	Shared school mission and vision are **regularly revisited, actively embraced and implemented** by the school community	Mission and vision are developed with the school community and **used as a filter for decision making**	**Relevant** mission and vision are **developed** and **understood** by the school community	The mission and/ or vision is **not present or is out of date**
Implements school improvement plans ☑ Required	**All members of the school community** are **actively involved in developing, implementing and evaluating** the school improvement plan	School improvement plans are developed collaboratively and **used to set priorities, allocate resources and take action**	School improvement plans are **developed and implemented in collaboration** with the school community	School improvement plan is **a compliance document containing little or no evidence of shared** development and implementation
Analyzes data to develop school goals ☐ Optional	**School community members, as appropriate**, are actively involved in collecting, analyzing and **evaluating** data to develop school goals	School staff is involved in the o**ngoing collection and analysis of data to inform actions and make adjustments as needed**	**School staff** participates in analyzing data to develop school goals.	**Makes limited or no use** of data in developing school goals
Celebrates the school's accomplishments ☐ Optional	Recognition and celebration are **embedded within the school culture by all stakeholders**	**Involves the school community** in celebrating school accomplishments	**Strategies** for celebrating school accomplishments exist	**Accomplishments are not consistently** recognized.
Facilitates change and promotes innovation ☐ Optional	**Anticipates** and facilitates change and pursues innovation to address **current and future needs of the school**	**Effectively facilitates change** and **promotes innovation** relevant to school needs	**Manages change and supports innovation** relevant to the school community	**Has limited or no capacity** to implement change and promote innovation

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The Future

It's why teachers teach