Principal Evaluation Policies on Paper vs. In Practice: Evidence from 20 Districts

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There is widespread agreement among researchers, policy makers, and practitioners that principals play a critical role in providing high-quality education to PK-12 students (e.g., Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2012; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Principals influence teaching directly and student learning indirectly when, for example, they set high expectations for instruction and student learning, and when they foster productive relationships among teachers and other school staff (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood & Janzi, 2005; Murphy, Elliott, Goldring & Porter, 2007).

At the same time, while we know that school leaders shape how well schools function, we know remarkably little about what school districts can do to improve principals' leadership practices. As David Leonhardt (2017) pointed out in a recent New York Times column, principals deserve more attention from policy makers and researchers. In addition, the role of principals will likely grow more prominent under the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the most recent reauthorization of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. ESSA provides districts and states with more flexibility in terms of how to promote effective principal leadership and high-quality teaching, and districts can affect school leadership in many ways.

Given the importance of principals and the relative dearth of research on how to improve their leadership, in this paper we explore the extent to which principal evaluation systems focus on learning-centered leadership, one promising conception of leadership, in policy and practice. We ask:

1. What types of leadership do written district principal evaluation <u>policies</u> emphasize?

2. To what extent is this emphasis reflected in the principal evaluation <u>practices</u> reported by district leaders?

To answer these questions, we drew on data from 20 school districts in Connecticut and Michigan to examine how district policies related to principal evaluation seemed to affect school leadership. First, we engaged in document analysis to investigate the extent to which each district's principal evaluation policy addressed instructional leadership, managerial leadership, personal traits, and/or community relationships. Second, we drew on interviews with superintendents in these districts to consider how district policies related to principal evaluation were associated with learning-centered leadership. We find that districts emphasize instructional leadership in both policy and reported practice. However, contextual data reveal that superintendents in fact weigh managerial leadership quite heavily. This contrasts starkly with district policies, which tend to de-emphasize this form of leadership.

In the first section of this paper, we review previous research on principal evaluation and principal leadership. In the second section, we present our construction of leadership, learning-centered leadership (Murphy et al., 2007). The third section describes our conceptual framework related to policy implementation. In the fourth section, we present out methods including our data and sample, measures, and analytical strategies. Fifth, we present our main findings regarding district principal evaluation policies and learning-centered leadership. Finally, we discuss implications of our findings for district efforts to promote effective leadership practices.

Principal Leadership and Evaluation

Since 2009, more than 35 states have passed legislation to substantially revise their principal evaluation policies, largely in response to Race to the Top (RTTT) and ESEA Title I waiver requirements (Center on Education Policy [CEP], 2014). In response, school districts in

these states have enacted new or revised principal evaluation systems focused on developing principals' instructional leadership skills and holding them accountable for their performance. Studies of *district* principal evaluation systems that were carried out post-RTTT have documented this new emphasis on promoting principals' skills and holding them accountable.

For example, in a study of changes in principal evaluation in six large urban districts, Anderson and Turnbull (2016) reported that new systems included measures of professional practice and student achievement growth and that all six districts used evaluation primarily as a tool to promote improved leadership. In each district, the role of principal supervisor had changed to focus less on monitoring school leaders' compliance with district priorities and more on supporting their growth as instructional leaders. Finally, novice principals in each district received individualized support from mentors or coaches (Anderson & Turnbull, 2016).

Kimball, Arrigoni, Clifford, Yoder, and Milanowski (2015) studied principal evaluation systems in three large urban districts and two small rural districts and concluded that new systems were more rigorous and complicated than earlier ones. Some districts provided formal professional development for principal supervisors to ensure the fidelity of evaluation implementation. In contrast, other districts depended on state training of principal supervisors and/or offered informal training for them. In addition, the authors reported that most districts had enacted goal setting and continuous improvement cycles for principals; and the three large districts had reduced supervisor-principal ratios. Finally, a few districts were supplementing principal evaluation with mentoring and coaching (Kimball et al., 2015).

A study by Henry and Viano (2015) explored principal evaluation ratings in North Carolina between 2010-11 and 2013-14. Superintendents' overall ratings of principals were strongly correlated with principals' performance on measures of instructional leadership; this

suggests that superintendents focused on instructional leadership as opposed to differentiating among the state's seven leadership standards. Objective measures of leadership, such as school valued-added scores or retention of effective teachers, were not strongly correlated with superintendents' ratings. Finally, principals in schools with high percentages of low-SES students and/or African American students received lower ratings (Henry & Viano, 2015).

Zepeda, Lanoue, Price, and Jimenez (2014) examined principal evaluation practices in one district following enactment of RTTT and identified several tensions encountered by the district superintendent. First, there were sometimes discrepancies between ratings of a principal's performance and those of their school. Second, the superintendent sometimes faced a question of attribution when a new principal was hired at a school that had particularly high or low levels of achievement in the school leader's first one or two years there. Third, there were persistent questions about how much emphasis to place on student achievement data versus other measures of leadership or performance. Fourth, there was often a need to adjudicate between a principal's self-rating and the final ratings of their performance. Finally, the superintendent had strong knowledge of and relationships with each of the district's principals and had to be careful not to let these factors bias his ratings of them (Zepeda et al., 2014).

Goldring, Mavrogordato and Haynes (2015) investigated how principals in one district made sense of and responded to multiple sources of feedback on their performance. In particular, school leaders and teachers in this district completed VAL-ED (Vanderbilt Assessment for Leadership in Education) surveys. Principals interpreted feedback from the VAL-ED surveys by making comparisons between their ratings and their teachers' ratings, between their teachers' ratings and teachers' ratings of other principals in the district, and between their current and past

ratings. In addition, some school leaders adopted self-protecting behaviors and defensive orientations when faced with critical feedback (Goldring et al., 2015).

Taken together, the findings from these studies have important implications for research on principal evaluation in the current policy context. First, several of the studies indicate that new district principal evaluation policies have focused on instructional leadership and ways to foster improved leadership (Anderson & Turnbull, 2016; Henry & Viano, 2015; Kimball et al., 2015). Second, these studies reveal challenges faced by district administrators in enacting new policies (Zepeda et al., 2014) and by principals in making sense of and responding to feedback generated by new principal evaluation approaches (Goldring et al., 2015). At the same time, it is less clear from these studies whether district principal evaluation policies focused on certain types of leadership are associated with effective leadership practices. In the study reported here, we build on recent research to examine this question.

Principal Evaluation and Learning-Centered Leadership

Under RTTT, many states and districts have placed greater emphasis on learning-centered leadership (LCL) activities as opposed to managerial leadership activities when evaluating principals. Among the many different conceptualizations of school leadership, LCL is closely related to student outcomes (Robinson et al., 2008). Principals demonstrate learning-centered leadership when they cultivate teachers' opportunities to improve their instruction and their students' learning (Goff, 2012; Goldring et al., 2009). Specifically, learning-centered leadership involves (a) establishing rigorous goals for student learning, (b) coordinating curriculum, (c) enforcing high standards for teaching, (d) supporting teacher learning, and (e)

maintaining productive relationships among school staff (Bryk et al., 2010; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood & Janzi, 2005; Murphy et al., 2007).

In a meta-analytic review of 27 studies, Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) reported that principals' efforts to establish learning goals and coordinate curriculum had moderate effects on student achievement while their efforts to support teacher learning had large effects on achievement. For example, using district-wide data from 200 K-8 principals in Chicago, Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, and Bryk (2001) reported associations between (a) principals' establishment of rigorous student learning goals and coordination of curriculum and (b) reading and mathematics achievement. Drawing on a similar dataset from Chicago, Bryk and Schneider (2002) found that principals' efforts to establish trusting, productive relationships between themselves and school staff were associated with student achievement in reading and math.

More recently, Grissom, Loeb, and Master (2013) drew on observation data from principals in about 125 schools in Miami-Dade County to investigate how principals allocated their time across various instructional leadership activities and how different activities were associated with student achievement gains. The researchers reported that time devoted to (a) coaching teachers on instruction and (b) evaluating teachers or their curriculum was related to higher achievement gains. On the other hand, overall time spent by principals on instructional activities was not linked to school effectiveness. In addition, time devoted to brief classroom walkthroughs was not associated with achievement gains (Grissom et al., 2013).

In summary, research indicates that principals' efforts to establish rigorous learning goals, coordinate curriculum, coach teachers on instruction, and evaluate teachers and monitor their instruction are associated with higher student learning gains (Grissom et al., 2013; Newmann et al., 2001; Robinson et al., 2008). In contrast, there is less evidence that principals'

attention to non-instructional or managerial leadership activities is associated with achievement gains; such non-instructional activities include school assemblies, extra-curricular activities, faculty meetings, marketing, budgeting, and communication with community organizations (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1982; Cuban, 1988). Based on prior research, we hypothesize that the greater the emphasis placed in principal evaluation on specific learning-centered leadership activities associated with student achievement (i.e., establishing rigorous learning goals, coordinating curriculum, coaching teachers, and monitoring their instruction), the more principals will enact learning-centered leadership practices.

Conceptual Framework

In this paper, we compare the emphases articulated by principal evaluation policies on paper to the evaluation priorities enacted by district leaders as they implement principal evaluation. Our inquiry draws on a long line of research suggesting that actors modify policies when enacting them, leading to substantial gaps between written and implemented policy (see, e.g., Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002).

Consistent with prior conceptual and empirical work, we argue that policy documents communicate values and suggest actions to those who read them (Coburn, 2001). In the case of principal evaluation rubrics, such documents send implicit and explicit messages, in this case to principals and superintendents, about what leadership behaviors they should prioritize.

Yet actors interpretation of policy documents and whether and how they act on their intended messages depends on both individual and contextual factors. Individuals actively construct the meaning, understanding and interpretation of a policy by placing information into cognitive frameworks that are shaped by individual experiences, local contexts, and social

interactions (Coburn, 2001; Weick, 1995). Policy implementation is thus influenced by how stakeholders take in and frame information, and ultimately act on it (Evans, 2007; Ingle *et al.*, 2011). Moreover, "how individuals and groups frame the problem opens up and legitimizes certain avenues of action and closes off and delegitimizes others" (Coburn, 2006, p. 344). Thus, the sensemaking process does not only prompt stakeholders to identify ways of acting, but also precludes them from taking other actions that do not fit within the logics they have created. This scholarship encourages us to attend not only to how actors respond to policies but also why. It further highlights the importance of actors' logics and rationales (Donaldson & Woulfin, 2017).

Research demonstrates that school and district leaders do not make sense of policy in isolation, but rather filter policy messages through their worldviews, professional beliefs and networks (Coburn, 2006; Ingle *et al.*, 2011; Spillane *et al.*, 2002a). For example, research on principals' instructional leadership practices demonstrate that they draw from their experiences, expertise, professional development, principal preparation training and mentoring to define what it means to be an instructional leader (McGough, 2003; Rigby, 2015), interpret and enact test-based accountability policy (Spillane *et al.*, 2002b), and determine how the incorporate social justice into their leadership practices (Mavrogordato, 2017).

Principal evaluation is both a high-stakes policy and, in most settings, has received much less attention from state and district administrators than has teacher evaluation. As a result, superintendents may have a relatively high degree of latitude when interpreting principal evaluation policy. Moreover, researchers have demonstrated that the sense-making process is heightened during times of change (Ingle *et al.*, 2011). Thus, as district and school leaders go about implementing a new high-stakes principal evaluation policy, the sensemaking process will be particularly critical. Despite the importance of principals, to our knowledge, no empirical

work has investigated how superintendents' sensemaking about principal evaluation policies is related to the policies themselves.

Research Methods

Data

Data sources include principal evaluation documents and interviews. For each district, we collected district policy documents related to principal evaluation. This included the evaluation policy itself, principal leadership rubrics, and corresponding documentation. We also conducted one-on-one interviews with administrators responsible for conducting principal evaluation (e.g. directors of human resources, assistant superintendents, superintendents, and/or principal supervisors) in each district. Our semi-structured interview protocol sought to understand the principal evaluation policies in place in each district. We focused on the processes, content, and consequences of principals' evaluations. We examined district leaders' views on how their district seeks to change principals' performance, and how key district-varying attributes of principal evaluation (i.e., evaluation policy focus, monitoring, professional development, rewards and sanctions) seem to be linked to learning-centered leadership enactment.

Sample

We purposively selected districts from Connecticut and Michigan, which vary by socio-political context, average student achievement, and policy context. Both of these states grant districts discretion in developing their own principal evaluation systems, but have state policy that set specific evaluation parameters. Connecticut's state policy mandates that a principal's overall rating is composed of 45% student learning; 40% observation of leadership practice; 10% stakeholder feedback; and 5% teacher effectiveness. Michigan's policy dictates that at least 25%

of a principal's rating is based on student achievement growth and assessment data and "the

portion of the evaluation that is not based on student growth data and the district's adopted

evaluation tool must be based on the administrator's proficiency in using the observation tool for

teachers; the progress made by the school or district in meeting the goals set forth in the school

or district improvement plan as applicable; student attendance in the school or school district;

and student, parent, and teacher feedback" (Michigan Department of Education, 2016).

Within these states, we selected districts to maximize variation in student enrollment,

urbanicity, student demographics and district principal evaluation policies. Specifically, 13

participating districts were in Connecticut and 11 were in Michigan, for a total of 24 school

districts. Districts ranged in enrollment from 1,000 to 10,000 students. For this analysis, we

analyze policies and interviews with superintendents in 20 districts.

Table 1
Information on Sample Districts (n=20)

District Pseudonym	State	Enrollment	% Economically Disadvantaged	% Students of Color	% English Learner	% Special Education	Urbanicity
Bradley	CT	21,000	100%	90%	15%	15%	Midsize City
Washington	CT	7,000	65%	85%	10%	15%	Small City
Elmer	CT	5,200	35%	20%	<5%	15%	Large Suburb
Oakwood	CT	2,000	10%	10%	<5%	10%	Large Suburb
Gaffney	CT	3400	10%	15%	<5%	10%	Large Suburb
Mayville	CT	1,200	25%	25%	5%	15%	Rural-Fringe
Morrison	CT	6,200	20%	20%	<5%	15%	Small City
Spaulding	CT	2,400	10%	10%	<5%	10%	Rural-Fringe
Valliant	CT	3,300	45%	30%	5%	20%	Large Suburb
Warner	CT	3,100	35%	65%	5%	20%	Large Suburb
Carleton	MI	4,700	65%	50%	10%	15%	Small City
Norwood	MI	1,100	55%	20%	10%	10%	Rural-Distant
Lambert	MI	3,000	15%	10%	<5%	5%	Large Suburb
Rhine	MI	3,400	25%	5%	<5%	10%	Large Suburb
Barrett	MI	8,400	30%	20%	5%	10%	Large Suburb
Gorman	MI	5,700	40%	25%	5%	10%	Large Suburb
Hamilton	MI	2,000	50%	25%	10%	10%	Distant Town
Jefferson	MI	6,400	5%	50%	15%	10%	Small City
Ralston	MI	5,200	30%	10%	5%	15%	Large Suburb
Parkston	MI	2,200	40%	10%	<5%	10%	Town-Fringe

Note: Numbers are rounded to protect the anonymity of participating districts. Data on economically disadvantaged students in CT retrieved from Kids Count Data Center 2013-2014, kidscount.org. Data on economically disadvantaged students in MI retrieved from CEPI 2014-2015 data, mischooldata.org. All other data collected from the Common Core of Data 2014-2015 LEA survey.

Analytic Approach

Consistent with Goldring and colleagues' (2009) content analysis of principal evaluation policies, we used an iterative, deductive process to code principal evaluation documents for LCL focus. This scheme categorizes principal evaluation policy contents into: management (e.g., oversees school facilities), external environment (e.g., advocates for the school), instruction (e.g., monitors instruction), and personal characteristics (e.g., listens). We coded documents using these categories and, following Goldring et al.'s (2009) procedures, calculated the percentage of items coded in the "instruction" category. Values for this variable ranged from 0 to 100.

Each interview was transcribed verbatim. After transcribing the interviews, we coded the transcripts and field notes using open, closed, axial, and selective coding and Dedoose software (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Closed codes were selected based on the research literature. Open codes were created through a process of reading and re-reading the transcripts to identify salient concepts. We then constructed categorical matrices capturing what individual participants said or did related to that theme. All these measures facilitated our use of the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to identify emerging themes across participant experiences (Miles & Huberman, 1994). We then compared districts' coded policies with their evaluation practices as described by district administrator interviews.

Findings

Overall, we found that most districts in the sample emphasized instructional leadership in policies, as reflected in evaluation rubrics, and in practice, as reported by superintendents in

interviews. We further found that rubrics and superintendents' reports varied in their secondary emphasis, with some districts focused on external environment and others emphasizing personal traits. Management was de-emphasized in both policy and practice. Notably, superintendents provided varied explanations for their district's principal evaluation focus. Some framed it as a response to community needs; others presented it as a case of best practice.

Rubrics Emphasize Instruction

As discussed above, the learning-centered leadership framework includes competencies that fall into one of four domains: Schooling and Instruction; External Environment; Management, and Personal Traits. We found that average, the rubrics in our sample weighted Schooling and Instruction most heavily. On average, 80% of rubric indicators were in the Schooling and Instruction domain; 28% in External Environment; 18% in Management, and 35% in Personal Traits. However, there is variation, with the range in proportion of indicators in the Schooling and Instruction category ranging from 48%-100% (See Figure 1).

Figure 1: Proportion of Indicators Coded in "Schooling & Instruction" Domain (n=20)
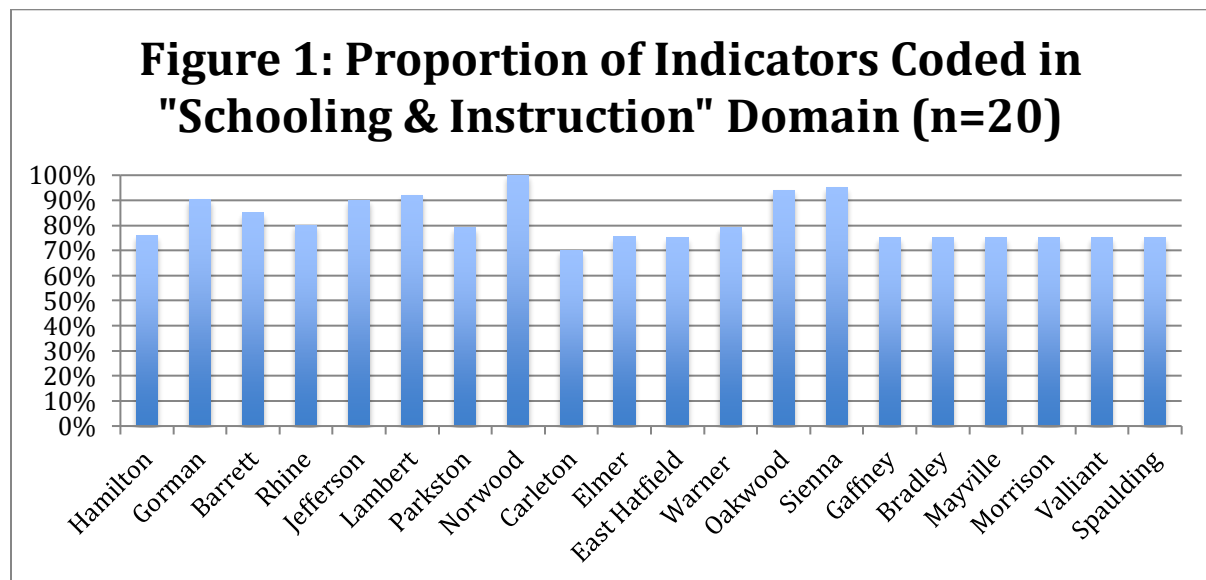
Similarly, there is a wide range in the proportion of indicators that fall into External Environment (37 percentage points; from 4.8% to 42%) and Personal traits (44 percentage points; from 8% to 52%). Management was the least emphasized domain on average, with between 8.3% and 32.0% of indicators reflecting this category.

Inspecting these patterns across the four domains and 14 rubrics provides additional confirmation of the prevalence of Schooling and Instruction in these rubrics and the relative de-emphasis of Management. As shown in Table 1, in all districts over 60% of indicators reflect Schooling and Instruction. In contrast, none of the districts contain Management elements in more than 39% of the indicators on their rubrics.

Table 1: *Number of rubrics by proportion of indicators covered by each domain [Measure 2]*

	0-19%	20-39%	40-59%	60-79%	80-100%
Schooling and Instruction	0	0	0	5	9
External Environment	4	6	3	1	0
Management	6	8	0	0	0
Personal Traits	3	8	3	0	0

Superintendents Report that Evaluation Policies Emphasize Instruction

We found that the reported practices of principal evaluation in the sample districts aligned with districts' policies on this topic. Superintendent interviews consistently reflect the pattern in the rubrics. Superintendents overwhelmingly reported that Schooling and Instruction is the domain most emphasized by their district's principal evaluation system, with a secondary focus in most cases on external environment or personal traits.

All superintendents but one reported that their district focused primarily on Schooling and Instruction. For example, one superintendent stated, "I think the instruction part is huge" (Valliant). Similarly, another superintendent reported that her district emphasized "Probably schooling and instruction." She explained why: "I think it's the whole thing and, you know, the emphasis on education right now [is] to take the principals away from being a manager to being an instructional leader and I think this fits in with the instructional leadership components" (Lambert).

Each domain within LCL consists of numerous sub-domain items (see Appendix A). In reporting that their district focused on Schooling and Instruction, superintendents further identified specified sub-domain items that their system prioritized. Across the sample, superintendents were most likely to mention Climate of discipline and order, Teacher Evaluation, Develops Shared Vision, Focus on Student Learning, and High Expectations for Students. This list contains a global emphasis (vision, expectations, focus) and a specific policy mandate, teacher evaluation. In identifying these items, the superintendents thus reveal their system's attention to how principals set the goals and tone for their school and how they carry out the specific practice of teacher evaluation.

Approximately 75% of superintendents identified Personal Traits as the second most important domain in their principal evaluation policies. This also aligned with policy emphases in districts' rubrics; recall that, on average, the second-highest proportion—35%--of indicators on the rubrics fell in this domain. For example, the one superintendent who listed personal traits as his district's priority with regard to principal evaluation worked in Hamilton district, which had the highest percentage of indicators in this domain (52%). The Norwood superintendent

named Personal Traits as the second-most emphasized domain in the district's principal

evaluation system:

> As a group we're working on the personal traits. Part of that is, well – because that
> there's words that that resonate with me on what we're working on like decision-
> making, uh looking at problem-solving protocols to help inform decisions decision. A lot
> of work around um the norms of collaboration and the language which we – using to
> coach people so I – That's become a bigger focus in the last year for us.   (NORWOOD)

Within the domain of Personal Traits, superintendents identified decision-making and

problem-solving as the sub-domain items on which their system focused. The superintendents

thus revealed that their systems put great stock in how principals dealt with issues arousing at the

school site.

Approximately one-quarter of superintendents identified External Environment as the

second-most emphasized domain in their principal evaluation policy. The superintendent

revealed the importance of this domain to his district's method of evaluating principals, "Public

relations and relationships with parents in the community have been something that we've been

working on as a district so I emphasize that, but I don't think it's clearly drawn out in the

evaluation rubric as it is here and so I emphasize that through the comment section or other

places in there" (WARNER).

Interestingly, no superintendents named Management as one of the top two focal areas of

their district's evaluation system. Two superintendents (Gorman and Ralston) mentioned

Management, but only as a former focus of their district's principal evaluation system, in

contrast to their systems' current focus on Schooling and Instruction. For example, one superintendent said, "I think the previous one, last year, it probably went between [pause] I would say probably the management and school instruction (Ralston). Similarly, the Gorman superintendent responded to the question about district focus by commenting, "Well where we have been, and where we are going are two different places." He further explained that the district had emphasized management but was shifting to a focus on instruction. Within the domain of External Environment, superintendents identified Develops relationships with parents and communities as the most emphasized item.

Superintendents' Rationales for Policy Focus

Beyond identifying a focal domain for their district's principal evaluation system, many superintendents provided compelling rationales for their decision to emphasize or de-emphasize particular domains. At times, these justifications reveal superintendents' conceptions of principal quality. In other instances, they expose superintendents' assessments of the context of their district and their constructions of the role of principals in responding to contextual demands and opportunities. As such, these rationales are an important source of information regarding the ways in which superintendents translate principal evaluation systems into evaluation practices in their district. Furthermore, these justifications highlight both the motivations and messages that superintendents believe they convey to principals through evaluation and coaching interactions. These messages may in fact communicate to principals that certain domains are more or less important than the district rubric suggests.

Why Focus on Schooling and Instruction?

As noted above, all superintendents revealed that Schooling and Instruction was a major focus of their principal evaluation systems. Their justifications for this emphasis clustered around several themes.

First, some superintendents justified their system's focus on Schooling and Instruction by describing these activities as central to the tasks and purpose of schools and districts. These superintendents presented the choice of Schooling and Instruction as self-evident. When asked about his district's focus, the superintendent of Ralston stated that it was "Obviously…Schooling and Instruction." Similarly, the superintendent from Jefferson said, "instructional programming. That's our bread and butter." She added: "School and instruction…it has to be the priority. You can't – kids cannot learn if there isn't a climate. A safe climate, a safe – shared vision, implementing of strategies, a shared vision of strategies, expectations for staff. I mean if you don't have that, teaching and learning isn't going to happen" (JEFFERSON).

Second, some superintendents attached this focus to larger educational trends suggesting that the role of principal ought to shift from manager to instructional leader. In this way, they presented their decision as a matter of heeding expert opinion. For example, Lambert's superintendent stated, "I think it's the whole thing and, you know, the emphasis on education right now to take the principals away from being a manager to being an instructional leader and I think this fits in with the instructional leadership components" (LAMBERT).

Third, some superintendents justified their system's focus on Schooling and Instruction by arguing that this priority responded to district needs. For example, Carleton's superintendent said that his district emphasized this domain because "We know about our district is that we still have some issues with climate and culture but that includes the systematic discipline

expectations. So to me the "creates a climate of learning" and "climate of discipline and order" are really important" (Carleton).

Fourth, some superintendents argued that new policies required their districts to emphasize Schooling and Instruction when evaluating principals. Superintendents noted in particular that new teacher evaluation policies required principals to be more familiar with instruction than under previous systems. At least four superintendents argued that teacher evaluation reforms necessitated that principal evaluation systems focus more intently on Schooling and Instruction. In explaining her district's focus on Schooling and Instruction, Norwood's superintendent stated, "We're focused more on knowledge of teaching and learning. And part of that is pushed by the new evaluation law" (NORWOOD). The superintendent from Elmer described the increased demands of new teacher evaluation statewide guidelines: "They should know how to do that well…we need to do the teacher evaluation with more so really understanding the knowledge of teaching and learning and understanding how this is important…understanding it at a deeper level (Elmer). The superintendent from Hamilton concurred:

> The teacher evaluation piece has to be close to the top because that's the one thing that we can control a little bit that will really have a great impact on student learning. And so the principals really need to be an instructional leader from that standpoint that they have some instructional chops, that they understand methods, and they can evaluate people and help make them better. If they do that, this climate of learning thing, the teachers make that happen for the most part, the important parts of it. You know, the principal can set the conditions, but if they're monitoring the teachers and teaching the teachers,

developing the teachers which is probably in here, too, then those things will happen naturally. (HAMILTON)

Why Focus on Personal Traits or External Environment?

Superintendents formulated justifications for their focusing on Personal Traits that echoed some of their arguments for emphasizing Schooling and Instruction.

Some superintendents justified their district's focus on Personal Traits by invoking a hierarchy of need and arguing that Personal Traits included basic skills and dispositions that were necessary for success as a principal. For example, Hamilton's superintendent explained why his district focused on this domain as its priority in principal evaluation, calling it "the foundation" and arguing that its absence "wipes out everything else that you need to do. He further spoke about how this emphasis was followed closely by Schooling and Instruction:

> I guess the one [domain] that I would prioritize first would be the personal traits because it talks or speaks to ethical behavior. [Pause] How you interact with human beings, I mean, that falls under personal traits and <u>without that you can't do anything</u> but <u>if you're unethical that pretty much wipes out everything else that you need to do</u>. And I'd say as a really close second would be the school and instruction piece. They're all   important, but the priorities here that I've communicated are, were about relationships, were about instructional programming. That's our bread and butter. And relationships encapsulates us taking care of people and valuing people and making sure places are safe and that kind of thing. Because, again, <u>that's the foundation</u>. And then, you know, excellence in instructional programming is a close second. (Hamilton, emphasis added).

Other superintendents argued that their district's focus on Personal Traits responded directly to the needs of the district. For example, the superintendent in Lambert argued that Personal Traits were important in her district given its affluence: "To thrive in a district like ours with high community expectations and an educated, affluent community you've got to be a good communicator and solid decision making and things like that. It's important" (LAMBERT).

Lastly, some superintendents located their interest in Personal Traits in their goals for their district. Mayville's superintendent described her commitment to "change leadership" as the main reason she prioritized Personal Traits. She asserted, "[Y]ou have a responsibility as a leader to know how to create change, try to understand what change needs to be created and then create change that, that's critical to me."

As with superintendents' rationales for focusing on Personal Traits, leaders justified emphasizing External Environment based their local context. For example, Warner's superintendent said, "[C]onnecting with our community here versus doing things at the state level I think is much more important for a principal so I like those, those categories better…So public relations and relationships with parents in the community have been something that we've been working on as a district" (WARNER).

Why (De)emphasize Management?

Superintendents' statements about the Management domain revealed a complication conception of this quadrant of principal skills and knowledge. No superintendents identified Management as a focus of their evaluation systems and many said they explicitly de-emphasized this domain. However, in discussing principals' leadership behaviors superintendents revealed that they conceived of the Management domain as a critical piece of principals' work. While they de-emphasized this domain within the context of principal evaluation, they appeared to

emphasize Management when making determinations about whether to rehire principals or coach them out of the district. Moreover, their responses revealed that they tended to think of Management as connected to the other three domains. In sum, while they asserted that their principal evaluation systems de-emphasized Management it appears that superintendents value it highly and find ways to consider it both within and outside the context of evaluation.

Several superintendents stated that their districts had focused on management in the past, but that this emphasis was inadequate given current goals for improving student learning. For example, the superintendent of Gorman explained why his district had originally emphasized management and, to a lesser extent, personal traits in evaluating principals: "[I]t was easy for us to evaluate management… we could see personal traits, and strengths and limitations around management." However, this focus was insufficient, he argued, because the district was not performing as well as it should. He linked the district's underperformance with the emphasis on management as opposed to instruction, asserting:

> Where we are going, happens to be the school and instruction. ….if we want to   keep
> doing business the way we have in (district), we're going to be about average in the
> state. Our test scores are right about the average. We're an exceptional community with
> exceptional stakeholders….So, if we have all these things working collectively in the
> same direction, why aren't we doing better on our   student achievement, results?

He added, "I don't believe we have directed our administrators to focus on student achievement, in making that their pillar." Now, by contrast, "Student achievement is really important to (district) and I have gone on record to say watch us improve" (GORMAN).

Other districts framed their system's lack of emphasis on Management in terms of a hierarchy of needs. For example, the superintendent of Gaffney framed the activities in the management domain as "remedial work":

I think what tends to be less emphasized is managerial. I think, I almost expect that as the, I mean, right, that's, that's a basic requirement. I expect you to be able to do those things and do them to a higher degree, but I don't want to spend a lot of time talking about that with you. That would be remedial work, as far as I was concerned. Having said that, I, I will mention that in a strand last year with our non-principal leaders, I clustered together our Technology Director, our Facility Director, our Nursing Director, our Food Service Manager, and our Nursing Director, and I did a series of about five half-days on leadership of all of them, and I did talk about some management components. I realized I was getting, I was spending a lot of time with grievances coming from (inaudible phrase), rather than—not from our principals quite so much. (Gaffney)

In a slight variation on this framing, other superintendents portrayed principals' under-performance in the Management domain as a sort of trip wire. Superintendents seemed to suggest that if principals did not reach standard on these indicators, they could lose their jobs regardless of how this domain was weighted in the performance rubric. For example, one superintendent stated:

If I am a superintendent watching this happen and somebody can't manage their building, nothing else is going to matter…. That is just going to be plain ineffective— you can't

manage anything. What do you mean— these kids are running off the bus and getting into a fight everyday and you can't even put a system in place to get kids to walk quietly of the bus? Well good luck with your climate and improving student results. Your lunchroom is a loud chaotic mess and it takes two hours to get kids through the lunch line? Well jeez, you should be able to fix that in about 15 second with a little [swish, swish, swish]. If you can't do that, you are done for (Parkston).

Moreover, some superintendents reported that in certain instances they focused on Management despite there more general emphasis on Schooling and Instruction. "You know, obviously if there were serious deficiencies in other areas they wouldn't even be able to begin to get to this part of their job. So, they've got to do a good job with the areas to even have time to focus on [Schooling and Instruction]" (LAMBERT). This superintendent articulates the interconnectedness of the domains within principal evaluation. In order to perform well in Schooling and Instruction, he argues, a principal must perform adequately in the other three domains.

Lastly, some superintendents reported that even if their district evaluation focus was on Schooling and Instruction, the realities of principals' jobs encouraged them to focus on managerial tasks. He explained, "I think what happens often is this, not because they want it to be a priority, but this is what happens because of the way we structure school and administration. And we don't – there's not enough administrators in a building to be able to manage all these tasks and so management becomes de facto" (JEFFERSON).

Discussion

By analyzing district evaluation policy documents and interviewing superintendents, we found both alignment and divergence between policy and practice. We found an emphasis on Schooling and Instruction and, to a lesser extent Personal Traits in policy and reported practice. Superintendents' rationales for choosing these domains were grounded in appeals to the purpose of schooling, dominant ideas about the principalship, current policies (i.e. teacher evaluation reform), and the contexts of their districts (e.g. a need to improve achievement). In vocalizing these justifications, superintendents revealed a belief that focusing on the elements of Schooling and Instruction would improve principals' practices in ways that would enhance teaching and learning in their schools. Interestingly, although superintendents asserted that Management behaviors were not emphasized in their evaluation systems, their rationales for *not* selecting Management revealed that they value it highly and found ways to emphasize it within and outside the context of evaluation. They often framed the elements in the Management domain as necessary but not sufficient for succeeding as a principal. Thus, even though the district policies heavily favor Schooling and Instruction (80% of indicators) over Management (18% of indicators), it appears that considerations of Management play a large role in superintendents' assessments of principals' performance.

These findings suggest that superintendents attend to the messages in principal evaluation policies, but consider them in light of information from other arenas in which they assess and support principals. In interpreting and acting on the rubrics, superintendents filter information through their own values and beliefs about the principalship. Moreover, their willingness to override the rubric based on extremely poor management suggests that these systems might be more effective for principals who are performing sufficiently well on Management and need to

enhance skills. In contrast, they may function less successfully for principals who are truly struggling in all domains.

Implications

The results presented here are preliminary and should be considered with caution. If they are verified as we continue to collect data on district principal evaluation policies and superintendents' interpretations of these policies, the findings have implications for research, policy, and practice.

On the level of research, these findings prompt us to ask how superintendents act on these policies and what the implications for principal practice, school functioning, and student performance might be. Superintendents' interviews suggest that they filter their understanding of the policies through their own experience and beliefs about what makes a good principal. Studies should investigate the implementation of policies such as these, tracing them from policy documents through superintendents' interpretations, to principals' understandings and actions within schools. Are these policies making a difference in schools and, if so, how?

On the level of policy, it appears that the message that instructional leadership is important has been taken up by principals and superintendents. Managerial leadership appears to be prominent, however. Are these emphases consistent with policymakers' intent? What changes did state departments of education want to prompt through these policies? What training is offered for district leaders in implementing principal evaluation and how could these and subsequent findings shape these learning opportunities for district leaders?

Lastly, this paper suggests implications for district leaders. All were quick to nominate Schooling and Instruction as their priority in principal evaluation. What does this term mean to these leaders, however? How are they transforming the concept of instructional leadership from a

catchy buzzword to a set of principles and practices that guide their work with principals on a daily basis? And where does managerial leadership fit in? In our sample districts, its role seemed informal and in some ways outside the evaluation system. If this is the case, how can principals ensure that they are analyzing and acting on principals' managerial leadership in systematic and fair ways? We will be tracking these questions and others as we collect additional data in our sample districts.

Studying district principal evaluation policies using multiple methods in diverse district contexts provides vital information about supporting the development of school leaders. Our study is significant because of its focus on principals. While we know that principals shape how well schools function, teachers teach, and students learn, we know remarkably little about what districts can do to improve principal quality. As states and districts rush to implement policies to increase teacher quality, comparatively little attention has focused on the person arguably best positioned to improve both teacher and student performance: the school principal. Second, we ground our study in the construct of LCL, a type of leadership that is closely related to student outcomes (Goldring et al., 2009). Third, we investigate whether an important policy lever, principal evaluation, is related to LCL. Despite the current policy emphasis on principal evaluation, no studies have described the range of principal evaluation policies post-RTTT. Describing how principal evaluation policies and practices focus principals' attention on different forms of leadership, we are able to shed light on how evaluation sends different messages to principals, with potential implications for their day-to-day leadership.

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