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# *Preface*

*The more leaders focus their influence, their learning, and their relationships with teachers on the core business of teaching and learning, the greater their influence on student outcomes. (Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009, p. 40)*

In his book *Assessing Educational Leaders*, Doug Reeves (2009) convincingly argues that “leadership evaluation systems [are] the ‘perfect storm’ of failure” (p. 1), with the confluence of many different variables at the same time creating a particularly destructive series of consequences. The first variable is a growing national shortage of educational leaders, which is joined by the second force, “A leadership evaluation system that simultaneously discourages effective leaders, fails to sanction ineffective leaders, and rarely considers as its purpose the improvement of leadership performance” (Reeves, 2009, pp. 2–3).

Specifically, Reeves supports this highly critical view of principal-evaluation systems by suggesting that three issues plague effective principal-evaluation systems. First, many of these evaluation systems contain poorly defined, ambiguous standards replete with educational jargon that tends to be substituted for clearly expressed language. The second problem involves undefined standards of performance. That is, even if the evaluation system has removed confusing educational jargon and ambiguity from its standards, it fails to adequately distinguish performance that is making progress but is not yet proficient from performance that is exemplary. Third, at times, these documents hold principals responsible for the actions of others without the authority to compel those actions in others.

The first two forces are joined with a third commanding force, the expectations of local, state, and federal authorities, that requires a rather dramatic change in the role as well as the performance of education leaders, extending well beyond prior definitions of administrative responsibilities. Clearly, the responsibilities of education leaders now exceed what individual leaders in schools and school districts can be expected to carry out alone (Reeves, 2009).

Specifically, here is what a state education agency (SEA) and its local educational agency (LEA) must do with their principal-evaluation programs in order to successfully obtain flexibility approval from the Elementary and Secondary Recovery and Reinvestment Act Flexibility Program. To receive this flexibility, an SEA and each LEA are required to

Develop, adopt, pilot, and implement, with the involvement of teachers and principals, teacher and principal evaluation and support systems that: (1) will be used for continual improvement of instruction; (2) meaningfully differentiate performance using at least three performance levels; (3) use multiple valid measures in determining performance levels, including as a significant factor data on student growth for all students (including English Learners and students with disabilities), and other measures of professional practice (which may be gathered through multiple formats and sources, such as observations based on rigorous teacher performance standards, teacher portfolios, and student and parent surveys); (4) evaluate teachers and principals on a regular basis; (5) provide clear, timely, and useful feedback, including feedback that identifies needs and guides professional development; and (6) will be used to inform personnel decisions. (U.S. Department of Education, 2012, p. 3)

In brief, while high-quality management within a school is necessary—where children are happy and well behaved, the school is orderly, the facility and property are well cared for, and the finances are under control—it is not a sufficient condition for leadership effectiveness. Why? Because it requires, in addition, that the school’s management procedures ensure high-quality teaching and learning for all (both students and staff). If effective leadership is about improving instruction and making a bigger difference to adult and student learning, then the SEA and LEA need trustworthy advice about the types of leadership as well as the specific sets of leadership practices that are most likely to deliver on those outcomes—the primary basis for summative evaluation.

The good news is that, while the last half-decade has produced a wealth of thinking in the area of leadership but a scarcity of research in leadership evaluation, we still have—thanks to the efforts of a few educational scholars (which we will explore shortly)—improved clarity about the practices of highly effective principals and the components to effective leadership evaluation systems. The bad news is that states across the nation appear to be compelled to follow the same path with principal evaluation as the one that they have pursued with teacher evaluation by constructing summative leadership evaluation documents that have far too many performance indicators to effectively keep track of or measure accurately when evaluating principals. What is needed is a principal-evaluation procedure that focuses solely “on [those] aspects of leadership

that are most critical for student learning” (Seashore-Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010, p. 215) and let go of the rest.

For example, the Minnesota State Model for principal evaluation consists of five performance measures in which 31 indicators are nested, the Colorado State Model Evaluation System for Principals and Assistant Principals is made up of six quality standards supported by 25 elements, the Washington State Principal Evaluation Model is made up of eight criteria buoyed by 28 elements, the Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation comprises four standards and 20 indicators that are sustained by 42 elements, and the Florida Model School Leaders Assessment entails 45 indicators that support 10 standards of practice within four domains, to name a few.

In brief, while all of these models of principal evaluation imply a desire to formatively develop principals, in many cases the formative, improvement-oriented virtues of these evaluation systems may, due to the number of leadership practices being assessed, diminish the practicality of providing principals the formative as well as the summative, evaluation-focused dividends of the strategy. As a result, these “fat” documents lead some within our field feeling as if current evaluation systems are too time-consuming, contain too many items, and include too many redundant concepts to effectively evaluate the impact of leadership on student learning.

## A NEW VISION OF PRINCIPAL EVALUATION

Whether it is the celebrated Italian artist Michelangelo sculpting the statue of David, or the famous American architect Frank Lloyd Wright designing The Guggenheim Museum, the renowned Russian-American novelist, philosopher, playwright Ayn Rand penning *Atlas Shrugged*, or, in our case, two educational authors and researchers devising a way to effectively assess school leaders’ instructional leadership ability, all successful endeavors begin with a vision. In other words, just as the sculptor envisioned the beautiful figure of David trapped within the block of marble and the novelist scrawled John Galt to life on blank pages of her manuscript, each needed a clear vision of what he or she hoped to accomplish and so too did we as we visualized what an instructional leadership assessment system could and should look like. In reality, “all things are created twice” (Covey, 1989, p. 99). For all things, there is a mental (first) construction and a physical (second) construction. The physical follows the mental, just as the school’s collective improvement efforts follows the school’s school improvement plan development.

Although many authors have addressed the topic of vision development, perhaps the most insightful efforts in this area come from the writing of Jim Collins and Jerry Porras in *Built to Last*. Drawing upon a six-year research project at the Stanford University Graduate School of Business, Jim Collins and Jerry Porras (1994) studied several high-profile exceptional and

long-lasting companies (e.g., 3M, Wal-Mart, Walt Disney, Boeing, Sony, and Hewlett-Packard) to answer the question, “What makes the truly exceptional companies different from their competitors?” Throughout their research, the authors kept “looking for underlying, timeless, fundamental principles and patterns that might apply across eras” (p. 17). In the process, they discovered that one of those *timeless, fundamental principles* was the interminable value of a good vision. Vision, they state, “defines what we stand for and why we exist . . . and sets forth what we aspire to become, to achieve, to create” (p. 221).

With these thoughts in mind, our vision for an effective process for growing and assessing school leaders’ instructional leadership ability can best be presented using the format of a resolution. In general a *resolution* in the context of debate by an assembly is a formulation of a determination, expression of opinion, etc., submitted to an assembly or meeting for consideration. That is, a proposal is put to a meeting, the proposal is debated, and a resolution is adopted. In a similar manner, we are proposing to you, the reader, the need for a new principal-evaluation framework, which we intend to discuss over the course of this book in hopes that, by the time you finish the book, you will be compelled to adopt our new vision as your own. What follows, then, is a series of arguments for a new vision in the form of *whereas statements* that culminate in a *therefore statement*, or our vision. In brief, by “employing a point-by-point whereas-based analysis” (Popham, 2013, p. 34), we intend to establish a clear rationale for the basis of this book. At the conclusion of our analysis, a description will be provided regarding what an instructional leadership ability evaluation should look like—our vision, which is described in the remaining chapters.

- *Whereas* most principal-evaluation instruments measure far too many domains of leadership practice that outstrip both the time and energy of evaluators, thus they lack depth and focus on those leadership practices that research has shown to be significantly related to the impact on student and teacher performance, and
- *Whereas* many principal-evaluation systems fail to focus on the critical behaviors principals perform to influence student achievement, and
- *Whereas* many principal-evaluation systems currently in use consist of ambiguous standards or the performance expectations are unclear, rather than operating on clear definitions of performance levels and precise rubrics that allow evaluators to effectively measure aspects of leadership performance, and
- *Whereas* an axiom of good evaluation as well as a lesson in common sense suggest that multiple, not single, sources of evidence be utilized when evaluating a principal, and
- *Whereas* significant variations exist in not only in the quality of principal-evaluation evidence, but also in its relative importance

when appraising a specific principal, the evaluative weight of all principal-evaluation evidence sources must be judged individually and then tailored to the particular principal's school level, context, and to the principal's level of experience; and

- *Whereas* principal growth plans tend to be utilized as a way to mitigate less-than-proficient leadership performance, rather than be used as a continuous improvement tool with all principals from the most novice to the most veteran within the school system,
- *Therefore*, principal-evaluation systems should be based on weighted-evidence judgment in which principal evaluators initially select, richly describe, and weight a parsimonious number of leader-quality criteria that focus on the most important behaviors and actions that improve instruction and student learning, use multiple sources of evidence, craft growth plans for all principals that address individual learning needs, determine whether to adjust those weights because of a leader's distinctive school level, context, and level of experience, and, last, arrive at a coalesced judgment regarding a leader's quality.

As a result of this analysis, its six supporting arguments are (1) principal-evaluation instruments distract attention away from those leadership practices that are closely linked to increases in student achievement and teacher performance, (2) they tend not to focus on the leadership practices that matter the most, (3) they are populated with vague and unclear performance expectations that do not allow evaluators to effectively measure leadership performance, (4) they should require that more than one source of evidence be used to evaluate a principal, (5) the evaluative weight of multiple evidence sources first must be determined separately and second must be individualized to the particular principal's school level, context, and level of experience, and (6) growth plans are natural byproducts of principal-evaluation systems and are useful tools for continuous improvement for all principals, regardless of their prior level of leadership performance.

Evaluating *Instructional Leadership: Recognized Practices for Success* is designed both as a summative evaluation of leadership performance and as a growth model to improve leadership performance, thereby increasing the likelihood that teacher and student performance will also improve. We have taken the position that district leaders can and in most cases must simultaneously fulfill two roles: that of a formative coach as well as that of a summative evaluator of school principals. With all due respect to our friend and colleague Dr. Jim Popham (2013), who argued that anyone who believes "that a combined formative and summative [evaluation effort] can succeed are most likely to have recently arrived from outer space" (p. 18), we came to the position that district leaders must serve two masters (formative coach as well as summative evaluator) not because we believe that these are the ideal roles but because we see this as being the most practical arrangement. That is, we rarely see school districts that

have the staffing luxury to hire both a central office administrator whose sole function it is to be a coach or mentor of school leaders and their professional growth and at the same time hire another district administrator who only facilitates the summative evaluation process for school leaders.

The book acknowledges the forces described earlier that have created this “perfect storm” in school leader-evaluation systems and describes a practical approach that school and central office leaders can take to create and successfully implement an evaluation of instructional leadership framework that will have a significant impact on leadership, teacher, and student performance. Moreover, the book utilizes the research that identifies the type of leadership practices that are most directly related to increases in student achievement and its related elements (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008), with the principal and assistant principal of the school as the focal points. As we shall show, the book describes a process that will encourage schools and districts to

- move beyond an event that occurs once every year, long after any opportunity to influence leadership performance;
- provide frequent feedback for school leaders with multiple opportunities for continuous improvement;
- focus on remarkably specific, high-impact, research-based aspects of leadership performance in order to significantly increase student achievement;
- describe in specific terms the difference between performance that is exemplary and performance that is proficient, progressing, or not meeting leadership expectations thereby establishing clear, coherent, and fair expectations for present and future leaders;
- be used to improve the performance of a 20-year veteran as well as to coach the most novice assistant principal; and
- also be used to train new leaders and to identify and hire prospective leaders.

The audience for this book is threefold: First and foremost, this book is for principals and all school leaders who want to make a greater impact than they ever imagined they could; second, it is for central office leaders who are in a position to alter the educational system, thereby creating conditions for transforming the principalship into a powerful force for reform; and third, would-be aspiring leaders, teachers who are seeking opportunities to expand their impact beyond the classroom and move into entry-level school leader positions.