

# Making the Grade: Improving School Leader Evaluations Through Teacher Feedback



Within schools, principals are the most important influence on students' success after teachers. Even so, evaluating the performance of a principal is difficult, because principals' responsibilities vary widely and their influence on student achievement is indirect and mediated through teachers.<sup>1</sup> To provide useful evaluation measures, school leader evaluation systems must be objective, fair, applicable to a range of leadership styles, and capable of differentiating between effective and ineffective school leaders. Using teacher input as a component of a school leader evaluation system can help promote these aims and improve principal evaluations.

## Teachers can provide valuable input for principal evaluations



Superintendents and central office staff can typically observe only a small part of the wide range of activities that principals engage in. And no one has yet found a reliable and valid statistical approach to systematically measure the effect of individual principals on student outcomes.<sup>2</sup> Finding another lens on principal performance is therefore especially important.



Teachers have a unique perspective because they see principals on a daily basis and directly experience their leadership practices. Teachers' views of principals are an important source of information regarding their principal's leadership.<sup>3</sup>



Incorporating teacher feedback in principal evaluations follows the example of 360-degree evaluations that are common in the business world.



Many districts now use student input to inform teacher evaluations. If students can provide useful input on their teachers—and evidence proves that they can—then it's likely teachers can provide useful input on their principals.<sup>4</sup>



A joint committee established by the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the National Association of Secondary School Principals created a research-based framework for evaluating principals' performance. Their findings suggest using teacher surveys to measure key domains of principal leadership, including professional qualities and instructional leadership; school culture; school planning and progress; and stakeholder support and engagement.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, existing teacher survey instruments used in principal evaluations typically include categories related to those four domains.<sup>6</sup>

## Key Domains of Principal Leadership



School  
planning  
and progress



School  
culture



Professional  
qualities and  
instructional  
leadership



Stakeholder  
support and  
engagement



## Endnotes

- 1 Louis et al. (2010)
- 2 Chiang, Lipscomb, and Gill (2016)
- 3 Fenton (2016)
- 4 Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2010)
- 5 Clifford, M. & Ross, S. (2012)
- 6 IO Education (2017); Tripod Education Partners (2015)

## Citations

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