



Perspectives on Incorporating Teacher Feedback into Principal Evaluations

Webinar transcript

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Now I’m pleased to turn the webinar over to Brian Gill. Brian, the floor is yours.

[Brian Gill] Thanks so much, Rick. And thanks to everybody for joining us today.

So, the first thing I should say is that this is a presentation from the Mid-Atlantic Regional Educational Laboratory, which I direct. And for those of you who aren’t familiar with the Regional Labs, the RELs as we call them, there are ten of them across the country all of which are funded by the U.S. Department of Education to help states and local districts with research, analysis, and dissemination of research.

So, REL Mid-Atlantic has done some – several projects over the last few years related to the evaluation of school leaders, of principals. And I think this – this work is particularly important because, as I’m sure you are all aware, there has been a ton of attention over the last decade or so, attention from policymakers

and researchers, for better and for worse, to teacher evaluation. There's been far less attention, particularly on the research end, to the evaluation of school leaders who are, of course, also very important in promoting student outcomes and in the success of schools.

So, with that in mind, we've done a little work on – on trying to see the extent to which it might be useful to get input from school staff, from teachers, in informing principal evaluations. And to talk about this work and – and – and doing that in practice, we have a great panel here today. So, I'm joined first of all by two of my colleagues from the Mid-Atlantic Regional Lab, Brittney Gionfriddo who will talk about – briefly talk very generally about the research on using staff surveys in the evaluation of school principals. And then we'll turn it over to Whitney Kozakowski who's going to talk about some brand-new research that we just released looking at school climate surveys in particular and how they might inform principal evaluations.

After that, we'll go to a panel discussion including a couple of folks who are closer out in the field and not – not researchers like us. Terry Ball is the Executive Director of the Maryland Association of Elementary School Principals and a former principal herself. She'll give us some perspective from – from the view of a principal and former principal on some of these ideas. And Jesse Papia is Director of Employee Effectiveness in Baltimore City Public Schools, which for some years has been using teacher feedback to inform principal evaluation. And so, she can talk about the experience of a particular district in doing this sort of thing.

So, thank you, again, for joining us, and thanks to all of our panelists for joining us. I think I've just given you the outline of – of the agenda. As Rick mentioned at the beginning, you can put questions you might have for any of our panelists, either for the researchers or the practitioners, in the Q&A box, and you can do that at any point. And we will plan to take some time during the panel discussion in the last part of our webinar to try to address some of those questions. So, send them – send them in at any point as they come up for you during our presentation.

And that said, I will turn it over to my colleague Brittney Gionfriddo to talk about some of the research on staff input into school leader evaluation.

[Brittney Gionfriddo] Thanks, Brian.

A review of literature tells us something that most of us were already inclined to think. Measuring school leaders' performance is important yet difficult. The work the principals do is key to students' success, but principals' effects on students is mediated through teachers and principal supervisors can typically observe only a small part of the wide range of activities that principals engage in. In short, it's really hard to measure principal performance. We know that principal performance affects student success but haven't yet found a reliable approach to measuring that effect or of measuring principal performance in general. So, finding another lens is especially important, and we'll speak more about that in a minute.

One other item to note is that as we focus on the topic of measuring principal performance, it's important to look outside of formal annual employee reviews and also focus on formative feedback and the goal of

providing actionable feedback to assist leaders in improving their performance. Performance information could possibly lead to the identification of best practices conducted by a district's most effective school leaders. This could help support all schools and principals in best supporting their students.

Teachers could be a really great resource on principal performance. They have a unique perspective because they see principals on a daily basis, witness the variety of duties principals perform, and directly experience their leadership practices. Many districts now use student input to inform teacher evaluations. And 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.

And research supports the use of teacher surveys in principal evaluation. A 2014 study found that adding teacher surveys to an existing principal evaluation system increased the link between principals' evaluation ratings and their schools' student achievement growth. A 2017 national study of eight districts across the country focused on building a more comprehensive principal and teacher evaluation system, part of which was by implementing a teacher survey twice per year. And that study found that it improved instructional leadership and teacher-principal trust. Most principals reported the feedback on their leadership as more objective and actionable than previous feedback from their district. And there was a likely positive impact of incorporating that teacher survey on student achievement in mathematics. In fact, the research is so supportive of implementing teacher surveys that 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 in instructional leadership, school culture, school planning and progress, and stakeholder support and engagement. And indeed, existing teacher survey instruments used in principal evaluations typically include categories related to those four domains.

Incorporating teacher feedback in principal evaluations also follows the example of 360-degree evaluations that are common in the business world as well as education. As we discussed, oftentimes student surveys are included within the teacher evaluation system. And on a side note, my professional performance is also evaluated this way.

Let's briefly discuss where teacher surveys are currently part of the principal evaluation system.

Some state departments of education, including Connecticut, Minnesota, and Massachusetts, have either developed their own teacher survey for this purpose or endorsed existing teacher surveys to be used within principal evaluations.

As we discussed at the top of this presentation, teacher surveys can be implemented in a variety of ways to best meet the needs of the specific principal evaluation system at discussion. For example, teacher surveys could contribute to informal, formative feedback throughout the school year or could be a resource for principals while they are forming their future goals.

Most surveys that are currently available have not been proven effective; however, there are two prominent independently developed surveys that have been assessed and (inaudible) by research. Those are the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education, commonly referred to as the VAL-ED, and the Tripod survey. It's really important to note here that the REL does not have any stake in a particular instrument. For the purposes of time and alignment with the experience that our panelists can speak to, we will share some information about the VAL-ED as a background reference for our audience today.

The VAL-ED focuses on measuring school leadership behaviors that influence teacher performance and student learning. The respondents – the proposed respondents include teachers, the principal, and the principal's supervisor. The instrument is designed to have all teachers in the school complete the survey. Responses are kept anonymous by providing data at the aggregate level. And you'll see on the screen right now there's a framework for the VAL-ED. There are six components, or domains, and then six key processes. The core components, which are listed at the top of each column you currently see on the screen, are characteristics of schools that support the learning of students and enhance the ability of teachers to teach. And this was all developed in research best practices and research supporting that these are, in fact, items that support student success and teachers' ability to teach.

Key processes refer to how leaders create and manage those core components.

Of note, VAL-ED has been used by many districts across the country including Baltimore City Public Schools, Cleveland, Des Moines, Long Beach, California, Hillsboro County, Florida, Broward County, Florida, Minneapolis, Minnesota, and Chicago Public Schools.

The output of the assessment produced by the VAL-ED includes an overall effectiveness scores, effectiveness scores in each of the cross sections of components and processes, as well as suggested areas of improvement. The scores are calculated using equally-weighted responses of all the respondents – respondent groups, the principal, all teachers in the school, and the principal's supervisor. And the output also provides data showing variability among each of those responding groups as well.

The VAL-ED has been evaluated and has more supporting evidence than other instruments. The Garrett Study, a two-year study of the VAL-ED published in 2017, that implemented the instrument in eight districts across the United States, I mentioned it about two slides back, found that the VAL-ED produced scores distributed across the entire range of possible performance categories. An improvement over many current evaluation systems. That same study also noted that 75% of principal participants reported that feedback from the VAL-ED was more objective and more useful than feedback provided by the previously existing evaluation system.

In addition, that same study found that implementing the VAL-ED alongside a teacher evaluation and feedback system produced significant improvements in instructional leadership practices and in teacher-principal trust. There was also some evidence of correlation to improvement in student outcomes. Specifically, students' math achievements.

Another study, the Porter study, found the VAL-ED to be a reliable instrument for measuring principal performance. The instrument operated similarly across schools with different characteristics, including elementary, middle, and high school. Additionally, the 2014 Covay Minor study found the instrument reliable in differentiating principal effectiveness 70% of the time when compared to district leaderships' perceptions of their best and lowest performing principals.

We hope that background is helpful for our conversation today, and with that, I'll turn it back to my colleague Brian.

[Whitney Kozakowski] Brian, I think you might be muted.

[Brian Gill] Thank you, Whitney. Sorry about that, everybody.

So, let me try that again. So, Brittney talked about the existing research on – on surveys that are specifically designed to – to be used in educator evaluation. And also talked about one example, the VAL-ED, which is one of the more prominent ones, one of the better researched ones, and the one that happens to be used in Baltimore City schools, so that Jesse will be able to speak to.

But in addition, we were wondering, and some of our stakeholder collaborators in D.C. public schools were wondering, whether existing surveys of school climate might also be useful for providing information on principal performance. And we think this is important because so many school districts across the country already use school climate surveys. And ideally, of course, you wouldn't want to require your staff to do additional surveys if they don't have to. Those of you – those of you who are in Maryland will know that there is a statewide school climate survey being used in Maryland.

So, D.C. has one of these school climate surveys as well, and – and we worked with our collaborators there to assess what sort of information that might provide on principal performance. And Whitney is going to tell us about that.

[Whitney Kozakowski] Great. Thank you, Brian.

So, as Brian mentioned, we partnered with D.C. Public Schools to examine – they have two different surveys they were interested in us looking at, but we really focused on this TNTP Insight survey, which was a survey that's measuring instructional culture. And it covers a couple different domains. So, we looked at nine different domains that are listed here. The survey actually covers up to 11, but we were looking over a four-year period and the – those domains were added later, so we focused on the original nine.

The domains of interest, so they cover academic opportunity, evaluation. And, again, this is the teachers' perspective on each of these issues. So, evaluation, instructional planning, leadership, learning environment, observation and feedback, peer culture, professional development, and school operations.

To give you a sense of the kinds of questions that are on this survey, we have a few examples here on the right. So, one – one survey question might be, my school is committed to improving my instructional practice. And teachers would just answer in a – on a scale that's towards favorable or less favorable, or

rather agree or disagree. Leaders at my school work hard to retain effective teachers. At my school evaluation ratings are accurate and reflections of teacher effectiveness.

So, we had a couple different goals in mind with this work with DCPS. So, one of the questions that we were – we were wondering about was when we see these differences in the survey domains across schools, to what extent might they be due to the principals themselves? So, we know there are lots of factors that affect teacher responses to surveys, and a lot of those are specific to the school, they're specific to the teachers in that school or the students that they're teaching. And to what extent might they actually be due to the principals themselves? So, we were interested in exploring that question.

Secondly, we also wanted to understand how do these surveys – how did this survey, and how did the domains on this survey, relate to the existing measures of principal performance that DCPS is already using in their evaluation system?

So, for the first question, what we do is we estimate what's called the principal value-added model, which sounds complicated, but I can – I want to provide you with the intuitive understanding of it. Essentially what we did is we looked over a four-year period at all the schools that experienced some kind of principal transition. And we looked at what happens to a survey domain for the school, like the average domain score for that score in, say, the leadership domain when their principal changes. What kinds of change do we see in the survey domain score for the school when the principal changes?

So, we did this for all of the schools that experienced transitions and were able to estimate effects of the – principal effects for all the schools that experienced these transitions and all the principals that were serving at those schools.

And what we've done here in this chart is we're showing you the standard deviation of the principal effects on the X axis. And, essentially, I think there are a couple of key takeaways here.

So, one is that principals have fairly large effects on staff survey responses across all of the domains within the TNTP Insight survey. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the largest effect is in the leadership domain. Followed by professional development and instructional planning.

The second big takeaway here is that we also estimated the same effects on percent proficient, so that's the percentage of students that are scoring proficient in math and reading on their standardized tests. And you can see that the effects of principals on these measures are much smaller. And this could just be picking up the fact that over a four-year period, when principals change schools, they have a big immediate effect on staff survey measures, but they might have smaller immediate effects on student outcomes.

And so, I'll talk a little bit about this in a moment, but it suggests that there could be – that it's important to keep this time dimension in mind when devising feedback systems for the principals.

The second question we looked at was how did the Insight survey relate to existing domains or constructs that the principal evaluation system in DCPS was already capturing. To give you a sense of what the DCPS

principal evaluation system is doing, it really consists of two different components right now. One is the leadership framework score, and that captures supervisors' ratings of the principal. Their rated across, I think, six different dimensions, and they get evaluated twice a year.

The second component is the student outcomes section, and that's related to student performance on typically standardized tests, but it can also include other things particularly for schools that don't really have standardized test outcomes.

So, we looked at how does the principal – rather, how does the school's Insight score relate to the principal's score for the leadership framework assessment and then for the student outcomes assessment. And what we found was that there's a decent correlation between the staff survey domains and the leadership framework scores for the principal. So, these correlations are about .3 to .5 in magnitude, so they're not enormous but they're substantive. There's something there. And what we – we take from this is that the staff survey measures, they're correlated. They're capturing a related construct to what's already being captured in the leadership framework assessments. But it's not completely captured. They're adding some information.

So, I think there are a couple of implications from this work. So, one is that principals affect staff survey responses to the instructional culture survey which suggests that they have effects on teachers' perceptions of various features of the environment. And so, it suggests that the teachers themselves can provide this additional feedback to the principals. They're capturing something that maybe wouldn't be captured by a supervisor rating alone. And that they could provide this additional perspective.

When districts are starting to think about, okay, what kind of staff survey might be good – a good one for me to incorporate into an existing principal evaluation system, I think there are a couple different things to keep in mind. So, two – two main things.

One, one reason you might want to include a staff survey is that they have predictive validity. So, in other words, the – if the surveys are related to student outcomes, they could be useful to incorporate into the principal evaluation system because we know that principals have immediate effects on these outcomes, and the effects on those student outcomes like test scores might be longer term. And to the extent that you want to provide your principals with actionable feedback in the short term, the staff survey could be useful for helping to help them grow and develop and make sure that they are on track in the short term.

Another reason to sort of think about including these staff survey measures could be that they are just measuring something that's objectively important to the district in and of itself. And that might be something like school climate. And incorporating this into the principal evaluation system could be a way of helping principals to think about this dimension more carefully and consistently.

And with that, I'm going to pass this back to Brian.

[Brian Gill] Thank you, Whitney. Remembered to unmute this time. So, so you – you've all now heard from – from us researchers about the – about the research on using staff feedback, teacher feedback, to inform principal evaluation, both in the context of surveys that are specifically designed for that purpose like the

VAL-ED and potentially using broader surveys of school climate to – to provide some information on how principals are performing. Feel free, if you've got any questions for – for we researchers, feel free to start putting those in the Q&A box.

But I'm pleased that we've still got more than half our time left for – for our panel discussion and for answering any questions you could have, not only for the researchers, but also for some folks who could talk a little bit more about what this might mean in practice. So, now I want to – I want to bring into our conversation Jesse Papia from Baltimore City Schools to talk about Baltimore's experience in using the VAL-ED and – and more broadly staff surveys in principal evaluation. And also bring in Terry Ball, former principal herself, currently runs the – the Maryland Elementary School Principals Association. Because I think it's important to talk about – it's going to be important to talk about some of the concerns that principals might have about this. I think any of us might have concerns about – about new ways of evaluating our performance.

As Brittany mentioned at the beginning, some of us have a lot of experience in these 360-style evaluations. We at Mathematica have been evaluated that way for a long time. But it – but it hasn't been standard in schools around the country even though, as you've heard, quite a few districts have – have done it. So, it's going to be important to talk about how – how this might be implemented in a way that – that is constructive and that can address any concerns that you might have.

So, I'd like to start with Jesse. And just – it would be great, Jesse, if you could take a couple of minutes to tell us about Baltimore City's experience in using the VAL-ED. And more specifically, how has the district found the information useful? What sort of things do you use it for? And how was it incorporated in principal evaluation in Baltimore?

[Jesse Papia] Thanks so much, Brian. So, everybody, I'm Jesse. It's nice to virtually meet you.

So, Baltimore City Schools has had the VAL-ED survey as a component in our principals' annual evaluation since school year 2013-14. Our relationship with VAL-ED in a principal survey has evolved a bit over that time. It started where it was 15, one-five, percent of the overall annual evaluation. You know, we have a principal evaluation structure where there's multiple components and data comes together to calculate total score. And a rating is determined from there.

Around school year 18-19, we shifted to where the VAL-ED survey was only ten percent overall of principals' evaluation, but we also shifted where only the staff responses were included. We actually, in terms of that 360 nature where you've got the principal self-reflection and the supervisor evaluation, those two responses are removed.

So, that's some technical information about our – the length of our relationship and what it looks like. I think it's incredibly valuable. This is a component where it is the only place that the folks who are supervised and led and supported by the leader are having some of their voice and perspective and feedback included in an assessment of that leader's performance for the year.

We had to certainly think very carefully about how to make sure we implemented the survey with fidelity. And that we considered teacher concerns about confidentiality as well as school year concerns about the validity of the information to be included in their annual evaluation. So, it's really important, and I could talk more about that if there are questions that come up.

In terms of how we use that, you know, as part of their annual evaluation, some of my colleagues who work more directly with coaching and support for school leaders, and particular early career school leaders, we've been partnering with more and more over the last several years figuring out how we can embed in their coaching and support ways to help newer principals use the feedback and the results of the VAL-ED survey in their own reflection. And when they're thinking about their growth areas, or identifying areas of strength that they, themselves, might not have even seen. And so, using it more as a reflection tool with folks who are in more of a coaching space has been really important for us.

We also, at the district level, use it as, you know, a bit of a – a bit of a check, I guess. There are times when we are looking at a school leader's evaluation, we're trying to see are things making sense when a lot of the data coming (inaudible), we often are seeing in places where the VAL-ED survey results are similar from staff. And it's giving a bit more sense of credence to actually both sets of results. That we're seeing some similar things coming up from multiple parties.

[Brian Gill] Great.

[Jesse Papia] I could say something about (inaudible).

[Brian Gill] Okay. Thanks so much, Jesse. It's interesting to hear that, you know, that – that Baltimore is definitely using this for, you know, trying to use it for development – for professional development purposes as well as – as formal evaluation purposes.

And it's worth noting that, you know, among the districts who do this – that do this across the country, some of them make it a formal percentage of a principal's evaluation as Baltimore City does. And others might use it just to inform a supervisor's judgment about a principal's performance in a way that isn't – isn't a – a formulary percent.

I want to turn to Terry Ball now, and – and I'm interested in getting your thoughts, Terry, from the perspective of a former principal and somebody who's talking to principals all the time, what – what sort of reaction do you have to this? You know, what kind of concerns does it raise? Can you see ways in which it might be constructed – I mean, we heard – we heard from Brittney that there is encouraging research suggesting that – that this kind of instrument can actually improve trust between principals and teachers, but I can imagine that some principals might worry about the opposite occurring. And so, what – what are your thoughts about this?

[Terry Ball] Thank you, Brian. And nice to meet everyone again virtually also.

I think trust is a key word, not only for principals and teachers but supervisors and principals. And I think with any evaluation system, whether it be a principal evaluation system or a teacher evaluation system,

that trust has to start with a complete understanding of what those components of an evaluation system are measuring. And what's the why. And I think when people start to understand that, and there's transparency about why that evaluation system or those components are used, that trust can start to develop.

And then I also think with a principal-supervisor and a principal evaluation instrument, there has to be a relationship building between central office and principals to develop that trust and encourage transparency as well as the principal developing those relationships with teachers. I think anyone who goes into the principalship profession, just as teachers do, that there has to be that self-reflection piece, and there's that growth mindset. So, understanding that and understanding what those components might do for you in growing, professionally and personally, I think that a teacher survey, or any survey, can add to that principal's building of a professional development system for themselves.

I do think that principals, myself included, when the Maryland surveys first came out, I think the first one came out in 2013, the TELL survey, with one of our governors, and then the ESSA survey, that there has to be – it's one component of data that is to be used. Because I think if you start in a building, or if your principal is placed in a building where there has been maybe some cultural issues or some low student achievement, that first one to three years is probably – not probably – is mostly devoted to building relationships, understanding the data, and maybe making changes. And some of those changes may be urgent changes that need to be made, and some may be able to be put on the side. But not all teachers, or all staff, or all parents are going to understand those changes at first, so that may negatively impact a survey. So, using it as one piece of data, I think would be a way of also building trust and helping principals understand that it's just a component of the total evaluation system.

[Brian Gill] Yeah. Thank you for that. It does seem like you could imagine that it – that you'd want to interpret the results differently depending on the circumstances in which the principal was placed in the school for.

Now, so you mentioned the Maryland school climate survey. The – the – coincidentally, the Regional Educational Lab was involved in helping to develop the current version of that. It started a couple of years ago. And it is included in the state's ESSA-compliant accountability system. So, it is a formal part of a school's evaluation though not officially a formal part of a principal's evaluation.

When you look at the – at the domains that are included in that school climate survey, some of them seem to match up reasonably well with domains that Whitney talked about in the – in the Insight survey that – that we found in our research are – do seem to be related to principal performance. And they include things like behavioral and academic supports, the quality of instructional feedback given to teachers, the quality of the physical environment. I'm wondering if you know whether, you know, again, this is not something that is – that is a formal part of a principal's evaluation, at least not statewide in Maryland, but are you aware of results from – from the – from the Maryland climate survey being used to inform either principal development or evaluation informally among districts in Maryland?

[Terry Ball] I – there are several districts that do use it informally. And I know that in discussion at our board meetings or just general membership meetings, principals use it themselves to get an idea of, you know, feedback from staff and others about just perspectives of what’s happening in their building. Especially the last couple of years with so much change virtually and then just with things due to COVID, there’s always that information that needs to be sent back quickly to them sometimes. So, I think trying to extend themselves out to teachers, and to parents and community, that feedback has been important to them just to – even to use day to day or month to month or just to think about it as next steps as they plan for a new school year.

[Brian Gill] Okay. Let me come back to Jesse for a minute. And, again, feel free to – for anyone on our audience, feel free to submit questions via the Q&A box. They can be questions either for the members of our research team about the research on staff surveys in school leader evaluation or about the ways they might be viewed by principals or used by districts.

So, I want to ask Jesse on this – there’s been a good bit of discussion among both of you about this issue of trust. And I want – I wonder if you could say a little bit more, you brought up the issue that teachers need to be able to trust that their – that their responses will be anonymous. Do you have any sense of, you know, whether that was a challenge? Do – do teachers in Baltimore generally appreciate the opportunity to do this survey? Do you get – do you get good response rates from the staff in your schools?

[Jesse Papia] Yeah. We – yes. I mean, so, in terms of response rates, we – I should have looked up some of our reports ahead of time – we – we do get good response rates. And so, for the VA-ED survey in particular, 50% is the minimum for the results to be considered valid. So, 50% response rate from staff. And that’s really important when I think about the credibility for the school leader. Because if you’re – if I’m in a school leader’s seat, and there are some tough conversations that need to be had or there are some changes that need to be made that might be uncomfortable for folks while we’re working through them together, I might be nervous in doing the right things for my students. And my survey might actually look like I’m doing worse as a leader. And so, again, having that 50% is really important. We do not include a score in the principal’s evaluation from staff (inaudible) because the idea here is, we’re not talking about outliers influencing your – your principal evaluation, we’re talking about now half, at least, of your staff. And we have very, very low numbers. Sometimes zero of our schools don’t meet that 50%. So, the inverse of that being 100% of our schools hit at least 50% response of staff. If they don’t, we’re talking, again, very, very low numbers, single digits.

As we have a high response rate, I think that staff do appreciate having this opportunity. We have, you know, survey coordinators in schools who are making sure that it’s facilitated by a staff member, not the principal. Trying to build some of those ways for the people who are completing the survey now to feel like they can be open and honest in places where they might be anxious. And I don’t think that’s a unique to Baltimore thing. I think it’s just when anybody is giving survey feedback, in particular something that is of some weight to their supervisor. Depending on where they are, they could have great relationships with their principal and have had a really bad experience in the past. Or heard of a bad experience and be anxious.

And so, the way the VAL-ED survey is set up is that it is completely anonymous. And we do a lot of communication to make sure people understand and believe that because we want people to be honest in their survey responses.

[Brian Gill] Great. So, that – that’s – that is nice because, you know, it’s – it’s a nice coincidence that, you know, the kind of thing that – that we researchers care about for validity, that is, high response rates, is important – are important for – for being able to know that the – that the – that the surveys are – are giving a valid indicator, that that’s the same sort of thing that can increase the credibility of – of these results for the people being evaluated, for the principals. And – and that it could presumably help to address some of the concerns that – that Brittney and I, I know, have heard about – about those outlier teachers that you mentioned, or the outlier staff. You know, you could – you could certainly imagine that in any school, there might be some small number of staff who have a particular beef with the principal that might not be widely shared, and you wouldn’t want that view to dominate the principal’s score if that’s actually only a couple of teachers.

So – so the, you know, making sure that you have a minimum response rate requirement makes a lot of sense, both from a validity perspective and from a credibility perspective, I think.

I wonder if there’s – if you might have any other recommendations you would make to a district that was considering using staff surveys for school leader evaluation that had to start with this. That doesn’t have the eight-or-so years of experience that you’ve had in Baltimore. How would you – how would you recommend that they – they get started with this?

[Jesse Papia] Yeah. I mean, I think that a pilot – so, I know sometimes we want to go so fast because every year it’s a year for our kids, right? I think sometimes just like taking a moment. Doing the pilot allows folks, you know, a place where it feels like it’s not (inaudible) the stakes are less weighty can help people kind of go through the experience. I think that’s really important. I definitely think, you know, messaging and training what to expect. I mean, all the way to the nitty gritty of what does it look like and feel like to complete the survey. We don’t want folks partway through to be overwhelmed or not know what buttons to push. We want them to be just in the mindset of giving feedback and not have a platform get in the way of that.

In the same way, we would – I would recommend training communication to orient the leaders to what the report is going to look like. Again, I don’t want folks where like the format of something is getting in the way of really good and worthwhile material.

Something that, you know, I mentioned, it’s like more in recent years that we’ve done, and as they learn from us and do it a little bit better, you know, I think sometimes we always like plan towards we’re going to get the evaluations in place, we’re going to have the support and the development all lined up. And sometimes there’s a little bit of gap while we’re building out some more support and development. And I would just say use that – if you’re doing a pilot, use that year as well to start already connecting with the coaches. With the supervisors. We’re going to be having feedback conversations. With the stakeholders that you need to so that they’re equipped, and ready, and bought in on using the results of the survey.

Because it's incredibly unique. I mean, we're literally in a place where 50% to 100% of staff are answering the same questions every year on VAL-ED. It's a – again, it's not about VAL-ED, this just happens to be a credible, nationally-normed tool. And so, you can see over time how somebody is doing. And if we didn't do our job on the communication side, that's a real lost opportunity. And a disrespect, I think, for the time folks put into the survey.

The only other thing I (inaudible) field, again, like very technical, but thinking about what is it that makes people anxious. So, what's the school leader going to be anxious about? Try to anticipate that. Listen to school leaders. Hear what their concerns are. And see what you can do in process to address them. And if nothing else, name them, right. If someone says, here's a thing I'm worried about, don't then go into a meeting of their peers and act like that's not a real concern in the room. And I'd say for teachers in the same way.

And then our survey coordinators are just fabulous. I mean, I am certain, 100%, that they also go, like many other titles, and that they are supporting with many things happening in their building. But that idea of having somebody in the building to sit folks down. We had somebody like that sharing strategies with their peer survey coordinators. You know, they promised like spaghetti dinner if they got to 100%. Because we would send out, you know, status reports to try and get the numbers up. And, you know, that is dedication.

So, I would say also think about having stakeholders in the school who know the survey who can help get your – your numbers up. Because I do think that if we didn't have the high percentage rates that we do, it starts to bring in a little more opportunity to question the results.

[Brian Gill] That's great. That's – that's – that's very technical and very helpful, I think. I mean, I think that's exactly the sort of thing that – that districts ought to be thinking about if they're – if they're considering doing – doing this kind of thing.

To come back to Terry, are there – are there other things that you would want districts to be doing if they were – if they were going to try to incorporate staff feedback in evaluation?

[Terry Ball] Sure. I think all the elements that Jesse mentioned are – are important. And one thing I heard her say was coaching and facilitating. And not all districts have principal coaches or principal mentors, they have supervisors. And I think there's a difference between a supervisor and a principal coach and a principal mentor. And I think if districts are going to – not even if they're going to, even now for a variety of reasons, if districts could increase that principal coach or principal mentor position. I think as a supervisor you are in that evaluative mode sometimes and not always looking to coach or facilitate. So, I think that that would be a critical element if they're going to start to incorporate the surveys because I think to develop that shared understanding, or to develop trust in a pilot, you have to have somebody who's there to listen, and actively listen. And as Jesse said, not necessarily dismiss concerns or to, you know, be hyperbolic about concerns, but to – to share them in a realistic and honest way.

I also think that a pilot would be a good way to go and to use or ask staff to volunteer, but also to get those devil advocates that you know in your leadership positions because they're going to give you some more honest, perhaps, and critical information than some of the people who are always volunteering to say, yes, I'll do a pilot for you. So, so look at your staff to see who could actually do a pilot and give that constructive feedback to you.

[Brian Gill] Okay. Thanks. So, you think that there's value in separating the roles of the evaluator and the coach or principals?

[Terry Ball] I do. Even as a principal, when I met with my teachers, you know, I'd pretend to put the hat on, now I'm going to be an evaluator, let's put that away, and now we're just going to have this conversation about how I can help and support you. And I think that's a – not think – I know that's a very different role than just being in that evaluator position.

And I think even a coach and mentor are different. A coach is going to help identify skills to take action on where a mentor might be engaged in conversation about research or actionable items that perhaps aren't always skill based but still developing mindsets or growth in specific areas for a school year.

[Brian Gill] Okay. I would be interested in hearing more about sort of how – how to think about staff surveys in the context of other ways of evaluating principals. So, Jesse, you described the fact that in Baltimore City, the staff surveys were previously 15% of the principals' evaluation. They're now ten percent. If I remember correctly, the other components are – are related to a supervisor's evaluation, leadership characteristics, and student outcomes. There are lots of districts that – that have a sort of two-part structure in principal evaluations where one part is a – is a supervisor evaluation of professional practices and the other part is – is something related to improvements in student outcomes.

You know, interestingly we've seen from the – the results that Whitney presented that – that the – the that the kinds of things that the staff surveys measure can be influenced more quickly by a principal than – than the student outcomes are, even though the student outcomes are what, presumably, we ultimately care about. So, let me ask, Jesse, let me ask you first, can you say anything about what went into the determination of what fraction of a principal's total evaluation rating is – is related to the staff surveys versus – versus other elements?

[Jesse Papia] Yeah. I mean, so we originally had the 15%. And just to clarify, it was 15% for VAL-ED, so it actually meant five percent was staff response, five percent principal, and five percent supervisor.

[Brian Gill] Oh, okay.

[Jessie Papia] Yes. So, we went from a place of a little more weight from that particular survey tool overall to a little bit less weight overall but increased the voice of the teacher in particular.

[Brian Gill] Right. So, that actually went from five to ten. Okay.

[Jesse Papia] If you're thinking about just staff (inaudible), yes, that's right. The – one of our other – and some of the discussion there had been just after review of several years of data. You know, again, that was something we had the opportunity to benefit from. But as I think, something I would recommend to folks, like, once you've implemented whatever you may choose to do as you continue, have you pause and reflect on the data and what it's showing you. And so, some of our decisions there were based on just having several years of data to review and discuss with our – our bargaining unit partners.

We also have a component in our evaluation, it's called the School Performance Measure. And there was – why I bring that up is there was a lesson learned for us there. It includes several different school-level datapoints. One of them is our results from our, at the time, locally developed district climate survey. And so, that was a component in our teacher and our school leader evaluations. And it included responses from parents, from staff, and from students. And, again, I think hearing voice from parents and students is just critical for understanding how well a school is serving them and how well a leader and the teachers in the building are serving.

One of our lessons learned is that because we were putting the results from that survey in both teacher and principal surveys, and as staff, they were also respondents on one part of that survey, we were potentially, you know, impacting how much we could trust the results on those surveys because of something we had incentivized in our design. So that – it was a very human, natural thing. Somebody noticed. And people told us in focus groups that, you know, they knew that that was going to become a score in their own evaluation, it felt really hard to say if they thought things weren't going well. And so, we ended up making a decision to remove those responses from that overall measure while still keeping responses from parents and students because of, you know, just the importance of their voices.

So, slightly different than your question, but I did want to offer we find value in climate survey results, although that was not statewide at the time. And just something to consider the unintended consequences when beginning to bring survey results into evaluations, whether formally as a discreet score, or even if it's a source of evidence being used by a supervisor because you still want to be able to use the data coming through that survey tool for other things. And that by nature of using it, we could be changing the comfort people had with being honest in that survey.

[Brian Gill] Right. Right. So – so in Baltimore then, the student climate surveys are also going into informing the school leader's evaluation in some way?

[Jesse Papia] Yes. Through that measure. I will say in the most recent years due to the, you know, the shifts due to COVID and state pilot of a survey, like we didn't want to just (inaudible) insert that data, so I anticipate the source of survey data may change in the future, but historically, you know, we had that, and it was coming from a district climate survey.

[Brian Gill] Okay. Thank you.

So, on a similar topic, Terry, let me ask you, you know, as a principal, you know, how would you – how would you like staff surveys to be included in your evaluation, if at all, relative to other kinds of ways of

being evaluated, whether that's student outcomes, or the judgment of the supervisor based on a professional practice review?

[Terry Ball] You know, I think with the – in Maryland, we use the (inaudible) standards and the rubric. So, I think it's part of evidence for culture and climate and equity and those specific indicators that we definitely could incorporate a survey, be it a parent survey, the teacher survey, even the student voice survey. I think that would be important to share as evidence, whether it's something the district uses. Many times, principals will create their own survey. It may not be research based, they may not have access to that, but just to get feedback and then to, like I said, to use that as evidence as part of the standard for that professional practice.

So, I don't think it's out of the question. I think many principals do that informally. I think having something research based would help them validate the results of any data they receive over time.

One thing I also wanted to comment before about Jesse, it seems like their program in Baltimore City is very well formulated and very well staffed. And I don't know – I think every district at this point would probably have a research and development department that certainly could help with that. I don't know if they have the in-the-school people to help with that implementation. So, I think that would have to be something considered.

And also, I'm curious because I also believe in most districts that anything added to the principal survey would have to be negotiated. So, I don't know that all districts have that part of their negotiations, and even a pilot would have to be probably included in that negotiations for contract and evaluation in Maryland.

[Brian Gill] Thank you, Terry. And that sounds consistent with what Jesse was describing. Is that right, Jesse, in terms of the contractual issue?

[Jesse Papia] Yeah. Yes. Terry – And if I am – if I'm saying Terry's right and she's like, Jesse, that's not what I meant, I do apologize, Terry. But in, yeah, in Maryland, for a locally-developed evaluation model, you have to have agreement with your – with your bargaining unit partners. And so – so we work very closely – for us, it's (inaudible). We work very closely. We've piloted or had working groups. We've always worked with our union partners to help us identify folks who should be part of those conversations. And then bringing back the results to a full group.

[Brian Gill] Great. Thank you.

Terry, your point about the – the district capacity seems like an important one. And – and it may be even more important in some other states outside of Maryland. Maryland school districts tend to be pretty large, and they probably have on average more – more central office capacity than – than school districts in states, say, like Pennsylvania or Massachusetts where many school districts are very, very small. And, so, one of the issues that raises has to do with analytic capacity and – and points to a question we just got in – that just came in through the Q&A box, which is whether – what sort of capacity is needed for – for districts to be able to analyze and understand these kinds of results. Now, you know, the sort of analysis

that – that we did in D.C. that Whitney described is fairly sophisticated, but I suspect that it's not necessary to be all that sophisticated to understand the results of – of the VAL-ED, for example. And I wonder, Jesse, if you have anything that you'd say about that. Is this the sort of thing that – that even a small district that doesn't have a research department, say, could be able to do?

[Jesse Papia] Yeah. I, you know, for – for Ms. Joanne. I – I don't want to misspeak or assume, and I think it could really depend on the question that folks want to – to investigate with the data. But at a – at a starting place, and I always – our experience with the VAL-ED survey, the platform does any analysis that is needed. In terms of, like, what are the like average responses on the different questions and the different domains. They do a cross-tabulation of the processes and components which is very technical and not helpful right now. But just to say there are some analytics that are occurring on the platform and then are visualized in a school leader's specific report that they can generate. We also are then able, as a district, to download an Excel report that gives us that same data but in a little bit – in a format that's easier to manipulate. There is something that we did when we were looking at patterns of data and determining, you know, do we keep it at 15, go to ten percent? That was a lot of looking at, you know, patterns over time, average scores, creating a kind of what were average scores for people who had a highly effective rating. So, we might have been doing a little bit of analysis using like one other parameter to – to look against. We weren't doing things that were very sophisticated. I guess I would say (inaudible) in terms of like a value add or trying to – to generate that sort of analysis.

So, I think there's a lot that can still be learned –

[Brian Gill] That's great.

[Jesse Papia] With the data that comes out of the system depending on your question

[Brian Gill] That's great. Okay. Thank you.

Well, we are at an hour now, so it's time to let you all go. Thanks, again, to all of our panelists. If you need to reach out to us, our contact info is here. And we'd be very grateful to all of our audience if you could take a short survey. It says ten minutes. It's not ten minutes. You could do it in two minutes. That should pop up here momentarily as – as we finish.

Thanks, again, to everybody for joining us today. I hope you found this useful. And we'll look forward to seeing you in the future.