**Overview**

This brief offers three recommendations for Massachusetts superintendents to reinvigorate principal evaluation. The recommendations are based on the work of Massachusetts superintendents and principals to develop practical ways to make principal evaluation more fair, practical, and useful for both principals and superintendents. The brief includes **concrete examples** for districts and previews **six field-reviewed tools**.

**The Opportunity**

Principals want and need support and guidance from their superintendents. They want them to recognize their accomplishments, know their challenges, and support their growth and development. They want the evaluation process they experience to be more integrated with and aligned to their ongoing work, more focused, and more helpful. With updated performance rubrics for both [principals](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/resources/rubrics/) (2018) and [superintendents](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/resources/rubrics/) (2019), it is imperative that leaders receive the guidance and support they need through an evaluation process that is both fair and meaningful. Further, by focusing on goals, prioritizing 6-8 indicators and/or elements, and making school visits the centerpiece of their work with principals, superintendents will be in a stronger position to meet the rigorous requirements for [effective supervision and evaluation](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/model/PartIII_AppxA.pdf#page=7) embodied in the superintendent rubric. Equally importantly, goal-centered and focused school visits will serve to dramatically increase the impacts of their district leadership.

We can’t wait: a 2018 statewide survey of superintendents and principals[[1]](#footnote-1) revealed a significant problem with the perceived fairness of principal evaluation. Fewer than 1 in 4 superintendents and 1 in 5 principals strongly agreed that “the evaluation system used in my district for assessing administrators generates fair results.” In fact, principals were twice as likely as superintendents to disagree with the assertion that the current system yields fair results. At the same time, more than 1 in 4 principals believe the current evaluation practices in their district are ineffective in identifying either outstanding or struggling school leaders. One in 5 superintendents share the same belief.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Three Best Practices to Effective Principal Evaluation**

Here are three “best practice” recommendations for making the evaluation process simpler, more focused and more useful for both superintendents and principals:

1. **Alignment and Coherence:** Tie each of the principal’s annual goals to the most relevant Indicators and elements so that evidence related to goal progress can also be used to assess performance on those Indicators and elements.
2. **Prioritization and Focus:** Establish a reasonable number of *priority indicators* *and/or elements* to focus an evaluation on in a given year.
3. **Focused School Visits with Feedback:** Make more consistent and frequent use of school visits as the most important supervision and evaluation tool.

## Recommendation #1: Alignment and Coherence

## Tie each of the principal’s annual goals to the most relevant Indicators and elements so that evidence related to goal progress can also be used to assess performance on those Indicators and elements.

The goal setting and reporting process is a critical part of the evaluation cycle. When establishing the principal’s annual goals and the actions required to accomplish them, take time to identify the specific Indicators and/or elements most closely associated with the goals and action steps. Establishing this alignment at the outset will lead to a more coherent and meaningful process for gathering evidence related to both goal progress *and* overall leadership practice. It also reduces the time and effort spent on collecting, presenting and assessing evidence during the formative and summative evaluation stages.

For example, in pursuing a school improvement goal around expanding social emotional learning (SEL), a principal may be called upon to demonstrate knowledge and skills reflected in Indicators and elements situated across multiple Standards, The principal can therefore use the evidence related to achieving this goal to demonstrate performance on all four standards. As a result, the burden of evidence gathering, reporting and assessing are reduced for both principal and superintendent.

For example, depending on the specifics of the SEL goal and action plan, possible priority elements include:

| Standard I: Instructional Leadership | Standard II: Management & Operations | Standard III: Family & Community Engagement | Standard IV: Professional Culture |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| I-D-1: Educator Goals I-E-2: School Goals | II-B-1: Recruitment and Hiring StrategiesII-B-2: Induction, Professional Development, and Career Growth StrategiesII-C-2: Time for Collaboration II-E-1: Fiscal Systems | III-B-1: Student SupportIII-D-1: Culturally Proficient Communication | IV-A-3: Meetings IV-D-1: Continuous Learning of Staff IV-D-2: Continuous Learning of AdministratorIV-E-1: Shared Vision DevelopmentIV-F: Managing Conflict |

## Recommendation #2: Prioritization and Focus

## Establish a reasonable number of priority Indicators and elements to be evaluated on in a given year.

The School-level Administrator rubric describes four Standards, 21 Indicators, and 38 elements. It is simply not realistic, practical or even useful to collect, present, and assess evidence on every Indicator, and certainly not every element. To support the focus that is essential for both growth and impact, it is critical that superintendents work with principals each year to identify *priority Indicators* and/or *elements* around which to focus the evaluation. This conversation should start with the principal’s proposal for priority Indicators and elements, based on their self-assessment.

How many? The number of priority Indicators or elements will vary depending on the needs of the principal, but it’s helpful to focus annually on no more than one or two Indicators for each Standard, and one or two elements within each of these priority Indicators. This degree of focus will help to ensure a positive impact on both the school’s and the principal’s growth and development. Districts have taken two general approaches to identifying these *priority Indicators* and *priority elements*, which they sometimes call *power Indicators* or *power elements*.

Approach #1: Individual principals identify priority Indicators and elements that reflect the unique needs of their school and/or personal professional growth.

* For example, a new principal in a school that is in its second year of implementing *Universal Design for Learning* might prioritize the elements in Standard I: Instructional Leadership that focus on his leadership practice related to curriculum implementation support (*I-A-1: Standards Based Unit Development and Lesson Support*) and goal-setting (*I-D-1: Educator Goals*).
* A veteran principal in a similar school context, on the other hand, may prioritize elements in Standard I that focus on ensuring the use of data to adjust practice (*I-C-2: Adjustments to Practice*) and providing meaningful feedback to instructional staff (*I-D-3: Observations and Feedback*).

Approach #2: All principals in the district focus on the same subset of priority Indicators and/or elements that are of critical importance to the district, in addition to two or three elements unique to their circumstances. District leadership team meetings and professional development can then be designed to help build their collective skills and knowledge in these areas.

* For example, in a district focused on strengthening culturally proficient communication and expanding community involvement, all principals may have the following three priority elements in common: *III-C-1: Culturally Proficient Communication*, *IV-B-1: Policies & Practices*, and *IV-E-1: Shared Vision Development*.

## Recommendation #3: Focused School Visits with Feedback

## Make frequent school visits with consistent and meaningful feedback the key to a fair, comprehensive and useful principal evaluation process.

In a school visit, the Superintendent works side-by-side with each principal at least every four to eight weeks, engaging in one or more of these activities:

1. Co-observe classes, debriefing together what they see,
2. Review artifacts together, such as written feedback on classroom observations, and/or
3. Attend and debrief together school-based meetings, including department, team, grade level, and leadership team meetings, as well as meetings between the principal and instructional specialists/coaches/department heads.

Frequent school visits are a key responsibility of the superintendent. The critical role school visits play in a fair and comprehensive evaluation process has become increasingly more apparent. They serve as the primary means to best understand principal efficacy and to provide meaningful and actionable feedback to support their growth and development. As importantly, school visits give superintendents critical first-hand information and influence that is available from no other activity they can do.

Superintendents visit schools and classrooms with principals for multiple reasons:

1. To see firsthand how district and school priorities are being implemented in order to assess progress, celebrate success and identify obstacles
2. To assess how well students are being engaged and challenged
3. To get a sense of how safe and healthy the school culture and climate are for both adults and students
4. To see the principal in action in order to guide and support their work
5. To gather evidence needed to assess the principal’s performance
6. To demonstrate that they care enough about teaching and learning to make time to observe it themselves
7. To model that a leader can and must make time in their schedule to see students and teachers at work

Of course, superintendents can achieve more than one of these intended outcomes on the same school visit. When thoughtfully implemented, school visits provide the superintendent and principal with the lion’s share of the evidence needed to make a thoughtful assessment of the principal’s performance on each of the four Standards in the School-level Administrator rubric. The following **six field-reviewed tools** are designed to support comprehensive, focused school-site visits that will benefit both principals and superintendents.

[**The School Visit Framework**](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/resources/supervisor/school-visit-framework.pdf)

The first tool describes the critical features of a school visit and the roles and responsibilities of the superintendent and principal before, during and after the visit to make school visits the foundation for both meaningful principal evaluation and effective district improvement work The protocol offers concrete guidance for conducting a school visit that can be adapted to a specific focus or objective.

Ten Steps for an Effective School Visit

| Before the Visit | During the Visit | After the Visit |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1. Establish Expectations
2. Review Artifacts and Develop Visit Focus
3. Establish Time, Agenda and Preparation Required
 | 1. Observe with a Specific Focus
2. Debrief What You Observed and Read
3. Share Feedback
4. Agree on Next Steps and Plan for Accountability
 | 1. Hold Each Other Accountable for Next Steps
2. Review Artifacts
3. Reflect, Prepare Feedback & Address Implications
 |

[**School Visit Protocol #1 Classroom Observation and Feedback**](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/resources/supervisor/protocol-observations-feedback.pdf) (A resource for Standard I)

The resource for Standard I is a school visit protocol a superintendent can use to gather evidence about the principal’s work related to observing teaching practice and providing useful feedback to the teacher. Superintendents gather evidence and also guide and support the principal’s development as they observe 2-4 classrooms together and debrief afterwards with a focus on the principal’s prior and planned feedback. This protocol places primary focus on ensuring high-quality observation feedback to teachers (I-D-3) and offers options for prioritizing specific elements within Standards I and II.

[**School Visit Protocol #2 Student Culture and Climate**](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/resources/supervisor/protocol-school-culture.pdf) (A resource for Standard II)

This is a protocol for a school visit, principal conference and artifact review designed to collect evidence for guiding, supporting and assessing the principal’s performance in establishing effective Operational Systems and Routines (II-A-1) and ensuring students’ Social Emotional Well-Being (II-A-2) and Health and Safety (II-A-3).

[**School Visit Protocol #3 Family Engagement**](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/resources/supervisor/protocol-family-engagement.pdf) (A resource for Standard III)

This is a protocol for a school visit, principal conference and artifact review designed to assess the principal’s progress in engaging, supporting and communicating with families. This protocol focuses on Family Engagement (III-A-1), Family Support (III-B-2), and Culturally Proficient Communication (III-C-1).

[**School Visit Protocol #4A Professional Culture**](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/resources/supervisor/protocol-prof-culture.pdf)(A resource for Standard IV)

The first resource for Standard IV is a protocol for a school visit, conference and artifact review designed to gather information about the principal’s work building a healthy professional culture with primary focus on Meetings (IV-A-3), and secondary focus on Mission and Core Values (IV-A-2), Communication Skills (IV-C-1) Shared Vision Development (IV-E-1) and Managing Conflict (IV-F). In this protocol, the superintendent observes the principal leading a meeting of a school team or faculty and debriefs with the principal afterwards. This protocol makes optional use of a portion of [DESE’s Model Staff Feedback Survey](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/feedback/).

**School Visit Protocol #4B Cultural Proficiency** (A resource for Standard IV)*– coming soon*

The second resource for Standard IV is a school visit protocol designed to gather evidence about the effectiveness of the policies and practices in place to enable staff and students to interact effectively in a culturally responsive environment (IV-B). In this protocol, the superintendent and principal together observe students interacting with one another and with adults in public spaces, talk with a group of students and/or staff, and examine artifacts, policies and practices related to culturally responsive teaching and leading. This protocol makes optional use of portions of both the [DESE Model Student and Staff Feedback Surveys](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/feedback/) and DESE’s annual [VOCAL (Views of Climate and Learning) student survey](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Csclancy%5CAppData%5CLocal%5CMicrosoft%5CWindows%5CINetCache%5CContent.Outlook%5C5C0VP4VT%5CVOCAL%20%28Views%20of%20Climate%20and%20Learning%29%20student%20survey).

1. [2017-2018 Views of Instruction, State Standards, Teaching, and Assessment (VISTA) Survey](http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/vista/2018/) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 2018 VISTA Principal Survey – All Districts, pp. 27-28 and 2018 VISTA Superintendent Survey – All Districts, pp. 23-24 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)