

MPPR Implementation and Validation: A Framework for Research and Evaluation

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Theory of Change

If principals use the rubric and its evaluation process with fidelity, their practice will improve. If their practice improves, their schools and their students will improve.

Theory of Action Components

1. The MPPR is best used as a means of directly improving principal practice in the service of school improvement. It is grounded in both accepted standards for professional practice (ISSLC) and in a conceptual framework around school improvement.
2. Evidence of improvement and attainment are best positioned and understood within a goal-setting and attainment process.
3. The principal is both a key actor and a learner in the principal evaluation process.
4. Individual, contextual and situational factors will have a strong impact on the understanding and use of the MPPR.
5. Principals can improve through feedback and support.

Principal Evaluation: A key lever for expanding the reach of instructional leaders

Principal and principal leadership are necessary for school improvement, and particularly in improving and supporting teachers' instruction (Leithwood, 2004). Better performance evaluation systems could be significant levers for improving principals' practice if they provided actionable feedback that promoted professional and school improvement. The principal workforce is aging and the job of the principal is more demanding than ever, requiring potentially different skills (Gates et al., 2006). Although principals are held accountable for achieving organizational outcomes (e.g., student learning), they report that they infrequently receive trusted feedback on leadership or management practices (Goldring et al., 2009). In fact, few districts have operationalized what it means to be an effective principal, and where those definitions exist, they are not aligned with the evaluation system (Kelley and Halverson, 2012). Formative performance evaluation of principals tends to be random, and unaligned to widely accepted standards of professional practice. As a result, principals may be at a loss to know how to improve organizational performance through better leadership practice (Kelley, Clifford & Kimball, 2011).

Better principal performance evaluation is also in states' interests. First, states must improve principal performance in order to qualify for federal assistance and grant competitions. Buoyed by federal incentives, 36 states have modified and strengthened principal evaluations in the past five years (Jacques, Clifford & Hornung, 2012). Second, better principal evaluations hold potential for improving schools, instruction and learning. Principal practice has been shown to influence student learning, instructional quality, teacher professional decisions, school reform agendas, and policy implementation (Clifford, Sherratt & Feters, 2012; Leithwood et al., 2008; Hallinger & Heck, 2002). School principals are key change agents with responsibilities for implementing a menu of complex new educational policies at the local level, including teacher

evaluation and Common Core State Standards (New Leaders, 2013). Research-informed evaluations that acknowledge the various responsibilities held by principals while providing a foundation for specific evaluation of, and feedback to, principals as they lead our schools, will assure that states get the right performances from school leaders.

Unfortunately, raising principal performance evaluation quality is a significant undertaking, in comparison to improving teacher evaluation systems because states and districts lack access to research-based and standards-aligned frameworks and measures to assess principal practice, and do not have information on the effective implementation (e.g., costs, supports, training) of principal evaluation systems. For example, Clifford, Menon, et. al. (2012) found few psychometrically sound survey measures and no observation measures for assessing principal performance on the market. A review of 22 state principal evaluation frameworks indicated that the majority (18) were written by committee, and had not been validated (Clifford, Fetters & Fulbeck, in process). Further, only one study of principal evaluation implementation has been conducted to date) to document factors contributing to implementation success (see Milanowski, Kimball & Henneman, 2009) and two national studies are underway (see Wallace Foundation Principal Pipeline study and AIR’s Teacher and Leader Evaluation Study).

The Principal: Instructional Leader and Policy Implementer

The work of principals is situated in the larger context of policy formation and implementation. The principal is often the primary communicator and interpreter of shifts in district policy and directives that impact teachers and students. As the instructional leader of the school, the principal, when faced with policy directives and information that may impact the school (e.g., Common Core Standards, a new literacy program, a new teacher evaluation system), first goes through an individual process of understanding and interpretation, or “sense-making” (Spillane et al., 2002, Weick, 1995; Klein, 2001). Second, individuals, and in this instance principals, may apply their own learned understanding of the context of their school and community to figure out how to best implement a particular policy; they use “situational awareness” (Weick, 1995; Leedom, 2002) to move from the sense-making process to take action and implement (or not implement) a given policy message within a complex educational environment (Lane & Hamann, 2003).

District leaders, principals, teachers, and even students operate within a *complex environment*—a multi-tiered education system—that policy intermediaries (principals, teachers) are situated within and that constrains, confuses, and/or promotes the actions that individuals take during the process of policy formation and implementation. It is within this complex environment that policy formation and implementation takes place. Individuals are sense-makers and situational actors, making decisions and taking action based on their own interpretation of events, past experiences, and the norms and organizational constraints presented by their current situations. Education policy—such as a principal evaluation system—is appropriated by individuals at all levels of the system through a process that involves adaptive strategies such as bargaining, negotiation, and discretion. This leads to wide variance in how policy is implemented at the local level (school by school, principal by principal, and even classroom by classroom). The local adaptation of policy is oftentimes seen as a barrier to effective policy implementation instead of an asset, thus rendering negligible the tremendous expertise and knowledge held and gained by practitioners including principals (policy implementers) in the field.

It is clear that education policies such as principal evaluation systems will not be implemented as intended by policymakers. And there is no guarantee that local adaptation will result in cohesive, systematic, and effective policy implementation in the field. Top-down mandates, including those centered on principal evaluation, can't ensure cohesiveness and fidelity of implementation, yet local adaptation is similarly susceptible to incoherence and wide variability in how a policy is implemented. Instead of artificially separating the decisions, opinions, experiences, and knowledge of the participants in the education system, we need to learn from each of these elements as they relate to one another. To do so requires conscious attention to promote dialogue and deepen understanding. If dialogue and understanding are so critical to policy implementation, especially in parts of the system that are not functioning as well as could be expected, then mechanisms that support dialogue and the development of shared understandings around education policy are needed.

The MPPR: A merging of research, best practice and local expertise

The MPPR was concurrently informed by Educational Leadership Policy Standards: ISLLC (Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards for School Leaders) 2008, which provide its research foundation; ARCS, a comprehensive framework for sustainable improvement developed by Communities for Learning which serve as its best practice foundation; and a Goal Setting/Attainment Process, which provides an opportunity for personalized and local adaptation and use.

The ARCS Framework is grounded in many years of research and practice. Its four core elements - ***Alignment, Representation, Sustainability and Culture*** – comprise a synergistic system that supports recursive cycles of dissonance, necessary for continued improvement.

- ◆ **Alignment** – a focus on questioning and establishing connections, coherence, focus, direction and sequence; activities supporting alignment involve connecting school and individual vision, policies; programs and practices; and expertise and action
- ◆ **Representation** – questions that probe and opportunities for stakeholder participation, assumptions, perspective and constituents; strategies supporting representation involve actively engaging students, administrators, teachers, parents, community and business partners, etc. in articulating and questioning the learning and work of the community
- ◆ **Culture** – attention to values, traditions and norms permeating the system, while probing the presence and importance of six “Dispositions of Practice” - personal, professional and organizational attributes whose development support and deepen the community’s ongoing learning and whose influence is evidenced in discourse, behaviors, and work
- ◆ **Sustainability** – structures and thinking that focus on lasting, continuance and meaning beyond the present moment or immediate importance; the development of a three-tier learning-leading-lasting structure that promotes and develops the expertise, leadership and sustainability of the community and contextualizes today’s successes and improvements as the legacy for the future

The MPPR rubric has two major components. The first supports the use of the Educational Leadership Policy Standards. This component is organized by ISLLC domain, with five

dimensions, culled by clustering and categorizing the ISLLC “functions.” These dimensions (Culture, Sustainability, Instructional Program, Capacity Building and Strategic Planning Process which relate to the ARCS Framework) are consistent throughout this component, though not all appear in every domain. Descriptors are specific to each domain. The ARCS components related to alignment and representation are woven within many of the rubric descriptors and are explicitly called upon in the upper levels of the rubric.

The second component of the MPPR supports Goal Setting and Attainment and has dimensions that are arranged to assess and scaffold the goal setting process, from the initial defining of goals, through action planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation.

Communities for Learning is proposing to conduct a multi-case, implementation study of the MPPR evaluation framework that has been adopted widely by districts in New York and New Jersey and is being piloted or used in selected schools and districts in several other states.

Rationale for the collection and annotation of exemplars and contrasting illustrations of practice

1. The MPPR is being used by 509 districts, in New York and 102 in New Jersey.
2. Preliminary anecdotal evidence and data from selected focus groups with districts using the MPPR suggest that there is wide variance in how the tool is used and perceived, including differences in how ratings are generated.
3. It is likely that many districts face two challenges to being able to leverage the MPPR as a tool for improvement: (a) the perception and/or reality that the MPPR is a compliance mechanism, hindering its ability to be proactively used by principals and the district and (b) low internal validity, or understanding, of how to develop accurate ratings.
4. Similarly, there is likely a very low level of external validity re: the MPPR ratings given that each district is able to negotiate the allocation of points and even the focus of the points.
5. Our theory of action posits that districts must develop a shared understanding of the rubric (internal validity) for it to be useful within a district; and that there must be some level of external validity within if not across districts so that the rubric can function as a legitimate set of standards to guide principal growth and attainment
6. Given the importance of (a) working towards some level of internal and external validity and (b) recognizing that districts and schools will necessarily interpret and modify the MPPR process as part of the process of implementation...
 - a. We need to collect and annotate exemplars and contrasting illustrations of practice, that will help districts develop internal validity and contribute to long-term goal of external validity. Anchoring the MPPR rubric in transparent images/stories of the processes, practices, structures and attributes with accompanying illustrations of practice (i.e., artifacts, processes, structures, etc.) can contribute to a shared understanding of the tool and increase consistency in scoring. Such consistency is a necessary step towards the validation of the MPPR rubric
 - b. We need to conduct case studies of how the MPPR is implemented to help us understand how the rubric and the evaluation process can promote improvement

as well as inform reliability, validity and scalability. It would be useful to compare contexts in which the tool is used primarily for evaluation and compliance purposes and those in which the tool is accompanied by a feedback and/or coaching aimed at improvement.

Rationale for case studies of how the MPPR is being implemented

Case study research can incorporate one or more of the following outcomes: a) exploration; b) development and innovation; c) efficacy and replication; d) effectiveness; and, e) measurement. The MPPR is still in the Exploration and Development stage. We have developed what we consider an ideal process for its implementation, but schools are in an infancy stage in terms of implementing it.

Implementation studies of educator performance evaluation studies commonly occur in strong implementation sites, which are considered to be schools/districts that are using our proposed evaluation process and where optimal supports and conditions exist.

The studies address the following areas:

- (1) Fidelity of implementation: the degree to which the evaluation system is being implemented as planned and the factors contributing to relative fidelity;
- (2) Utility: the use of evaluation system information by supervisors, school systems, and those being evaluated;
- (3) Feasibility: the relative ease with which the new evaluation system is implemented effectively and practically;
- (4) Consequential validity: the extent to which the evaluation system promotes professional and school improvement

Such implementation studies establish a basis for larger impact studies because they document conditions important for implementation fidelity, including the development of teaching cases, and informing further refinements of the tool and its implementation process.

We also need to explore settings in which the district decides to simply integrate the MPPR (just the rubric) into existing processes, leading to meaningful interactions, feedback, and improvement.

Research Questions

***Research Question #1:** To what extent is the MPPR and its evaluation process implemented with fidelity in school districts, and what factors contribute to more or less implementation fidelity?*

A well-designed principal evaluation system will not have the desired effect if it is not well implemented or implemented with fidelity against its original design. The study will gather information about implementation fidelity of the MPPR framework and evaluation procedures, as described by professional development programs. To do so, we will describe implementation in districts, including documentation of district-identified measures for assessing principal

performance against the MPPR. We will identify the supports and challenges to MPPR implementation fidelity, and explain why procedures have or have not been followed.

Our approach to answering the research question entails in-depth documentation of practice, and of the district/school conditions that support or inhibit implementation. Based upon our previous empirical work and experience, we will probe for the following issues and will remain open to other possibilities:

1. Clarity of communication about MPPR to principals, evaluators, and evidence-providers
2. Existence of previous principal evaluation systems
3. Perspectives on the importance and purposes of principal performance evaluation
4. Differences in MPPR interpretation
5. Use of the MPPR to set, pursue, evaluate, and revise goals
6. Availability and use of MPPR-aligned measures
7. Existence of professional development and other human capital supports for the use of MPPR results
8. Competing district priorities and initiatives
9. Nature and quality of professional development offerings

In addition to study results, we anticipate developing a fidelity-of-implementation instrument that may be repurposed for a subsequent impact study.

Research Question #2. *What aspects of the MPPR and its evaluation process facilitate or inhibit the ability of the district and principal to use the MPPR to directly promote improvement (for principals, for district systems, for instruction)?*

This question will consider the experiences of all sampled districts and their implications for scaling up evaluation reform. It will address the theory of change adopted by each district and why it was adopted. Focus groups and interviews will be used to determine the factors that contributed to the success of the change process in moving the district to evaluation implementation will also be addressed. The evaluation process which accompanies the MPPR advocates for the use of goals as the means to connect principal practices and processes to the rubric. These goals are aligned to the dimensions and domains of the rubric of the MPPR and evidence that will substantiate progress is identified. This research question will explore the use and impact of this evaluation process. Common implementation barriers that arose during the school year and how the districts addressed these inhibiting factors will be considered. Based on these comparisons, broad lessons learned will be developed regarding state actions to support evaluation implementation and school improvement, and will be used for the benefit of districts in earlier stages of reform. A set of recommendations for district and state action, based on these findings and in light of other state/district findings, will be developed as well.

Research question #3. *To what extent is the evaluation process attached to the MPPR feasible for repeated evaluation and sustainable use over time?*

The feasibility of implementing principal evaluations can affect implementation fidelity and systematic data collection given the time required to complete the evaluations. The complexity of the evaluation task can affect the feasibility of the evaluation.

This research question focuses on the time, complexity and sustainability of the principal evaluation system. To examine feasibility, we will:

- a) ask principals and supervisors to track the amount of time required to engage in and complete the evaluation process attached to the MPPR;
- b) interview users about the relative clarity and complexity of the MPPR evaluation process, and about the impact of the different interactions within its phases; and,
- c) observe user interactions with the evaluation framework.

Research question #4. How actionable is the feedback resulting from MPPR for principals and their supervisors, and how useful is the information for making human capital decisions in districts?

Providing principals with constructive and actionable feedback is essential to improve professional practices. To do so, the MPPR rubric should reflect the diverse, complex tasks of principals. It should also enable principals and principal evaluators to recognize not only the practices that reflect current state, but also, the specific moves or actions that could improve professional practice and performance. The final research question will rely primarily on interviews of principals and supervisors to describe (a) the applicability of the MPPR framework to diverse leadership situations, (b) the usefulness of the tool in educating and informing strategies for improvement; (c) the usefulness of the tool in supporting clear, constructive, and actionable feedback; and, (d) the interactions between the tools and the expertise of evaluators in terms of generating constructive and actionable feedback.

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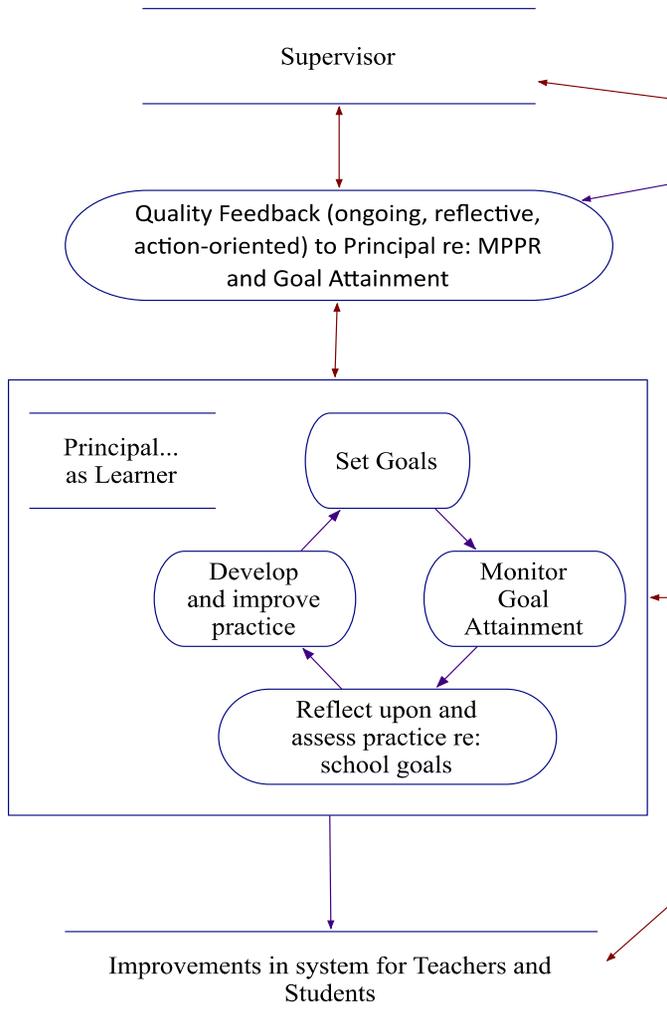
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Use of MPPR in Ideal Setting



Valid and Reliable Data
is necessary, yet mediated by Supervisor and Principal understanding of, and faith in, the MPPR.

Individual and collective sense-making in a complex environment

How district leaders, principals, teachers, and school boards interpret, make sense of, and then implement the MPPR will influence the extent to which the MPPR impacts principal improvement, school improvement, and district decision making.

Use of MPPR in Real World

Our Case Study research will examine factors that impact fidelity and effective implementation and explore how the use of the MPPR can be maximized

Supervisor and principal use of data
(Validating the MPPR)
(Documenting how data is collected, annotated, and used in practice)

Impact on Principal Improvement
(Factors impacting the extent to which principals are able to use and internalize the MPPR for professional improvement)

Impact on School Improvement
(Factors related to how the MPPR is used by districts and school to drive overall school improvement and improvement in teachers' instruction)

District use of data
(Factors related to district ability to use MPPR data re: targeting of professional development and overall human capital decisions and strategies.)

