

**Implementation of the Multidimensional Principal Performance Rubric
In New York State School Districts 2012-2013**

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Background:

In 2011 Learner Centered Initiatives, Ltd. (LCI) designed the Multidimensional Principal Performance Rubric (MPPR) “to support principals and superintendents as they work to make explicit connections between the actions, decisions, and learning of school leaders and the improvements to teaching and learning in the schools they lead.”

The rubric has two major components, the first of which supports the use of the Educational Leadership Policy Standards: ISLLC 2008 (ISLLC). The rubric contains five dimensions: culture, sustainability, instructional program, capacity building and strategic planning process.

The second component of the MPPR rubric supports goal setting and attainment and “scaffolds the goal setting process from the initial defining of goals, through action planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation.”

Beginning in 2012-2013 schools in New York were required by the New York State Education Department (NYSED) to conduct principal evaluations choosing from among several state approved models. In New York 503 (70.9%) districts out of 709 chose the MPPR as the tool to use for principal evaluations. At the time of this study,

May through August 2013, other states have contacted LCI expressing interest in MPPR.

The purpose of this survey research was to provide insight into the first year experience of districts using MPPR by exploring their context, process of implementation and impact on practice. The survey findings will be used to plan and provide assistance to current users of MPPR. In addition, LCI leaders were interested in learning how they might help interested districts in other areas understand and implement MPPR.

Participants in New York State were selected to represent diverse district sizes and geographic locations. Rural, large and small urban, and suburban district were included in the sample. (See Appendix A)

Eight principals, four assistant superintendents, and seven superintendents were invited to participate in a telephone interview conducted by the researcher who is a former school superintendent with a doctorate in program development and evaluation. She served as a consultant to LCI for this study.

An interview protocol was developed and piloted through three interviews conducted in February and March of 2013, two with superintendents and the third with an assistant superintendent. The three pilot interviews conducted in May suggested that districts were in the early stages of implementation. This was not surprising inasmuch as this was the first years of the principal evaluation mandate in New York State. Additional interviews were postponed until June and July in

order to obtain fuller picture of the MPPR implementation process. Sixteen participants were surveyed in June and July, 2013.

Leadership structures in districts

In the smaller districts in the survey sample, generally the only administrators were a superintendent and one or more principals. Middle to large size districts often had a superintendent and one to four assistant superintendents. In addition to these roles, some districts had directors, coordinators, and supervisors. In the largest districts staffing included mid-level administrators who served as principal evaluators. Regardless of the administrative size and structure, the most common practice was for the superintendent to evaluate all of the district's principals. The number of principals evaluated by principal evaluators ranged from one to fifteen.

Selection process and rationale for choosing MPPR

In all but one district in the sample, selecting the model for teacher evaluation was done by a representative committee, generally composed of principals, superintendents, and central office administrators. Often the local administrator's union played a key role in the selection process. Three districts consulted with the School Administrators Association of New York State (SAANYS) as they went through the selection process. In only two cases reported were board members or other community members involved. No respondent indicated teachers were involved in choosing a principal evaluation tool. In one district an administrator worked alone to choose MPPR and recommended it to the Board of Education.

The process of selection typically involved representatives attending a local or regional meeting where the NYSED approved models were presented. District level follow-up to the introductory session frequently included closer study by committees. In one district, principals piloted two tools and by consensus decided on MPPR.

Selection committees made recommendations to their Boards of Education and they, in turn, approved MPPR for principal evaluation. Most districts suggested the process was not contentious and received far less scrutiny than the selection of the teacher evaluation instrument. Only two districts reported some minor tension over the selection process.

Reasons for selecting MPPR

Respondents voiced some general reasons for choosing MPPR. One described the rubric as “very comprehensive.” Another suggested it was “deep, broad, and realistic.”

Several more specific reasons for selecting MPPR were frequently given by districts in the sample. Most often mentioned was a variation on the generalization that MPPR “reflected what we value.”

Another stated, “It is reflective of our culture.” One respondent expressed this by saying, “The philosophy of MPPR is consistent with that of our district.” Another explained, “It speaks to developing and living a shared mission, which is what we’re all about.”

Another commonly expressed reason for adopting MPPR was that it gives focus to the “real work” of schools, given its strong emphasis on teaching and learning. A superintendent explained, “It engages leadership in the instructional process.” Five respondents noted support for the overall emphasis of the MPPR rubric, placing a priority on instructional leadership as differentiated from a management perspective. One principal stated the rubric “helps us make the distinction between management and teaching.” Another suggested it “portrayed a realistic and fair picture of the role of principals.” An interesting comment suggested instruction “is where our bread is buttered.” Another respondent strongly supported the focus on “individual and distributive leadership directed at teaching and learning.”

The emphasis on the culture of schools was reported as a strong reason for selecting MPPR in at least 5 schools. One district in the sample chose to focus on Domain 2 in the MPPR (School Culture and Instructional Program) as one of the two priority domains in 2012-2013. Another stressed the importance of, “creating an environment for learning.” Another district had three previously identified goals, one of them being culture. Thus the emphasis on school culture in MPPR was seen as very appropriate.

The consistency with other sets of standards was a significant factor in the selection of MPPR in several districts. At least ten districts in the sample use the Danielson rubric or a variation on it for teacher evaluation, and they cited the compatibility of MPPR with this model. The direct correlation to the ISLLC standards was cited as important in four interviews.

The goal setting portion of the rubric was a selection criterion mentioned in at least five districts, although many districts reported not using that portion until late in the 2012-2013 school year. The specific step-by-step process appealed both to districts with a tradition of goal setting and those wanting to focus more heavily on this aspect of school and district leadership. One superintendent explained, “Goal setting is huge for us. It drives everything we do.”

Eight of the 19 interviewees had familiarity with LCI and specifically with Giselle Martin Kniep and Joanne Picone-Zocchia. Those who did, expressed respect for the work that LCI has done over the years. That shared history and was a factor in several districts for choosing MPPR.

Challenges in implementing MPPR

In the increasingly demanding and complex world of school leadership it is not surprising that districts faced challenges in implementing MPPR. The most pressing concern, expressed in thirteen of the nineteen interviews, cited the pressure placed on administrators to effectively evaluate teachers. One respondent said, “We were consumed by the process of teacher evaluation.”

Changes in the teacher evaluation process were mandated in New York State in 2012-2013. The New York State Education Department (NYSED) identified and approved options as they had done with the principal evaluation models. Districts then chose their preferred teacher evaluation model and submitted that information to NYSED in an Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) report. The

turnaround time for approval was often lengthy. Districts were sometimes required to revise and resubmit their plans.

In some districts, especially those with a history of teacher evaluation using rubrics, the transition was relatively smooth. In others, the selection of the teacher evaluation tool and procedures for implementation required sometimes-lengthy negotiations and contractual modifications. Several districts reported working through the middle of the 2012-2013 school year to identify which tool would be used for the teacher evaluation process. Two respondents indicated process became quite contentious. In one case, contentious issue around the teacher evaluation tool and process spilled over into discussions and decisions about principal evaluation.

Regardless of their district role, all but two respondents in the sample noted that implementing the new teacher evaluation process was extremely time consuming. One principal reported being responsible for “just under 50” teacher evaluations. Another shared spending every Sunday in April and May working at home on the teacher evaluations in order to meet the contractual deadline and, in spite of that, needed to take two personal days to complete the process. One superintendent boiled it down by saying, “The biggest issue is time.”

In addition to the burden of implementing the revised teacher evaluation process, the majority of respondents also noted the competing priority of implementing the common core standards and preparing teachers for the changes they represented in both curricular content and instructional practices.

Several districts reported changes in district leadership, central office structures, administrative resignations, and retirements as an impediment to moving the MPPR implementation along. One large suburban district cited half of their administrators departed in 2012-2013. In three districts, new superintendents took over their role either midyear or at the end of the 2013 school year, compromising the first year MPPR implementation process.

In addition to the confluence of factors noted above, five respondents mentioned budget pressures. The annual budget planning process begins in earnest in most districts in December/January. In many districts this was approximately the time both the teacher evaluation and principal evaluation processes were getting underway.

New York State currently has a tax cap requirement that if a school district budget increase represents more than 2% from the previous year votes must pass the budget with two-thirds verses a simple majority. This cap, coupled with the current statewide economic pressures, made budgeting especially difficult in 2012-2013.

Other competing priorities identified by interviewees included highly controversial student issues, school safety concerns, redistricting decisions, administrative staff reductions, and changes in Response to Intervention (RTI).

Timeline of implementation process

All respondents in the survey sample indicated that the timeline in this first year of implementation of MPPR was extremely challenging, given the many factors noted

above. One superintendent indicated they probably would rate the implementation at a “3 on a scale of 10.” A principal suggested the due to the pressures of teacher evaluation MPPR was “put on the back burner.”

By June and July the districts interviewed had made progress but the majority had not yet completed the first year principal evaluations and planned to do so in the summer of 2013. In two cases, by late June there had been no meetings between principal evaluators and principals.

Overall, though the steps to implementation were similar, there was diversity in the timeline for the districts in the sample. Two districts identified the MPPR as their model of choice and began using it in the summer of 2012. For the other districts in the sample, the introduction of MPPR was done during the 2012-2013 school year in regional, often Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) meetings, or in New York State Education Department (NYSED) workshops in Albany. In many cases, superintendents and other administrators attended workshops and brought back information to their districts. Often, the MPPR rubric was “unpacked” in process-oriented meetings of administrators replicating LCI workshop activities. The modeling of activities in these workshops was seen as very valuable to all participants who reported attending them.

In two districts, principals and superintendents began gathering evidence and holding regular meetings about MPPR as early as Summer 2012. In one district, the selection process for MPPR was made in June of 2012, and the superintendent

introduced the rubric in the final principal evaluations of the 2011-2012 year. In this district, it formed the basis for goal setting for 2012-2013.

More commonly, MPPR was visited in earnest by principals and superintendents midyear of 2012-2013, with observations, evidence gathering, and both formal and informal walkthroughs scheduled through the end of the 2012-2013 year.

The rating process and use of evidence

In districts in the sample, principal evaluators, usually superintendents, asked principals to use the rubric for a self-evaluation as they began the MPPR implementation process. Five superintendents reported using MPPR to self-evaluate and to better understand the model. In only a few districts was the goal setting component included in the initial self-reflection. This was in part because many districts and buildings had some form of goal setting in place as they began implementing MPPR and also because of the timing of implementation.

Principals frequently reported gathering evidence of their practice, though in some cases principal evaluators also gathered relevant samples. The range and variety of evidence was perhaps the most diverse and challenging element of the MPPR implementation process in the districts in the sample.

Commonly, principal evaluators conducted announced and unannounced visits to schools, observed meetings with parents, professional development sessions, faculty meetings, and school/community events. Principals and their evaluators did joint teacher observations and walkthroughs, usually meeting to debrief these afterward.

One superintendent suggested this was a bit like “grand rounds” in the medical profession. Paper documentation was rare for these activities.

In addition to these commonly shared experiences, many principals gathered paper evidence often in binders or files by domain. One invested \$100 in binders and post it notes. A superintendent shared receiving a six-inch, color-coded binder, filled with agendas, minutes, e-mails, newsletters, and other sources of evidence, from one principal. Another received a roll of chart paper from a faculty meeting. Some principals gathered photos and video clips.

Student work samples, student achievement data, and statistics on attendance and discipline were also identified as sources of evidence, though less frequently than the above sources.

Meetings were scheduled between principals and evaluators as frequently as weekly. Many evaluators attempted to meet with principals once a month, but reported difficulty in doing so. Quarterly meetings were more common. Using the rubric and gathered evidence was common practice for the end of year meeting. However, as previously noted, at the time of many interviews the end of year meeting had not yet occurred.

In one district, the superintendent and an assistant superintendent shared the responsibility for evaluating each of their principals. They both did building visitations and met together to review progress. Both completed the rubrics for each principal, and they met to agree on ratings prior to meeting with the principals. Though time consuming, they felt this approach was effective.

The most common questions around evidence were, “What constitutes good evidence?” and, “How much is enough?” Four interviewees expressed gathering evidence to support the distinction between effective and highly effective as especially challenging. Identifying and analyzing evidence to make grounded judgments remains a major hurdle for the majority of interviewees.

One superintendent suggested principals’ ratings tended to be higher than the ratings s/he had given, but when the principals presented evidence, it was often compelling. Only two interviewees reported discrepancies between the evaluator and principal’s ratings. Note that many in the sample had not had their final meeting with their evaluator at the time of the interview. In one case, the evaluator said the issue was handled by “downplaying the numbers and focusing on having quality conversations with a focus on ideas.”

Outcomes of using MPPR

Outcomes of using MPPR in this first year of implementation were both personal and organizational. One participant said, “It made me realize evaluations are so much more than accountability.” Another explained, “Self-reflection is helping me become more conscientious and intentional in my work.” One principal described “having an epiphany about becoming more open about procedures and routines rather than just keeping them in my head.” One administrator said using MPPR “highlighted the things I need and want to work on.”

The most frequently reported building or district outcome of using MPPR related to a change in the conversation over the first year of implementation. Nearly all of the

participants alluded to this in one way or another. One respondent said, “The process has forced, in a good way, formal and informal conversation focused on instruction.” Another described the ways in which using a common vocabulary enhanced collegial sharing. A superintendent expressed that “MPPR requires people to talk and work together.”

Five respondents noted using MPPR informed and enhanced their work in teacher evaluation. One participant said conversations around MPPR “increased the consistency of teacher evaluation across the district.” One principal explained it by saying, “We aligned and calibrated our practice through collegial conversation.” Another said their district had “retooled their teacher evaluation process.” A superintendent reported that using MPPR “has improved our evaluation processes and helped us measure nuances.”

Some principals reported setting up special meetings to discuss and share ways of gathering evidence, and address the question of how much and what type they would gather. Focus and intentionality in decision-making and action has reportedly become keener as a result of MPPR. Respondents reported being much more attuned to focusing on goals and reflecting on their practice.

An impact on relationships between and among both evaluators and principals was reported. One experienced principal suggested, “It made our relationships deeper.” Another suggested the boundaries between levels of administration were bridged through using MPPR.

Most interviewees, both principals and their evaluators, reported using MPPR for self-reflection prior to introducing and using it with colleagues. At the personal level most participants suggested reflecting on their own practice has been a positive outcome of using MPPR. One participant reported gathering evidence during the week and writing a weekly reflection log focusing on rubric language. Others spoke of the value of the specificity of the rubric allowing them to set personal goals following self-reflection.

However, the outcomes of using MPPR simultaneously with new teacher evaluation processes were not always perceived as positive. In some districts with a history of well-developed routines and processes for strategic planning, goal setting, and teacher and principal evaluations, some participants expressed concern about transitioning to a new approach. Others expressed some confusion about how the old and new approaches could be aligned. In other districts, alignment seemed doable, and administrators were proceeding with that effort.

Next steps

All respondents shared the intention of revising the district timeline for MPPR related activities in 2013-2014. Given the pressures placed on administrators to conduct teacher evaluations, in the majority of districts MPPR implementation did not begin in earnest until winter or spring. Administrators plan to make the process more formalized in 2013-2014 with specific due dates, timelines, and agreements about the process.

Guidelines for gathering evidence are a priority with many respondents. The key questions that users of MPPR are asking include, “What constitutes good evidence?” and also, “How much is enough?” Workshops conducted by LCI in the spring of 2013-2014 were reported to be very helpful by attendees.

Aligning district approaches used in the past with MPPR is a need in some districts especially, those with a tradition of goal setting and commitment to continuous improvement. In some cases this will involve simply exploring vocabulary nuances. In others, forms and formats used previously will be reviewed and revised to be consistent with MPPR. Many reported their summer 2013 administrative meetings are exploring some of these issues as next steps in implementing MPPR.

One participant summarized the ideas of several by suggesting, “We now need to embed what we’re doing as a result of using MPPR, and become more focused as we fine tune our practice.”

Respondents indicated that though it is quite early to tell, the process of principal evaluation and the use of MPPR will continue to have a positive impact on the work of schools.

APPENDIX A

Interview Participants and Respective Districts

| # of Participants (15) | Central School Districts |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 4 | Gates Chili Central School District |
| 2 | Gouverneur Central School District |
| 1 | Guilderland Central School District |
| 1 | LeRoy Central School District |
| 2 | Monhonsen Central School District |
| 3 | Pittsford Central School District |
| 2 | Webster Central School District |