



GROWING SUPPORT FOR PRINCIPALS

PRINCIPAL SUPERVISORS COLLABORATE AND PROBLEM SOLVE IN LEARNING COMMUNITIES

BY JILL A. BAKER AND GARY S. BLOOM

There is clear consensus that school site leadership is second only to teacher quality in its potential to impact student achievement positively. It is also clear that, despite the fact that principal supervisors

can contribute to the effectiveness of site leadership, principal supervision has been a neglected, even haphazard practice in America's schools.

Many principal supervisors in the United States work in relative isolation and experience no professional development designed to support them. Principal supervisors, many of whom


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LONG BEACH UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR LAB DAY 2016-17

The Long Beach Unified School District Principal Supervisor Lab Day is designed to provide principal supervisors with an authentic opportunity to share their work, practice and build their coaching skills in service to principals, and contribute to a consistent approach to principal supervision across the district. Each component of the lab day is designed to grow the group at an individual or group level.

HOST SITE FOCUS

Opening

Principal supervisors gain an understanding of the principal's level of performance and current goals and the host principal supervisor's approach to working with the principal. This session creates a context for the lab day and prompts principal supervisors to think about a principal with similar strengths and challenges with whom he or she works.

School walk-through and coaching practice

Principal supervisors practice coaching a principal following each classroom visit and throughout the visits as patterns and trends in teaching and learning emerge. This component emulates the time spent in classrooms during principal supervisors' monthly site visits and increases the impact of those visits through practice and calibration.

Whenever possible, school-level teams remain together to build small-group calibration across a level.

Debrief: Principal supervisor's next steps

The host principal supervisor considers how to best support the school. With guiding questions, all principal supervisors have the opportunity to reflect and engage in a collaborative discussion on potential next steps for the school and principal.

APPLICATION OF LEARNING

Debrief: Learning for all principal supervisors

Principal supervisors reflect individually on new learning or new thinking and connect it to their own supervision cohort.

Case study or problem of practice

The case study or problem of practice engages principal supervisors in using one another as resources. Through dialogue, principal supervisors build trust, develop consistent approaches and practice, and help one another prepare for coaching conversations with principals.

Closure

Principal supervisors offer feedback on the lab day's impact (process and practice) on individuals and the group.

have other high-stakes responsibilities ranging from the superintendency to positions in areas such as human resources and curriculum and instruction, have not been asked to make principal development a priority.

Principals often only hear from their supervisors when there is a problem, complaint, or operational issue. One veteran principal, describing the interaction with her supervisor before participating in a principal supervisor initiative, said, "Previously, interactions with my supervisor were limited to monthly principals meetings, periodic phone calls when complaints reached his office, and a brief meeting each summer where I received and signed my evaluation."

Fortunately, principal supervision is getting much-needed attention through, among other things, the Council of Chief State School Officers' *Model Principal Supervisor Professional Standards* (CCSSO, 2015). Those standards challenge traditional practices of principal supervision, suggesting that, first and foremost, "Principal supervisors dedicate their time to helping principals grow as instructional leaders (and) coach and support individual principals ... to help principals grow as instructional leaders."

A NEW APPROACH IN LONG BEACH

With support from The Wallace Foundation, the New Teacher Center, and other individuals and organizations, the Long Beach Unified School District in California has come a long way in building a coherent model of principal supervision grounded in coaching-based support and embedded in professional learning communities.

Over the past four years, the role of principal supervisor in Long Beach Unified School District has shifted from compliance and at-a-distance supervision practices to a deeply rooted

LONG BEACH UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR LAB DAY	
Component	Description
Opening	<p>The host principal supervisor describes the problem of practice related to supporting the principal and school in improving instruction.</p> <p>The presentation ends with guiding questions to address focus areas. Example: “How might I better support this principal or school with _____?”</p> <p>The host principal supervisor leads a discussion about what principal supervisors should expect to see during the classroom walk-through as indicators of the district’s expectations related to the problem of practice.</p>
School walk-through and coaching practice	<p>Principal supervisors and the host principal walk through classrooms in small teams to observe instruction and take notes related to the instructional focus as discussed in the problem of practice. The notes should support a conversation about the problem of practice.</p> <p>Observation teams participate in or observe conversations between the principal and supervisor between classroom visits, focusing on improving the problem of practice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The host principal supervisor and principal emulate their regular walk-through routine. • The participating principal supervisors take turns in the role of principal supervisor with a site leader (e.g. assistant principal, aspiring administrator, pathway coordinator) to practice coaching skills and explore potential solutions to the problem of practice.
Debrief: Principal supervisor’s next steps	<p>Principal supervisors share individual reflections on Google Drive.</p> <p>Each principal supervisor:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lists schools in his or her cohort with a similar problem of practice. 2. Reflects on the question, “What new idea, strategy, or coaching technique can I implement in the schools I supervise based on my learning or thinking today?”
Case study or problems of practice discussion and closure	<p>Case study: In level office teams, principal supervisors discuss challenges in supporting a principal and gather insights from colleagues. Principal supervisors share successes and challenges from previous case study presentations or discussions.</p> <p>Problem of practice: Teams share problems of practice related to principal supervision, using one another as resources for potential solutions.</p>
Follow-up activity for host principal supervisor	
Shared learning (within a month)	<p>Principal supervisor progress report</p> <p>Host principal supervisor uses these prompts to share progress with principal supervisor colleagues:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What next steps did you discuss with the principal? Which steps did you select to implement? 2. How will the principal integrate the new ideas with existing systems and structures?

coaching orientation, support for addressing student achievement issues, and a focus on quality instruction in every classroom.

In the past, principal supervisors managed caseloads of 18 to 24 principals, preventing them from dedicating significant time to any one principal or providing support that could have an observable impact. Supervisors managed their relationships with principals primarily through phone contact, periodic visits to school sites and interaction in principals

meetings, with little calibration across principal supervisors in the district.

Since 2014, with an average caseload of 11 principals, principal supervisors now spend three to five hours a month on every campus they supervise. Principal supervisors’ site visits include regular time in classrooms walking alongside the principal to monitor student achievement, collect data about instructional implementation, and develop strategies for supporting teachers.

The significant increase in time

spent with principals also includes structured opportunities for principal development in targeted areas based on the Long Beach district’s principal evaluation framework, including addressing issues of environment and equity and the supervision and evaluation of school-based personnel.

Principal supervisors now spend more than half of their time in school buildings coaching, guiding, and assessing principal needs. The result is an increase in effective relationships with principals as well as new

opportunities to improve principal professional development, identify student needs, and contribute to districtwide planning efforts.

This shift in role does not mitigate the sense of isolation inherent in the position of principal supervisor. While more than half of each principal supervisor's time is now spent in schools, most of this time is in a one-to-one relationship with a principal. This has the potential to improve the practice of some principals, but it does not address calibration across principal supervisors in their coaching methodology or ensure that there is a common capacity among principal supervisors. To ensure that every principal receives support from a skilled principal supervisor equipped to coach effectively and provide targeted support, the district created a professional learning community (PLC) for principal supervisors.

EMBEDDED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Principal supervisors in the district participate in embedded professional learning reflecting the same expectations we have of teachers and principals.

In their job-alike group, they:

- Engage in a learning community of public practice with shared norms and expectations;
- Clarify expectations in the role of principal supervisor to ensure vertical coherence and horizontal calibration;
- Consider principal practice and align feedback and performance assessments to the district rubric; and
- Practice supporting principals using the language of coaching-based supervision with the goal of raising student achievement in all schools.

The principal supervisor group has engaged in professional development on blended coaching (see Bloom, Castagna, Moir, & Warren, 2005), worked diligently to use the principal evaluation system in concert with one another, analyzed one another's feedback to principals, and developed methods of collaboration never witnessed in this way within the organization.

Much of the professional learning community's work has been grounded in a case study approach. Feedback about coaching is now an integrated aspect of principal supervision. Outside coaches observe principal supervisors in their one-to-one interactions with principals, supervisors of principal supervisors observe interactions between individual principal supervisors, and principals and peers observe one another, all providing individual coaching feedback on their practice.

"In the PLC, we are working toward defining our shared expectations as principal supervisors," one participant said. "This work helps to calibrate our support for sites as well as bring new principal supervisors on board."

At the heart of the principal supervisor PLC is the district's lab day. Lab day gives principal supervisors the chance to practice blended coaching and their supervisory decision making in an authentic and active environment, using peer and expert feedback throughout the session.

Lab days have included the hosting school's principal and principal supervisor in a presentation about their work, a live coaching session observed by all principal supervisors that follows classroom visits, and multiple opportunities for principal supervisors to learn from one another.

In addition to a focus on blended coaching, lab day gives principal supervisors time to collaborate and problem solve with other principal supervisors about their work with

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individual principals. Through case study analysis, principal supervisors share their successes and offer ideas to one another, often resulting in significant rethinking of their work with their supervisees.

At the end of a recent lab day, the host principal supervisor said, "Having the opportunity to discuss what was observed with peers and to determine how to best support the principal moving forward was most helpful."

This model has built a culture of openness and vulnerability among principal supervisors, consistent with the district's vision of teacher professional learning communities as a place where professionals are open and honest in sharing their successes and failures, they look to colleagues for help with their toughest challenges, and calibration of practice is built through authentic work.

Are these lab days effective? "Having the opportunity to share problems of practice and getting the feedback of the group is the best part of the lab day," said one principal

supervisor. “It is also helpful to calibrate by going into classrooms together looking for specific items.”

Long Beach has experimented with variations in the lab day model and shared the model with the 14 districts participating in The Wallace Foundation’s Principal Supervisor Initiative, resulting in experimentation by 13 other school districts as part of the national Principal Supervisor Initiative professional learning community. The Principal Supervisor Initiative is a \$30 million, five-year effort to help 14 urban school districts improve the effectiveness of principal supervisors so they can better work with principals to raise the quality of teaching and learning in schools.

For example, the district has at times included curriculum leaders and principal leaders in the process, at other times not. We have conducted the post-visitation coaching conversation between principal supervisor and principal in a “fishbowl,” allowing all lab day participants to observe a live coaching session between the principal supervisor and principal, and in a more private setting, observed only by a consultant or deputy superintendent.

Based on our experience, we suggest that the following characteristics should be present across all configurations:

- Lab days are grounded in the notion that the primary role of principal supervisor is to nurture the growth and effectiveness of principals as instructional leaders.
- Lab days are based at a school site and dedicated to supporting an individual principal supervisor in improving his or her supervision practice through an in-depth case-study approach.
- Lab days include classroom visits and structured debriefs focused on supporting

principals as teacher coaches and instructional leaders.

- Lab days include time and protocols for all principal supervisors to share problems of practice with their colleagues.

RESULTS

In a survey at the end of the 2015-16 school year, 69% of the 87 principals surveyed strongly agreed or agreed that their summative evaluation reflected the feedback provided during the school year. When asked about working with their supervisor on blended coaching, 70% of principals rated the experience a 4, 5, or 6 on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 being the lowest.

Early indicators used to gauge progress on principal performance include two years of the spring administration of the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (VAL-ED) teacher perception survey. Results show an increase in the number of proficient and distinguished principals, from 29% in 2013-14 to 44% in 2014-15.

In an analysis of 2014-15 summative evaluation data compared to 2015-16 summative data, a positive trend emerged. In 2014-15, 67% of principals were rated effective or distinguished in teaching and learning, and this percentage grew to 72% in 2015-16.

These data show that, even as expectations for principal performance are rising through clearer and more consistent implementation of the principal evaluation rubric, principal performance is improving.

BUILDING A SENSE OF TRUST

Lab days and the principal supervisor community of practice are clearly having a positive impact on the culture among principal supervisors and in the relationship between principals and principal supervisors.

“Listening to each other’s thinking helps us to grow our thinking and understand each other better.”

— Principal supervisor



Principal supervisors report that the group has built a sense of trust that allows them to experience the power of vulnerability in their own learning and that also contributes to the group’s learning. Developing a system of consistent practice across principal supervisors has emerged not only as a norm, but also as a valued aspect of the group’s work. As one principal supervisor said, “Listening to each other’s thinking helps us to grow our thinking and understand each other better.”

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