THE PRINCIPAL EVALUATION PROCESS: PRINCIPALS’ LEARNING AS A RESULT OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

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To the Faculty of Washington State University:

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THE PRINCIPAL EVALUATION PROCESS: PRINCIPALS’ LEARNING
AS A RESULT OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

Abstract

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With a new level of importance being placed on the evaluation of principals, this study specifically examines the process used to evaluate principals. Data were analyzed to determine if the principal evaluation process impacted principals perceived professional learning and the principal’s practice as an instructional leader. Data was collected in this qualitative case study from interviews, evaluation instruments, and documents used during the evaluation process. Two principal evaluators and seven principals were interviewed about their experience in the principal evaluation process. Interviews took place during the 2013–2014 school year. The principal evaluators and principals were from a school district of approximately twenty thousand students in Washington State using the new Association of Washington School Principals Leadership Framework as a tool in the evaluation process.

The study found that the principal evaluation process used was aligned with standards, offered continual feedback, and maintained numerous meetings between the principal evaluator and the principal. The principal evaluators and principals perceived the process as an avenue for them to learn professionally. As an extension of the learning, both the principal evaluators and the principals perceived that the evaluation process had a positive impact on the professional practice of the principals.
The study found that for the evaluation process to be meaningful the principals needed to be able to trust their evaluator and feel supported. The collaborative structure of the evaluation process was also important to the principals. The relationship developed between the principal evaluator and principals working in the collaborative setting allowed for principals to take what they learned from working with their evaluator and apply it to their work with teachers.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

As leaders of their buildings, principals play a vital role in the overall success of the school organization (Hallinger, 2003; Jackson, 2000). Principals manage a multitude of responsibilities including facility usage, student discipline, parent concerns, cafeteria supervision, and playground duty (Sanzo, Sherman, & Clayton, 2011). Yet, the current national trend in education holds principals responsible for developing and supporting a positive learning culture (MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009), recruiting and retaining the most effective teachers (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, Ronfeldt, & Wyckoff, 2010), ensuring the improvement of teachers’ instructional skills (Youngs & King, 2002), and ensuring that students grow academically (Chirichello, 2010). Principals need to be instructional leaders who create and sustain an effective school where students receive a high quality education.

Effective schools are led by principals who are effective leaders (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliott, & Cravens, 2009). In order to be effective leaders, principals must positively influence student academic performance as this is the most significant component of their job (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Sun, Youngs, Yang, Chu, & Zhao, 2012). Principals must also develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to influence the instructional practices of teachers to increase student academic performance. The importance of the principal being a strong, well-rounded leader is identified as a key component of a school’s success (Chirichello, 2010; Hallinger & Heck, 1996). Sousa (2003) stated:

In the real world, it turns out that the instrument of meaningful change is the classroom teacher and that the unit of change is the individual school. This reality places building
principals in an extremely important position. By their actions, they can be the true catalysts or obstacles to change. (p. 2)

Several meta-analyses have found that school leadership is second only to classroom instruction as a correlate of student achievement (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Supovitz & Poglinco, 2001). Thus, schools are more effective with an effective leader. To ensure quality leadership, principals need support through ongoing development of their instructional leadership skills.

Despite the fact that principals alone account for 25 percent of a school’s impact on student learning (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005), the principal evaluation process and the development of principal leadership skills have often been an afterthought (Mendels, 2012). The principal role is critical in schools, yet the evaluation system is largely considered ineffective by the principals being evaluated (Ginsberg & Berry, 1990). Throughout the country, principal evaluations have been developed and designed as a matter of personal opinion and local practice, not of research findings (Ginsberg & Berry, 1990). Nationally, the principal evaluation process typically includes the principal evaluator conducting one or two meetings between the evaluator and the principal during the year to talk about the principal’s job performance (Cranston, 2008).

However, the principal evaluation process can provide an opportunity for principals to develop their skills and knowledge to improve their work in schools as instructional leaders. For their skills and knowledge to develop, principals need clear feedback on their job performance aligned with the current job performance expectations. The principal evaluation process can reinforce and strengthen leadership skills when it provides timely, trustworthy feedback on performance and standardized information for monitoring principal progress (Goldring, Cravens,
Murphy, Porter, Elliott, & Carson, 2009). However, limited work has been done on developing and implementing a meaningful principal evaluation.

While the research on the effectiveness and impact of the principal evaluation process on principal performance is limited, research is also limited on what elements of an evaluation process make the process meaningful for the principal. Emerging research finds that “principal evaluation policies should reflect research and should be closely linked to a principal’s professional development, plans, and activities” (Davis, Kearney, Sanders, Thomas, & Leon, 2011, p. 28). The notion that the process should meet an individual principal’s needs has gained popularity in the last decade. Practitioners, scholars, and policymakers are growing skeptical regarding the efficacy of the one-size-fits-all model of evaluations. The concept that principal evaluation should serve both formative and summative functions has gained popularity among school systems (Murphy, Goldring, Cravens, Elliott, & Porter, 2011). Two independent reviews of research on principal evaluation concluded that the traditional evaluation systems have not been designed or enacted in ways that promote accurate judgments of principal effectiveness (Clifford & Ross, 2011; Davis et al., 2011). Although states and districts require principal evaluation, research suggests compliance with the law does not ensure that quality performance evaluations are being used (Goldring, Cravens, et al., 2009). Because competent principal leadership is needed in schools to improve student learning, principal evaluation has emerged as a national policy focus.

**National and State Policy**

Creating better evaluation systems has surfaced as a cornerstone of education reform, with federal policies highlighting the roles and responsibilities of principals and emphasizing the need for defining principal effectiveness (Clifford & Ross, 2011). As policies are being
developed, a new paradigm around principal evaluation has materialized in many states and districts. Clifford and Ross (2011) identified the new paradigm as a change in policies on principal evaluation with more polices speaking to (a) the context of the principal and superintendent working collaboratively to set goals and determine measures that are unique to the school; (b) the incorporation of standards that align with practice; (c) the use of widely accepted standards of practice so that results are relevant to the improvement of the principals’ work and are monitored and adapted to reflect the complex nature of the profession; (d) the use of evaluations to build capacity and encourage professional development; and (e) a focus on student achievement identified through multiple measures. Principal evaluation is not new to state policy. State laws and administrative rules have required districts to evaluate all principals, but the expectations for the evaluation are beginning to change.

Historically, state level policy normally allowed districts to develop their own systems for principal evaluation, which led to the creation of a patchwork of systems that did not necessarily serve principals well. Traditional principal performance evaluation was not typically routine or systematic. The evaluations were not comprehensive, informed by valid measures, or aligned with contemporary professional standards (Davis et al., 2011). Spurred by the aggressive reforms intended to improve schools, states and districts have been persuaded to adopt new procedures to comply with the federal government’s exceptional reach into the principal evaluation arena (Davis et al., 2011).

The key drivers behind the national focus on principal evaluation are No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Race to the Top (RTTT), and the School Improvement Grant (SIG). They have all influenced the legislative stance taken on principal evaluation at the state level. NCLB,
RTTT, and SIG all call for principal evaluation to be a more rigorous process that includes the measurement of student achievement as part of the principal evaluation.

In 2009, the United States Secretary of Education gave unprecedented guidelines to school districts and departments of education regarding principal evaluation through a $4.35 billion RTTT federal competition grant program. The RTTT grant gave monetary incentives for massive reforms at the state level. States had to remove legal statutory or regulatory barriers and link student achievement data to both the teacher and the principal in the evaluation process (Clifford & Ross, 2011). In the context of RTTT, the Department of Education evaluates the effectiveness of a principal in terms of student achievement. It defines an “effective principal” as one “whose students, overall and for each subgroup, achieve acceptable rates (e.g., at least one grade level for one academic year) of student growth” (U.S. Department of Education, 2009, p. 12). There have been three phases for RTTT. States awarded funding in phases one and two received their monetary award in 2010. States selected to receive the third phase of RTTT grant received their monetary award in 2011. States that applied for the third phase of RTTT funding had to clearly state how they would update the principal evaluation and include student achievement in the evaluation criteria. The new principal evaluation criteria needed to be implemented no later than the 2014–2015 school year.

RTTT was a competitive grant program established to provide monetary incentives to districts to reform their education systems, including updating their principal evaluation system. The NCLB law differs from RTTT in that it outlines specific mandates for measuring student achievement. The NCLB law dictates that students in districts receiving Title I funds must demonstrate adequate yearly progress (AYP) or face progressive government control each year AYP is not met. The NCLB Act insists that school leaders not only implement effective
programs but also provide evidence of their success through state-determined assessments and justify changes through the measured academic achievement of students. In addition to student achievement being monitored, both the principal and teacher evaluations need to be redesigned and must include student assessment results as part of the evaluation.

The third piece of federal funding for education, which inspired a change in the principal evaluation, is the School Improvement Grant. School Improvement Grants (SIG) are awarded to state education agencies as authorized under section 1003(g) of the Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and reauthorized in NCLB. The SIG funding was specifically awarded to turn around the lowest performing schools. In 2010, the latest requirements were published for the SIG program. Within the requirements were new levels of authority for the SIG funds. States and districts receiving the grant were required to include new teacher- and principal-evaluation systems as part of reform efforts. SIG requires the use of rigorous, transparent, and equitable evaluations that take into account data on student growth. The other evaluation requirement in the SIG is that the evaluation needs to be designed and developed with a focus on teacher and principal involvement. In response to the SIG, both state and federal laws and policies increased the focus on principal evaluation. The new and updated laws and policies regarding principal evaluation support the belief that principal evaluation will align with improving student achievement, raising accountability for educators, and facilitating principal professional development (Clifford & Ross, 2011).

**Principal Evaluation in Washington State**

States are now working to redesign the way in which principals are evaluated. Research shows effective evaluation systems include student achievement as well as the quality of the principal’s leadership practices and the impact of the leadership practices on the school
conditions, school culture, and instructional quality (Leithwood et al., 2004). In the newly
developed principal evaluation tool, the Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP)
Leadership Framework, all those areas are being addressed in the assessment criteria. A group
of principals and individuals representing AWSP submitted evaluation criteria recommendations
to the Washington State Legislature and worked to develop the rubrics for the AWSP Leadership
Framework. Principal evaluation tools are more meaningful and effective for principals when
principals participate in the development of the tool (Amsterdam, Johnson, Monrad, & Tonnsen,
2003; Kaplan, Owings, & Nunnery, 2005; Sun et al., 2012). Due to the quick pace of the
development of the principal evaluation tools, in many states concerns arose around the notion
that principals would not be included in the design of the new evaluation models (Clifford,
Hansen, & Wraight, 2012). The state of Washington worked to meet that challenge by
partnering closely with AWSP. The AWSP Leadership Framework is now one of two tools that
may be selected by Washington State school districts to use for principal evaluation.

The development of AWSP Leadership Framework was initiated in 2010 after
Washington Senate Bill 6696 (2010) was passed. The bill aimed to strengthen Washington’s
application for RTTT. It included requirements to develop a principal evaluation tool with the
minimum criteria outlined in the bill. Senate Bill 6696 asserts, “It is the state’s responsibility to
create a coherent and effective accountability framework for the continuous improvement for all
students and districts” (p. 2). In addition to offering evaluation criteria, the bill states that
evaluation tools will be constructed on a four-tiered model and that school boards will need to
report the number of staff in each rating area each year to the Office of the Superintendent of
Public Instruction. It is the responsibility of the superintendent to evaluate all administrators.
The bill outlines that student growth data must be used in the evaluation and must be based on multiple measures. To summarize, Senate Bill 6696 states:

The legislature finds the presence of highly effective principals in schools has never been more important than it is today. To enable students to meet high academic standards, principals must lead and encourage teams of teachers and support staff to work together, align curriculum and instruction, use student data to target instruction and intervention strategies, and serve as the chief school officer with the parents and community. Washington is putting into place an updated and rigorous system of evaluation for principal performance, one that will measure what matters. This system will never be truly effective unless the results are meaningfully used. (p. 26)

In addition to Senate Bill 6696 (2010), Senate Bill 5895 (2012) addressing principal and teacher evaluation also passed. Senate Bill 5895 clarified the eight criteria for principal evaluation. This bill outlines that student growth will be included in criteria three, five, and eight of the eight criteria in the principal evaluation.

The criteria outlined in Senate Bill 6696 (2010) and Senate Bill 5895 (2012) were included at least partially in response to the federal law of NCLB and the RTTT Grant. Established by the Washington State Legislature with input from AWSP, the criteria used to evaluate principals are (a) creating a culture, (b) ensuring school safety, (c) planning with data, (d) aligning curriculum, (e) improving instruction, (f) managing resources, (g) engaging communities, and (h) closing the achievement gap. The final criterion, closing the achievement gap, was not developed with input from AWSP. The Washington State Legislature added it as the final criterion prior to the bill’s passage.
Washington State identified two leadership frameworks, which align with the new state criteria, to be used in the principal evaluation process—Marzano’s Leadership Framework and the AWSP Leadership Framework. Each district in Washington State adopted one of the two frameworks to use in the evaluation of principals. The majority of school districts in the state selected the AWSP Leadership Framework as the tool to use in their principal evaluation process (Brown-Sims, Clayton, Chen, & Brandt, 2013).

Prior to the adoption of new evaluation criteria for principal evaluation in 2012, Washington State principals had been evaluated on a set of criteria originally established in 1969. The seven Washington State criteria were: (a) knowledge of, experience in, and training in recognizing good professional performance, capabilities, and development; (b) school finance, (c) professional preparation, and scholarship; (d) effort toward improvement when needed; (e) interest in pupils, employees, patrons, and subjects taught in school; (f) leadership; and (g) ability and performance of evaluation of school personnel (RCW 28A.405.100). The evaluation criteria did not correlate with the actual work of today’s principals as instructional leaders. Washington State is similar to most states in which principal evaluation processes and criteria have not been a high priority (Fenton et al., 2010). The new state criteria and frameworks are much more rigorous than past criteria and frameworks. As a result of the adoption of the new evaluation criteria for principals, evaluators and principals are experiencing an immediate need to modify the process used for the principal evaluation cycle.

Statement of the Problem

Principals are held accountable for guaranteeing student learning takes place in their buildings (Catano & Stronge, 2007). Evaluation processes used often did not assist the principal in developing the skills necessary to be an instructional leader who could improve student
achievement. This failure occurred partly because the intricacy of the principal’s role makes it difficult to align evaluation processes with desired principal behaviors (Heck & Marcoulides, 1992). Additionally, the limited research on principal evaluation has shown that principals do not meet often with their evaluators and do not feel as though the principal evaluation process is a learning experience (Cranston, 2008; McKerrow, Crawford, & Cornell, 2006). Thus, the effectiveness of the principal evaluation process deserves attention (Kempher & Robb-Cooper, 2002). If principals are going to ensure that all teachers are prepared to successfully teach all students, principals need to benefit from their evaluation process by improving their ability to have a positive impact on student learning. Evaluation criteria need to be clear, and principals need to be supported in achieving the criteria through the implementation of an evaluation process in which practices within the process are based on research.

As Washington State implements the new principal evaluation criteria, which were developed to attain accountability and ensure an effective evaluation, the process used to conduct the evaluation must be initiated and monitored by district leaders. It is the work of the principal’s evaluator to support the growth and learning of the principal in the implementation of the principal evaluation process (Clifford et al., 2012). Research regarding the process of evaluating principals will provide insights for superintendents and policy makers, allowing them to design an evaluation process that will provide an opportunity for the principal to learn and change his or her professional practice to increase student learning.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to review the principal evaluation process that principal evaluators followed when using the AWSP Leadership Framework. The study explored the principal evaluation process from the perspective of both principal evaluators and the principals.
evaluated. From the evaluators’ perspectives, attention was on the implementation of the principal evaluation process, the focus of the principal evaluation process, the components of the principal evaluation process, and the perceived learning resulting from the process. From the principals’ perspectives, attention was on the skills and knowledge the principals developed as a result of the evaluation process in reference to their learning and evolution as instructional leaders.

**Research Questions**

The research questions that guided this study are as follows:

1. What is the process used to evaluate principals?
2. How do the principal evaluators and principals perceive professional learning as a result of the evaluation process?
3. How do the principal evaluators and principals perceive the connection between the principals’ professional learning during the principal evaluation process and the principals’ practices as instructional leaders?

**Overview of the Methodology**

The study began with an in-depth look at the literature. Areas of research included a) an historical look at the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards, b) the alignment of the evaluation process with the principal evaluation criteria, c) the instruments and tools used in principal evaluation, d) the professional development of principals, e) the principal evaluation process, and f) the attributes of principal evaluators. The literature review found a lack of empirical research on principal evaluation, specifically the process used to evaluate a principal.
Qualitative research methods were employed to better understand the current nature of the principal evaluation process used in a purposefully selected school district. The case study format provided for an in-depth investigation of the process the selected school district used to conduct principal evaluations. As Yin (2009) explains, a case study is a study in which “the boundaries of the case—that is, the distinction between the phenomenon being studied and its context—are given explicit attention” (p. 186). The bounded context of this case study was the district selected. The phenomenon being studied was the perceptions of principal evaluators and principals concerning the principal evaluation process.

Using qualitative methodology in the form of interviews that included open-ended questions and dialogue in the natural setting, the researcher was able to explore the experiences and attitudes of participants in their own words (Creswell, 2009). The data from the interviews with the principal evaluators and principals were collected and analyzed. Principal evaluation instruments and documents were used for additional data sources. Using the data collected from the interviews, evaluation instruments, and documents allowed for a robust data set of the experiences of the principals and the principal evaluators during the principal evaluation process. A key characteristic of qualitative research is that it is based on how individuals construct reality (Merriam, 2009). In this study, the interview responses of the principal evaluators and the principals presented their perception of the principal evaluation process in the district studied.

**Significance of the Study**

The evaluation of principals, “when designed appropriately, executed in a proactive manner and properly implemented, has the power to enhance leadership quality and improve organizational performance at three levels” (Goldring, Cravens, et al., 2009, p. 20). The three levels referenced by Goldring, Cravens, et al. (2009) are (a) the individual level of practice,
(b) the level of continuous learning and development, and (c) the level of organizational accountability. The study of the process used during the principal evaluation will bring a deeper understanding about how the evaluation process can support the principals in their work with teachers as instructional leaders to potentially increase student achievement.

This study provides new research on the principal evaluation process, which currently is very limited. Very few studies address the principal evaluation process used during the principal evaluation cycle. As a result of the NCLB Act (2002), there is urgency for improving student achievement in the United States. To ensure that all students are provided an environment conducive to learning, it is necessary to implement an evaluation process that will support principals in learning and growing professionally in the skills and knowledge required to be effective leaders. In an interview with the Director of the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), the U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, expressed concern that many principal evaluations do not help principals learn and grow (Connelly, 2010).

Education has been slower than many other fields in the development and adoption of a well-crafted and reliable way to assess the performance of its leaders (Wallace Foundation, 2009).

From a practical approach, Washington State has new research-based criteria that are included within the AWSP Leadership Framework. When using the framework, it is important to also implement an effective evaluation process. The AWSP Leadership Framework is designed to be a growth model. Instructional leaders across the state need information about how the evaluation process supports the implementation of the framework. Thus, instructional leaders and principal evaluators throughout the state will benefit from learning about the different evaluation processes being used with principals in conjunction with the AWSP Leadership Framework.
**Limitations of the Study**

There were a number of limitations considered. The first limitation to the study was the scope of the study, which in the case study format focused on only one district. The small sample size is typical of a case study but will make it more difficult to generalize the findings. Second, the depth of information gathered was limited to the information the participants were willing to share. This restriction may have been more significant with the principal participants interviewed because some of the information they shared was about their current evaluator. Third, the principal evaluators selected the principal study participants. Although no bias was identified in the selection process, it is a limitation to consider. Fourth, the evaluation process is multi-stepped with a great deal of depth. This study was conducted during the period of one school year and as a result may not have covered each of the evaluation process steps at a deep level. The final limitation is that the researcher was a novice. This was the first complete study I conducted and as a result I learned a great deal throughout the study process.

To reduce the limitations and bias in the study, data collection and analysis were conducted following accepted qualitative procedures as a means of providing a fair and accurate portrayal of the participants’ responses. The study included the following strategies to enhance trustworthiness: (a) triangulation of data sources using observations, interviews, and documents; (b) member-checking of interview materials; and (c) maintaining a reflexivity journal (Merriam, 2009) to strengthen the confidence of the study.

**Definitions of Key Terms**

The study contains the following terms, used throughout:
Artifact – Something a principal creates or gathers (PowerPoint, notes, newsletter, agenda, etc.).

   The outcomes of the artifacts determine whether the artifact is evidence of one of the eight Washington State criteria for principal evaluation.

Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP) Leadership Framework – A rubric of responsibilities that correspond to the new state principal evaluation criteria and the evaluation tool used in this study (Appendix A).

Evidence – An observed practice, product, or result of a principal’s practice that demonstrates knowledge and skills of the principal’s job performance as aligned with the eight Washington State evaluation criteria.

Principal – An educator holding a Master’s degree and principal credentials who is responsible for leading a school.

Principal Evaluation – The formal process conducted to provide the district and the principal with information about the principal’s job performance. Typically, it is a written document annually given to the principal to provide information regarding his or her current quality of performance in the criterion areas. The evaluation is used to measure a principal’s competency.

Principal Evaluation Cycle – A one school-year period (typically from September to June) during which a principal’s evaluation takes place.

Principal Evaluation Process – The roles and responsibilities of the evaluator and the evaluatee followed during the annual evaluation of the principal. In addition, the process includes the documents, instruments, and other resources used during the evaluation of principals.

Principal Evaluator – As defined in the law, the superintendent or his or her designee who evaluates principals in the district.
Organization of the Study

This study consists of five chapters published in the standard form of a dissertation. Chapter One is an introduction of the study, including the research problem, purpose, and research questions. Chapter Two contains a review of relevant literature on the evaluation of principals. Chapter Three describes the research methodology, design, and procedures used in the study. It includes site and participant selection procedures. Chapter Four presents the findings and analysis of the data in qualitative form. Chapter Five discusses and summarizes results of the findings in terms of the research questions and presents conclusions, implications, and recommendations.
CHAPTER TWO  
LITERATURE REVIEW  

Many states, including Washington State, have developed or are working on developing new principal evaluation criteria. The new principal evaluation criteria in the state of Washington are aligned with what the research indicates are the standards principals need to meet to be effective as an instructional leader, resulting in increased student achievement. Research shows that principal evaluation should be aligned to research with clearly defined criteria so the evaluation is a fair and valid assessment of a principal’s job performance (Amsterdam et al., 2003). The state of Washington has achieved the alignment of standards to research for use in the principal evaluation process. However, even with the criteria being clear and aligned with research, it is the process used during the evaluation cycle to address the standards that will help principals learn and develop, improving their practice and ultimately improving the learning of students (Goldring, Huff, Spillane, & Barnes, 2009). While the new evaluation criteria are established at the state level in Washington, it is still left to districts to design the evaluation process. A process that provides both “formative and summative feedback to a school leader, enabling principals to make informed decisions regarding development and improvement by identifying gaps between existing practices and desired outcomes” (Goldring, Cravens, et al., 2009, p. 20) should be put in place. Research shows that in the past principals have not found the evaluation process beneficial (Kempher & Robb-Cooper, 2002). For the evaluation process to be meaningful, districts need to develop an evaluation process that will be beneficial to principals and improve their practice. Washington State has determined the criteria upon which principal performance will be assessed but not how the evaluation will be conducted.
This review will provide the reader with information about the current research available on the principal evaluation process. The research has been divided into the following topics: the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards; aligning the evaluation process with the principal evaluation criteria; the evaluation instruments used in principal evaluation; and the professional development needs of adult learners—specifically principals, the principal evaluation process, and attributes of principal evaluators. Each of these core areas provides an important baseline of information about the current research on principal evaluation.

**ISLLC Standards**

A great deal of the research conducted on standards for principal performance and evaluation references the 1996 and 2008 Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) (Babo & Ramaswami, 2011; Derrington & Sharratt, 2008; Johnston & Thomas, 2005; Murphy, 2005). These standards were originally created as descriptors of the principal’s job and subsequently also used for principal evaluation (Kaplan et al., 2005; Murphy, 2005). The 2008 ISLLC standards reinforced the proposition of the original ISLLC standards stating that the principal’s primary responsibility is to improve teaching and learning for all children. The ISLLC standards are:

1. Setting a widely shared vision for learning
2. Developing a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth
3. Ensuring effective management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment
4. Collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources
5. Acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner

6. Understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, legal, and cultural contexts (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008, p. 14)

The ISLLC standards were written to help principals meet the growing expectation of the principal job. In 1996, when the ISLLC standards were first written, the goal was the same as it is today—to raise student achievement (Babo & Ramaswami, 2011).

Although the ISLLC standards were not developed to be an evaluation instrument, due to a lack of other research-based standards for principal performance and evaluation instruments, the ISLLC standards, with a focus on instructional leadership, have been successfully used in different formats to assess the performance of principals (Babo & Ramaswami, 2011; Derrington & Sharratt, 2008; Johnston & Thomas, 2005; Kaplan et al., 2005; McKerrow et al., 2006). Using the ISLCC standards allowed both principals and superintendents to realize the importance of the use of performance criteria in the principal evaluation process and also for the evaluator and the evaluatee to understand the criteria upon which principals were being assessed (Derrington & Sharratt, 2008; Kaplan et al., 2005; McKerrow et al., 2006; Yavuz, 2010).

The research available on the ISLLC standards references the 1996 and 2008 edition. However, there is a 2014 edition of the ISLLC standards that has not yet been formally released. The standards are still being finalized after a period of public comment was offered in the fall of 2014. The new standards were driven by an “increased sense of urgency that every student reach high levels of achievement” (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2014, p. 7). The 2014 ISLLC standards have an increased emphasis on instructional improvement, distributed leadership, human capital management, equity and access, and continuous improvement. The
ISLLC standards place an emphasis on the instructional leadership responsibilities of administrators. The 11 standards in the current draft of the 2014 ISLCC standards are:

1. Vision and mission
2. Instructional capacity
3. Instruction
4. Curriculum and assessment
5. Community of care for students
6. Professional culture for teachers and staff
7. Communities of engagement for families
8. Operations and management
9. Ethical principals and professional norms
10. Equity and cultural responsiveness

Though not yet formally finalized, the 2014 ISLCC standards are what the Council of Chief School Officers believe are the new high standards to which administrators should be held. The standards address what administrators need to do to improve student academic outcomes (Council of Chief School Officers, 2014).

**Aligning the Evaluation Process to Criteria**

In the principal evaluation process, superintendents need to determine criteria by which principals should be evaluated (Babo & Ramaswami, 2011; Thomas, Holdaway, & Ward, 2000), align the evaluation instrument accordingly, and, in turn, ensure that the tool assesses measurable performance based on identified criteria (Amsterdam et al., 2003; Babo & Ramaswami, 2011). Discrepancies between what should be evaluated and what actually is evaluated often end in
conflict. This is so because the criteria the superintendent should use to evaluate job
performance often does not seem to align with the job the superintendent expects the principal to
perform on a daily basis (Babo & Ramaswami, 2011; Yavuz, 2010). First, the process of
identifying criteria or standards for principal evaluation begins with determining the definition of
“effective principal.” Criteria are the basis of the desired performance of a principal (Clifford et
al., 2012). Administrative evaluations should align with organizational goals and objectives for
student achievement, which will then help school leaders focus on behaviors related to student
learning (Goldring, Cravens, et al., 2009). Research shows principal quality has an effect on the
achievement of students (Kaplan et al., 2005), so the evaluation tool needs to measure the
principal’s strengths and areas for growth in relation to the instructional leadership criteria (Babo
& Ramaswami, 2011; Derrington & Sharatt, 2008).

Maintaining a focus on instructional leadership is a challenge for principals (Camburn,
Spillane, & Sebastian, 2010; Goldring, Huff, May, & Camburn, 2008; Murphy, 2005). The trend
in the job of a building principal has moved from building management to a very intentional
focus on instructional leadership and academic improvement (Babo & Ramaswami, 2011;
Catano & Stronge, 2007). As a result, principal evaluations across the country have given more
credence to instruction than to the categories of management (Goldring, Cravens, et al., 2009).
Some research has shown that principals are spending a significant amount of time on instruction
(Catano & Stronge, 2007; Goldring et al., 2008; Sun et al., 2012) as measured by various means.
However, there is conflicting research (Camburn et al., 2010; Kaplan et al., 2005) indicating that
principals still spend the majority of their time on management, personnel issues, and student
affairs and much less time on instructional leadership. As criteria are written for the evaluation
of principals, the change of emphasis from management to instructional leadership needs to be
noted (Goldring et al., 2008; Parylo, Zepeda, & Bengtson, 2012) to support the development of high quality principals.

Once the evaluation criteria are identified, principals need to be informed about them. They need to understand what criteria will be used to evaluate their performance. When principals are informed and educated about the criteria upon which they are evaluated, they focus on the evaluation areas, resulting in more success for the principals in their evaluation outcomes and job performance (Amsterdam et al., 2003; Catano & Stronge, 2007; Derrington & Sharratt, 2008; Goldring, Cravens, et al., 2009; Kaplan et al., 2005; Oyinlade, 2006; Sun et al., 2012).

**Evaluation Instruments**

The demands on a principal in today’s educational setting are immense and result in the inability of many principals to determine where to focus their time, effort, and energy to learn and grow. The complexity and lack of clarity surrounding the role of a principal makes forming an appropriate principal evaluation instrument a daunting task (Catano & Stronge, 2007; Eller, 2010). However, studies indicate that well-designed performance standards and a corresponding evaluation instrument are necessary to help improve the effectiveness of the principal in completing the job requirements (Amsterdam et al., 2003; Catano & Stronge, 2007; Johnston & Thomas, 2005; May & Supovitz, 2011).

Principal evaluation instruments can vary greatly. Researchers have identified instruments with elements that make them more effective for both the evaluator and the principal. The principal and supervisor working together on clearly articulated criteria can result in an effective and collaborative evaluation instrument (Amsterdam et al., 2003; Johnston & Thomas, 2005). When principals work with the evaluator on the development of the evaluation process and the instruments to be used, they demonstrate ownership and an understanding of the
importance of the evaluated areas (Amsterdam, et al., 2003; Kaplan, et al., 2005; Sun et al., 2012). The more principals are involved in the development of the evaluation instrument, the more meaningful both the evaluation process and evaluation instruments will be for them.

Different tools and formats used to complete the principal evaluation have been reviewed. Both supervisors and principals indicate a desire to learn about the portfolio collection as a tool for the evaluation (Johnston & Thomas, 2005). Studies show varying results. Success depends on how the tool is used by the principal throughout the year. If the portfolio is a useful tool that brings meaning to the principal’s practice, the positive results may improve principal performance (McGough, 2003). The portfolio is most effective when aligned with professional development for the principal (Johnston & Thomas, 2005). McGough (2003) found to effectively evaluate a principal, the process needs to be authentic and idiosyncratic in nature. The evaluation tool used needs to allow the principal evaluator to approach each principal’s needs at an individual level, and the evaluation process needs to be modified to meet the need of the individual.

Ultimately, effective principal evaluation requires congruence between well-defined standards and an aligned performance assessment (Catano & Stronge, 2007; Goldring, Huff, et al., 2009). It needs to be rigorous, with a focus on curriculum, quality instruction, and connections to external communities (Polikoff et al., 2009), and it must be tied to evidence of the principal’s actions (Porter et al., 2010). In addition, effective evaluation instruments are aligned with professional development plans and opportunities for principals (Parylo et al., 2012), so principals learn as part of the evaluation experience. To summarize, the tools used during the principal evaluation need to be aligned to clear, evidence-based criteria focused on curriculum, instruction, building community, and principal professional development.
Continual learning is universally accepted and expected across all professions. From teaching to nursing to engineering to architecture, pressure is increasing in various fields toward the pursuit of more effective, efficient, and evidence-based practices that deliver improved outcomes (Penz & Bassendowski, 2006). The purpose for this ongoing learning is to improve the practice of those taking part in the learning experience. It is a move toward a professional being even more “accomplished” in his or her practice (Smith, 2003). While adult learning may include skill development, it should be more than an accumulation of facts, knowledge, and skills—it should be a process of transformations, provided that appropriate supports and challenges are in place (Drago-Severson, 2007). Workplace learning is a major contributor to the competitiveness both of particular enterprises and of the nation as a whole (Smith, 2003). It is something people look for as a job perk when they are searching for new jobs and/or selecting one over another.

Although some believe the needs of adult learners are different from those of children (Knowles, 1992), many believe there are more similarities than differences. Adults benefit from good instructional practices just as children do. They learn best when learning is seen as participation in a “community of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and when they are learning and developing together. The culture of the workplace is very important in determining what is learned and how it is learned. Being part of a workplace team that is learning and developing professionally inspires everyone on the team to learn (Sandholtz & Scribner, 2006).

Whether working on a team or not, adults desire to improve their practice and understand that which they see as relevant directly to their work (Smith, 2003). Relevant professional development needs to be a holistic experience rather than a combination of interrelated factors.
There needs to be an interaction among the learner, the context, and what is learned (Jarvis & Parker, 2007). The learner is integral to the learning experience rather than a spectator looking onto the experience. Research both in the business world and in education shows that adults exposed to new practices in workshops or team meetings need on-the-job support to make new ideas they learned part of their daily routines (Joyce & Showers, 2002). On-the-job support is one component that makes the learner a part of the learning experience rather than just a spectator. However, making learning relevant and including on-the-job support or training is not easy.

For adult professional development to be successful, adults need to understand why they need to learn something, value their formal and informal learning, and connect their learning to their lives in a meaningful way (Smith, 2003). Learning takes time, and if adults are not able to make connections, they are likely to move to other things that demand their time. The job requirements for a principal are very demanding on the principal’s time. However, it is important that time be dedicated to the principal’s professional growth. Research shows that when teachers have an average of 49 hours of professional development in a single school year focusing specifically on the curriculum they teach, student achievement increases by 21 percentile points (Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007). Potential for similar growth in student achievement is present when principals commit time to professional development. This idea is something that needs to be explored when making the principal evaluation process a form of professional development.

An important part of adult learning is it is not the same for all adult learners. As differentiation must happen in the classroom for children, differentiation must also happen in the realm of adult learning (Dall’Alba & Sandberg, 2006). Principals have personal strengths in
different areas; their professional development must be focused on the areas where they need to learn and develop. Individual differences should be acknowledged and learning should be differentiated based on the individual learning needs of the adult (Swift & Kelly, 2010) if the professional development is to be meaningful.

Professional development plans and activities for principals should closely align with the principal evaluation (Davis et al., 2011). When the professional development opportunity is connected with the principal evaluation, both are found to be more meaningful (Jarvis & Parker, 2005; Parylo et al., 2012). In addition to being relevant, professional development for adults should be intensive, sustained, content focused, coherent, well defined, and strongly implemented (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001). All of these qualities are characteristics of a quality principal evaluation process.

To enhance the effectiveness of principal evaluation, professional development needs to be an important element of the evaluation process (Johnston & Thomas, 2005; McGough, 2003; Parylo et al., 2012). If principals are to grow as professionals, the evaluation process needs to be designed as a formative instrument, allow for collaboration, contain open dialogue, and present the opportunity to engage in reflective practice (Parylo et al., 2012). Supervision and evaluation are often not recognized as opportunities for professional growth (Eller, 2010). However, the principal’s supervisor is the person who best understands the work of the principal and is in frequent contact with the principal. As a result, the evaluator can effectively identify areas of need and work with the principals to assist them in developing professionally (Derrington & Sharratt, 2008; Cranston, 2008). The principal evaluation process may allow for meaningful, focused development in areas where the principal needs to grow in job performance.
From the principal’s perspective, the evaluation process has not always been meaningful and productive (Cranston, 2008; McKerrow et al., 2006). However, aligning the evaluation with both clear evaluation criteria and professional development has increased the value principals place on the evaluation process (Cranston, 2008; Derrington & Sharratt, 2008; McKerrow et al., 2006). To summarize, the evaluation should be used to guide the design of professional development in identified focus areas to allow the principal to learn and grow as an administrator (Amsterdam et al., 2003; Babo & Ramaswami, 2011; Catano & Stronge, 2007; Derrington & Sharratt, 2008; Johnston & Thomas, 2005; Parylo et al., 2012).

The Principal Evaluation Process

Despite increasing attention being paid to improving the competency of school principals and renewing the emphasis on the quality of principal preparation programs, leadership evaluation has received far less attention and research than the evaluation of teachers (Goldring, Cravens et al., 2009). Research on the elements of an effective principal evaluation process is limited (Clifford et al., 2012). The Wallace Foundation (2009) conducted a study to determine the effectiveness of urban school leaders. Their resulting report explained much research exists on what it takes to learn how to lead, but education has been slower than other fields in developing a reliable way to assess leaders’ performance (Portin, Knapp, Dareff, Feldman, Russel, Samuelson, & Yeh, 2009). To date, empirical studies on systematic processes of principal evaluation are very thin (Davis et al., 2011). However, research shows that current principal evaluation processes have little consistency, and the level of rigor varies across a district (Condon & Clifford, 2010). Over a decade ago, Davis and Hensley (1999) completed a study that found principals were not formally evaluated on a regular basis; goals were not developed until mid-year if at all; and the evaluation formats varied from narrative summaries to
rating scores to self-assessments or portfolios. More recent studies have found that the principal evaluation process still lacks systematic and consistent approaches to assess a principal’s practice (Cranston, 2008; Derrington & Sharratt, 2008; McKerrow et al., 2006).

The evaluation process has not changed much during the last three decades. In a nationwide survey of principals, Reeves (2009) found that principals saw their evaluation as positive (89%), accurate (79%), and aligned with their job expectations (76%). However, only 60 percent of those surveyed reported that the evaluation process helped them improve their practice or motivated them in their work. Less than 50 percent of the principals reported that their evaluations provided specific enough feedback to understand where to focus their professional development plan. In addition, most survey respondents found their evaluation inconsequential and thought the criteria of the evaluation were unclear.

**Best practices for principal evaluation.** The review of the literature shows there is no comprehensive research of principal evaluation processes. A study on the content, format, psychometric properties, and use of evaluation instruments to determine the most effective means of evaluating principals is needed (Goldring, Cravens, et. al. 2009; Parylo et al., 2012). The literature is clear that when establishing an evaluation process, the evaluator needs to clearly communicate the structure of the evaluation process to the principal, the process needs to be aligned with evaluation criteria, and documents need to be developed to support the work (Clifford et al., 2012). The “goal is to support the continuous growth and development of each principal by monitoring, analyzing, and applying pertinent data compiled within a system of meaningful feedback” (Clifford et al., 2012; Stronge, Xu, Leeper, & Tonneson, 2013). Reeves (2009) and Stronge et al. (2013) have both published outlines of evaluation processes they structured using information from current research.
Stronge et al. (2013) determined that a principal evaluation process should (a) be adaptable; (b) be a system-wide approach; (c) have an emphasis on communication between the principal and evaluator; (d) have technical and conceptual soundness, which includes planning for professional development experiences; and (e) use multiple data sources for each criterion. Stronge used the utility standards designed primarily for teacher evaluations by the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (2009) to establish the components. Reeves (2009) supported implementation of the principal evaluation with Multidimensional Leadership Assessment (MLA). Reeves clearly states that MLA is not a compact package to be unpacked but rather an ongoing process that will help both new administrators learn their new job and experienced leaders become more effective. MLA includes a systematic documentation of evidence that principal evaluators share with the principal and other stakeholders. In MLA, the principal and the evaluator spend significant time collaborating to assess the performance of the principal based on a rubric developed around the established standards. Evaluators also use the rubric to assess performance for both individual and system-wide improvement. In MLA, the evaluator works as both a coach and an evaluator for the principal. These are examples of two evaluation processes developed based on the interpretation of findings in research. Research supporting these processes is limited, given that the evaluation process needs to be continual process and formative in nature to allow principals to engage in reflective practice (Clifford et. al., 2012; Dall’Albe & Sandberg, 2006). However, as previously noted, researchers have not conducted significant research in schools or districts on the evaluation processes recommended by Reeves (2009), Stronge et al. (2013), or others to determine whether they positively impact the job performance of the principal.
Collaboration. If at all possible, it is important for principals to be a part of the design process of the evaluation system to be adopted (Amsterdam et. al., 2003). When principals are involved in the design of the evaluation tool and criteria used to complete their evaluation, they have ownership in the process (Amsterdam et al., 2003; Kaplan et al., 2005; Sun et al., 2012). However, to increase the learning of principals as a result of principal evaluation, collaboration should also be an integral part of the evaluation process. When principals engage in a professional development opportunity that facilitates cooperative and collaborative learning between and among principals, the principals learn more (Cranston, 2008). Principals indicate that a developmental evaluation process improves their professional practice (Parylo et al., 2012). The developmental structure includes collaboration in the evaluation process and allows for the principal evaluator and principal to have open dialogue. As an organization works to develop its collective intelligence, working collaboratively to learn and develop its members’ skills, learning moves from individual learning to collective organizational learning (Smith, 2003). An evaluation process that includes systems to allow for collaboration may provide a more meaningful professional development opportunity for principals.

Several researchers (Amsterdam et al., 2003; Clifford & Ross, 2011; Parylo et al., 2012) claim that when collaboration exists between the principal evaluator and principal as part of the evaluation process, the result is powerful. Collaboration between the principal evaluator and the principal as a part of the principal evaluation process results in the principal having a more vested interest in the process (Reeves, 2009). A principal evaluation process with collaboration in its design is more likely to generate trust among stakeholders and encourage leaders to think deeply with colleagues about the improvement of schools and student learning (Clifford et al., 2012).
**Goal setting.** A standard part of the evaluation process is goal setting. Most evaluation processes include the opportunity for principals to establish goals, which they then strive to meet throughout the year and discuss with their principal evaluator (Cantano & Stronge, 2007). Recent research increases the emphasis of goal setting on student achievement. Louis, Leithwood, Wahstrom, and Anderson (2010) found that “principals agreed that the most instructionally helpful leadership practices were: focusing the school on goals and expectations for student achievement” (p. 68). As a result of findings indicating that student achievement goal setting leads to improvement in student learning, recent evaluation processes include setting student achievement goals as part of the process (Stronge et al., 2013). When the evaluation process includes setting goals, the evaluator and the principal should choose those goals based on an analysis of school-based data to help principals improve their leadership skills in salient areas (Parylo et al., 2012). Research on establishing student achievement goals as part of the principal evaluation process is limited, but Kaplan et al. (2005) found these goals are a meaningful component of the evaluation process.

**Collection of evidence.** Research on the principal evaluation process indicates that evaluators should collect evidence for the evaluation from multiple sources (Portin et al., 2009; Wallace Foundation, 2009). Because each school leader is unique and performs at different levels, the evaluation process needs to allow for the evaluator to address the individual needs of principals (Goldring, Cravens, et al., 2009; Stronge et al., 2013). Other items that, according to the research, should be included in the principal evaluation process are: (a) timely feedback; (b) clear communication of the criteria and standard protocols (Stronge et al., 2013); (c) ability to enhance principal motivation and improve performance (Reeves, 2009); and (d) alignment of the
evaluation instrument with professional standards so that principals understand where they should focus their attention (Catano & Stronge, 2006).

Goldring, Cravens, et al. (2009) conducted a study that included limited research on the evaluation process; they found it difficult to collect information on the process used to conduct principal evaluations. Of the 200 principals surveyed, only a small portion reported their involvement in the evaluation process. Those principals who provided feedback on the study survey reported having direct involvement in their evaluation in two primary areas. First, 25 percent of the respondents reported that they completed self-assessments; second, 16 percent reported being responsible for providing evidence, usually through portfolios. In this study, only 67 percent of the survey participants completed the survey portion about how the district conducted the evaluation.

**Portfolio.** One other area researchers often discuss is principals’ use of the portfolio for the collection of evidence in principal evaluation. Russo (2004) advocated for using portfolios to provide valid, reliable, and authentic performance assessment. Typically, the portfolio is a collection of artifacts showcasing a broad range of skills and accomplishments that a principal has demonstrated throughout a year. Portfolios are flexible and can be easily tailored to the needs of individuals. However, without structure, the portfolio can turn into a version of a checklist or a “scrapbook” (Hackney, 1999). Although the collection of evidence is an important part of the principal evaluation process, stakeholders must determine how to manage the collection of evidence so that it is meaningful for the principals and informative for the evaluator.
Attributes of the Evaluator

The evaluation of personnel includes an element of important relational practices. Communication, cooperation, and consideration are human relations Stronge (1991) identified as being vital to an effective evaluation system. If subordinates are to feel comfortable working with their evaluator, they must be able to develop a relationship with the evaluator. Open communication, which often includes ongoing conversations with the subordinate and the evaluator working together through the evaluation process, can create an environment of trust, resulting in a more effective performance evaluation (Stronge, 1991).

If performance evaluations are to be effective, the evaluators must be trustworthy (Aryee, Budhwar, Chen, 2002; Tan & Tan, 2000). Trust in the evaluator grows through different means. Tan and Tan (2000) found that a perception of organizational support was a predictor of trust in a supervisor. The support could be provided to the evaluatee by the evaluator or provided through other members of the organization. When the evaluation process is viewed as a “system of support orchestrated by the central office leaders” (Parylo et al., 2012), the evaluation process is more effective. With support in place, principals acknowledged that the support provided helped them become more effective leaders (Parylo et al., 2012). In addition to support, Connell, Ferres, and Travaglione (2003) found, transformational leadership and procedural justice are characteristics that enhance the feeling of trust in an evaluator and in the organization. Procedural justice aligns with the perception of fairness in the design and implementation of an organization’s performance evaluation system (Connell et al., 2003).

Limited research has been conducted specifically on the attributes of a principal evaluator and how they correlate with effective principal evaluations. Two studies addressed the need for a trusting environment. In Stronge’s (1990) research on performance evaluations in the
educational setting, he found that the evaluation process must be built on the characteristics of honesty in regard to the intent of the evaluation for an environment of trust to exist. And, Parylo et al. (2012), in their research on the principal evaluation process, found that when the principal trusted and respected the evaluator, the principal learned more from the evaluation process. Finally, Machell (1995) found that a barrier to effective development in current evaluation systems is the lack of trust between subordinates and their evaluator.

Summary of the Literature

As noted in the literature review, the ISLLC standards were the first common standards that principals across the nation developed and used to guide their work (McKerrow et al., 2006). Because of the lack of other performance standards for principals, evaluators sometimes used the ISLLC standards as evaluation criteria even though that was not their intended use (Babo & Ramaswami, 2011; Derrington & Sharratt, 2008; Johnston & Thomas, 2005; Kaplan et al., 2005; McKerrow et al., 2006). Subsequently, many states used the ISLLC standards as a foundation in the work they did to develop new principal evaluation criteria (Clifford & Ross, 2011).

The first standards in the nation completed to align the principal evaluation with performance standards was the ISLLC standards (Derrington & Sharratt, 2008; Kaplan et al., 2005; McKerrow et al., 2006; Yavuz, 2010), with the work continuing in recent years with the writing of new standards for principals. Research shows that when principal evaluation is aligned with clear criteria, and the principals understand the criteria, their performance in regard to the criteria will improve (Amsterdam et al., 2003; Catano & Stronge, 2007; Derrington & Sharratt, 2008; Goldring, Cravens, et al., 2009; Kaplan et al., 2005; Oyinlade, 2006; Sun et al., 2012). As the role of the principal shifts from principal as manager to principal as instructional
leader, the criteria need to be clear or principals may remain in the world of principal as manager (Camburn et al., 2010).

Further review of the literature illuminates the inconsistency of the processes, the criteria, and the lack of urgency with which evaluators evaluate principals (Kempher & Robb-Cooper, 2002). If the tools used in principal evaluation are not aligned with clear criteria and professional development, and if they are not modified for the individual principal, they are not as likely to provide application-based information to the principal (Catano & Stronge, 2007; Johnston & Thomas, 2005) that will lead to a change in the principal’s practice. This conclusion was evident in the literature about evaluation tools, the process, and the professional development. When the principal evaluation process is aligned with professional development, the value of the evaluation process increases for the principal (Cranston, 2008; McKerrow et al., 2006). By infusing the well-designed evaluation criteria and the “best practices” of professional development, evaluators will give principals the support needed to change their practice. Some of the “best practices” that should be included in the evaluation process are collaboration, open dialogue, and time for reflective practice (Parylo et al., 2012). Creators of the evaluation process can establish clear evaluation criteria and a process that supports principal learning in a trusting environment.

When principals understand both the criteria and the process evaluators use to evaluate their performance, they have a perception of procedural justice. Perceived justice assists the principal evaluator in earning the trust of the principal (Connell et al., 2003). When a principal trusts his or her evaluator, the effectiveness of the evaluation can increase. To create a trusting environment, the principal evaluator needs to ensure that the principal is supported and that open communication exists between him or herself and the principal (Tan & Tan, 2000). A trusting
relationship and environment may result in an evaluation of principals that increases the use of evaluation as a tool for principals’ professional development.

If an evaluation process is to be meaningful and to result in professional growth for the principal, elements of effective professional development need to be part of the evaluation process. The research on the process or cycle used during a principal’s evaluation is limited. However, there is extensive research about adult professional development. Adults learn when given the opportunity to work on skills that will impact their job performance (Mezirow, 1994). If the process used by evaluators to evaluate principals included the use of what we know to be effective adult professional development, the principal evaluation could be more meaningful for principals.

When reviewing the research on the process or systems of principal evaluation, a limitation is the dearth of studies on the topic (Davis et al., 2011). What the limited research does indicate is that the process of evaluating principals varies, as does the level of rigor (Condon & Clifford, 2010). The research available clearly states that the principal evaluation process should be a collaborative process between principals and their evaluator (Amsterdam et al., 2003; Clifford & Ross, 2011). Currently, the principal evaluator finds the principal evaluation process meaningful, but studies show the principal does not find the process meaningful (Thomas et al., 2000). Another resonating finding in the literature is that professional development is most productive when it is a cyclical process that continues to assess the learning, modifies and adjusts what should be learned, and continues the learning process (Dall’Alba & Sandberg, 2006). And finally, early research is emerging that shows the principal evaluation process should also be cyclical in nature without a permanent start and stop—an
ongoing process that continually assesses, monitors, and gives the opportunity to improve the professional practice in principals’ work (Clifford et al., 2012).
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

All research begins with a similar foundation. At a very general level, research consists of “three steps: 1) pose a question, 2) collect data and answer the question, and 3) present an answer to the question” (Creswell, 2005, p. 3). Research adds to our knowledge and the knowledge base of practitioners. It can help practitioners develop new ideas and evaluate the approaches they are using. It might fill a void, confirm or refute prior studies, add to literature about a practice, and assist in advancing or improving practices (Creswell, 2009).

To elaborate on the three general steps for research, the basic process includes identifying a problem, reviewing the literature available on the problem topic, specifying a purpose for the research, collecting data, analyzing and interpreting the data, and evaluating and reporting the results of the research. Two primary methods are available for conducting research: qualitative and quantitative. I conducted this study using qualitative methods.

Qualitative research is a means to explore and understand individuals or groups as they ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2009). It involves immersion in the setting and questions and procedures to facilitate the study. The researcher collects data in the natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, a phenomenon in terms of the meanings people bring to it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The qualitative researcher does not identify variables but rather explores and seeks to define the variables during the research. The researcher reviews the literature with a critical eye to both determine the strengths and weaknesses of prior research and identify missing components in the formal body of scholarly literature (Merriam & Simpson, 2000).
The data collected in qualitative research primarily come from words and should paint a picture for the researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Content analysis is the primary method used for data analysis. Fraenkel and Wallen (2002) described content analysis as “a technique that enables researchers to study human behavior in an indirect way, through an analysis of their communications. It is just what its name implies: the analysis of the usually, but not necessarily, written contents of the communication” (p. 405). The qualitative researcher is very interested in how things occur, particularly from the perspective of the participants in the study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2002). Qualitative reports typically rely upon extensive data collection to convey the complexity of a phenomenon or process. The purpose for a qualitative study is to “achieve an understanding of how people make sense of their lives, delineate a process rather than an outcome, and describe how people interpret their experience” (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 97).

Choosing a Research Design

The qualitative research method selected for this research aligned with the purpose of the study: to understand the evaluation process used to evaluate principals. While conducting the study, I was able to establish a clear understanding of the current principal evaluation process. The use of qualitative research resulted in a very vivid picture. The qualitative method allowed me a glimpse into the study participants’ worlds regarding the process evaluators used during the evaluation cycle and an opportunity to try to understand the social phenomenon from the actors’ perspective rather than trying to explain it from the outside (Ospina, 2004).

I conducted my research using a qualitative case study design. The purpose behind a case study design is to gain a clear understanding of a problem or situation (Merriam, 2009). Yin (2009) defined the case study research process as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a
contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 18). Case studies “concentrate attention on the way particular groups of people confront specific problems, taking a holistic view of the situation” (Shaw, 1978, p. 21).

This case study included one district using the AWSP Leadership Framework as a new approach to the principal evaluation process. The design allowed me as the researcher to examine issues and phenomena to gain an understanding that could improve practice and make recommendations to structure future research. The case study methodology “allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events—such as individual life cycles, small group behavior, organizational and managerial process, neighborhood change, school performance, international relations, and the maturation of industries” (Yin, 2009, p. 4). Qualitative case study research was appropriate for this study because the purpose was to explore the attitudes and perceptions of participants within a “bounded system,” specifically the district’s work with its principals during the evaluation process (Yin, 2009).

Data collection methods included a triangulation of sources: interviews with principal evaluators, interviews and focus groups with evaluated principals, and analysis of documents and tools used during the principal evaluation process. The triangulation of data collection methods increased the study’s validity because the research questions were analyzed and findings supported from multiple perspectives.

Focus of the Research

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What is the process used to evaluate principals?
2. How do the principal evaluators and principals perceive professional learning occurring as a result of the principal evaluation process?

3. How do the principal evaluators and principals perceive the connection between the principals’ professional learning during the principal evaluation process and the principals’ practices as instructional leaders?

The purpose of this study was to review the principal evaluation process from the perspective of both principal evaluators and the principals evaluated. From the evaluators’ perspectives, attention was on the implementation of the principal evaluation process, the focus of the principal evaluation process, the components of the principal evaluation process, and the perceived learning resulting from the process. From the principals’ perspective, attention was on the skills and knowledge the principals developed from the evaluation process in reference to their learning and growth as instructional leaders.

In conducting the study, I collected information on the actions taken by both the principal evaluators and the principals during the principal evaluation process and compiled the data and evidence. I conducted the study in a school district using the AWSP Leadership Framework. To summarize, I designed the study to allow me to develop an understanding about the process used during the principal evaluation cycle and the perceived impact of the evaluation process in a district using the AWSP Leadership Framework.

**Role of the Researcher**

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2002), which is the role I filled in this study. I conducted the interviews and collected the data. I also analyzed and interpreted the data. To help account for the validity of my work, I kept a reflexivity journal (Pillow, 2010) in which I outlined my work and thoughts during the interview.
process. Reflexivity helped me track and verify the work I completed as the primary instrument in the research. I also documented decisions made during the data analysis process in ongoing analytic memos. The reflexivity journal and the data analysis memos were tools that allowed me to review the work completed and strengthen confidence in the overall findings. In addition, I found it helpful to have debriefing conversations with a professional peer. I recorded the ideas, reflections, and thoughts that developed during those conversations in my memos.

As the researcher, I found this to be a labor-intensive process. During the process, I learned to ask probing questions, listen, think, and ask more probing questions to get to deeper levels in the conversation during interviews. I worked to build a picture using ideas and theories by talking with the principal evaluators and principals and reviewing the shared documents. While working with the study participants as the researcher, my focus was on listening to what they had to share without sharing my personal experiences. I had to work to gain a level of professional acceptance while at the same time remembering my role as a researcher and the need to maintain an objective perspective.

Sample and Context

I used purposeful sampling and chose a school district that designed a process for principal evaluation using the AWSP Leadership Framework as an evaluation tool. The alignment with the AWSP Leadership Framework was desirable because the majority of the school districts in Washington State have selected the AWSP Leadership Framework as the evaluation tool to be used for the principal evaluation process (Brown-Sims, Clayton, Chen, & Brandt, 2013). In purposeful sampling, the goal is to select cases that are likely to be “information-rich” with respect to the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2002). Thus, my intent in choosing the sample was to achieve an in-depth understanding of the selected district in
regard to the principal evaluation process, not to select a sample that would accurately represent a defined population.

The school district chosen for this case study was a pre-kindergarten through 12th grade district in Washington State that was located in a large suburb with some urban characteristics. The district served approximately twenty-one-thousand students. In terms of ethnic distribution, the students were predominately Caucasian, representing 62% of the student population. The second largest demographic was Hispanic, representing 14% of the student population. Students identified as Multi-racial represented 10% of the population. The remaining 14% of the population was spread fairly evenly across the remaining ethnic demographics of Pacific Islander, Asian, Black, and Native American. Thirty-five percent of the students qualified for free and reduced lunch, and 13% of the students received special education services. The district had approximately 1,030 teachers, 38 principals, and three principal evaluators in the district. I assigned the school district the pseudonym of Decker School District, and it will be referred to as such in this study.

Two principal evaluators and seven principals participated in the study. The study shares limited information about the principal evaluators and principals to maintain confidentiality. Confidentiality is important to maintain trust in the relationship between the principal evaluators and the principals, allowing them to continue the work they are doing together. Providing too many specifics about the principal evaluators and the principals in the participant description or in the findings in Chapter Four could allow someone to determine the identities of those sharing information.

The participants consisted of three secondary and four elementary principals. Five of the principals were female and two were male. Six of the principals were Caucasian and one was
Black American. All of the principals served for a minimum of 4 years and experienced an evaluation process prior to the new principal evaluation process being implemented during the 2013–2014 school year. The buildings of the participating elementary principals had student populations between 300 and 650. The secondary principals schools ranged in student population from 125 to 820 students.

Of the two principal evaluators, one had evaluated building administrators for 10 years, and the other had evaluated building administrators for four years. One of the evaluators had been in the district since 2000, and the other joined the district two years prior to the study. Both of the evaluators were Caucasian, with one being a male and the other a female. One evaluator was responsible for the annual evaluation of 13 principals while the other was responsible for the annual evaluation of eight principals.

**Data Collection**

**Interviews.** Interviews were the primary source of data collection. The study used interviews to make meaning of principal evaluators’ and principals’ experiences in the principal evaluation process. The interviews presented the “lived experience of the people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman, 2006, p. 9). Interviews provided first-person insights into the process of principal evaluation, which could not be solicited by observation alone (Patton, 2002). In this study, I wanted to understand the experience of the principal evaluation process, and interviewing both the principal evaluators and principals provided an opportunity to learn holistically about that experience because “as a method of inquiry, interviewing is most consistent with people’s ability to make meaning through language” (Seidman, 2006, p. 14).
To begin working with each participant, I briefly explained the purpose of the study and the interview process prior to the interview. I used a semi-structured interview format (Merriman, 2009) with open-ended questions as a guide to explore the principal evaluation process. An initial interview with each of the two principal evaluators allowed me to collect historical and background information about principal evaluation in the district (Appendix B). After the initial interview with the evaluators, I conducted two additional interviews individually with each of the evaluators who were study participants (Appendixes C & D). I interviewed each principal twice. I used a focus group format for the first interview with the principals (Appendix E). For the second interview, I individually spoke with each principal after he or she had completed the final evaluation meeting with his or her principal evaluator (Appendix F). I asked the principal evaluator and principal similar questions. I kept notes throughout the interview process in a face-to-face setting. According to Kvale (2006), interviews conducted as a part of qualitative research are an attempt to understand the world from the subjects’ points of view and to unfold the meaning of their lived world. The interviews give voice to common people, allowing them to freely present their life situations in their own words, and open for a close personal interaction between the researchers and their subjects. (p. 481)

The initial interviews explored the background of the principal evaluation process and the established groundwork for the process in the district. The subsequent interviews focused on the collection of details about the process used in the evaluation cycle, the present lived experience of the participants in regard to their work with principal evaluation, and their perceptions of the perceived learning as a result of the evaluation process.
Supporting documents. In addition to the interviews, I collected and analyzed documents. The documents included the AWSP Leadership Framework, the rubric used to collect data, final principal evaluation tools, evaluation documents that were used prior to the adoption of the new evaluation tool, principal questionnaires, contracts, and board policies that were relevant to the principal evaluation process. The collection and analysis of these documents added to the validity of the study (Merriam, 2009). I analyzed the documents in an attempt to contextualize organizational texts (Patton, 2002) and discern how they aligned or did not align with the other data collected. I reviewed and analyzed the documents as data sources to use in the triangulation of the data.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data within this study, I used a seven-phase process, which included organizing the data, immersion into the data, coding the data, generating categories and themes, interpreting the data through analytic memos, looking for alternative understandings, and writing the final report of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). I transcribed audiotaped interviews in a timely manner after completing them. The principal panel interviews averaged approximately seventy-five minutes or twenty-five pages, the individual principal interview transcriptions averaged approximately sixty minutes or nineteen pages, and the principal evaluator interview transcriptions averaged approximately ninety minutes or twenty-eight pages. This material provided more than 340 transcribed pages. A transcription service transcribed the interviews, and I reviewed and verified the transcripts for accuracy by comparing each transcript with the original recording.

To prepare for the analysis, I read and reread the data and notes. I re-listened to the recordings of interviews, looking for similarities and differences, and then documented findings
in analytic memos. Once I verified the transcribed interviews for accuracy, I maintained each transcription in a Word document. I became acquainted with and organized the data so the analysis process would be productive. I analyzed the data through coding and put the findings into categories, themes, and then findings (Merriam, 2009).

The process began as I was listening to the interviews, re-reading the data, and reviewing my notes shortly after the interviews. As I listened to and reviewed the data, I marked important relations, similarities, and dissimilarities. I then marked the data with descriptive names, creating tentative labels for the data that summarized what I saw emerging (Merriam, 2009). This was the first step in open or initial coding. My goal in this coding step was to keep an open mind to all possible theories that might have emerged while I reflected on the content and relationship of the data (Saldaña, 2009). The participant’s words with the attached code were then sorted into separate spreadsheets and color-coded according to the participant.

After sorting the data, I applied the focused coding method. I reviewed the initial codes to determine which made the most analytic sense to identify in categories. I wrote analytic memos during the coding process to reflect on the process and code choices, how the process of inquiry took shape, emergent patterns, categories, subcategories, and concepts in the data (Saldaña, 2009). The data review (Appendix G) defined categories such as growth, trust, questions, support, student growth goal, calibration, process, final evaluation, rubric, conversation, and process result. The review identified 21 categories. I re-sorted the descriptions into spreadsheets based on their new code for continued analysis.

I used selective coding for the final stage of data analysis. In this stage of coding, I identified themes based on the nature and relationship of the core categories emerging from the data. The identified themes were (a) evolution of the principal evaluation process; (b) the
evaluator attributes and skills needed in the evaluation process; and (c) the connected, cyclical, and reflective nature of the principal evaluation process. Each of these themes will be explained in detail in Chapter IV.

**Validity and Reliability**

I implemented systems and checks to ensure that the findings and conclusions are considered trustworthy by those reading the research and to increase the levels of validity and reliability in the study. If studies are to have an effect on the practice in the field, they “must be rigorously conducted; they need to present insights and conclusions that ring true to readers, practitioners, and other researchers” (Merriam, 2009, p. 210). I gave careful attention to the way data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted in an effort to present valid research findings. To ensure that the study met rigorous characteristics, I took the following steps: (a) I kept a reflexivity journal in which I outlined my work and thoughts during the interview process; (b) I used multiple methods of data collection that resulted in triangulation (Merriam, 2009); (c) I maintained a record of feedback received from findings of debriefing sessions with a professional peer (Lincoln & Guba, 1985); and (d) I conducted member checks by soliciting feedback on the emerging findings from some of the principal evaluators and principals interviewed.

I conducted this case study using a design that employed triangulation of research sources to investigate and explain the impact of the principal evaluation process in Decker School District. I conducted interviews and observations and obtained documents to collect evidence related to the principal evaluation process. Primarily, I collected data through face-to-face interviews conducted with the principals and their evaluators.
Positionality

The researcher’s positionality in a qualitative study is important to analyze. Because the researcher is the primary tool, the researcher’s biases can easily affect the outcomes of the study (Merriam, 2009). In explaining positionality, it is important to note that I am currently an assistant superintendent and that my job responsibility is to work with and evaluate principals. Previously, I was both a middle school and a high school principal. My past experience as an administrator was a strong contributing factor in my deciding to move into the next level of administration where I would be working with principals and conducting their annual evaluations. My work today as a principal evaluator is influenced by my experience of being evaluated as a principal. The evaluation process was not meaningful and was often a waste of time. I focus the work with principals that I do in my current position on trying to make the evaluation process a learning experience for the principals, allowing them to have meaningful feedback about their work as part of the evaluation process.

While conducting this study, I worked to ensure that my bias did not impede the results. In my position, it is inevitable that I will have ethical and political positions about the principal evaluation process. These beliefs are a concern if I do not acknowledge them. For schools to thrive, I believe that the leadership in our schools must be supported and given the opportunity to learn and grow professionally. The principal evaluation process should be one avenue that supports the growth of principals. Acknowledging my positions and beliefs helped to unmask the implicit bias and assisted me in responding critically and sensitively to the research (Griffiths, 1998). As a tool in the process and as the researcher, I needed to be aware of my beliefs. I worked to maintain an unbiased approach during the interviews, the analysis of data, and the interpretation of the results.
To negate the effect of positionality in the study, I worked to maintain a learning approach in the interview process with the principals and the principal evaluators. I was intentional about not sharing any of my experiences, instead maintaining a focus on asking questions about the participants’ experiences with the principal evaluation process. It was important that the participants understood I was interviewing them to listen and learn. The participants in this study seemed to appreciate the opportunity to talk about their experiences and share their perceptions with someone who was interviewing them, listening and taking notes.

During the data analysis process, I again needed to approach the work from the perspective of a learner. I worked to analyze the process and the method of implementation in the district studied and to refrain from drawing comparisons with my work. During the analysis, I focused on the coding and theme development to determine what the study results indicated.

**Study Limitations**

Every study has its limitations, and this one was not any different. The study had a small sample size and the sample was limited: The case size included only one district. A criticism of case study methodology is that it often depends on one case, which makes it incapable of providing a generalized conclusion. However, Yin (2009) argued that the goal of case study methodology is to establish parameters that can be applied to all research. Even a single case could be considered acceptable, provided it meets the established objective. Although generalizability may not exist, some transferability to other districts that are also using the AWSP Leadership Framework or a similar model will exist.

Another limitation is that the information the participants were willing to share may have been limited. This restriction could be a limitation because principals were indirectly talking about the effectiveness of their evaluators. There were a few times when principals hesitated as
they shared their experiences. However, they hesitated primarily when talking about principal evaluations they experienced in previous years. An additional limitation is in the selection of principals. Principal evaluators invited all the principals they evaluated to participate in the study. The invitation resulted in a variety of principals self-selecting to participate in the study. While I was not able to identify any bias, because the selection process relied on the principal evaluator, some bias may have been present in the selection, resulting in principals with certain common characteristics being part of the study.

It is important to note that as a researcher, I am a novice and was learning a great deal as I conducted this study. I learned from the process of conducting the empirical study. I also learned from the findings of the study. To ensure that the study was effective, I made an effort to develop a comfortable, professional relationship with all the study participants while working with them. As data were collected, I made personal contacts with the participants to ensure they were comfortable sharing information during interviews (Seidman, 2006). I worked to develop a relationship of trust and rapport with the participants to reduce any disadvantages resulting from my novice research skills.

A further limitation of the study is that the principal evaluation process has multiple steps that add depth and layers. This study captures the process the evaluator used during only one evaluation cycle. I used interviews with the principals to determine if they felt the process helped them develop their professional practice. Information gathered across multiple evaluation cycles might demonstrate practices, perceptions, and the usefulness of documents more accurately than the data gathered as part of this single-year study.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to review the principal evaluation process that principal evaluators followed. The study explored the principal evaluation process from the perspectives of both the principal evaluators and the principals evaluated. From the evaluators’ perspectives, attention was on the implementation of the principal evaluation process, the focus of the principal evaluation process, the components of the principal evaluation process, and the perceived learning resulting from the process. From the principals’ perspectives, attention was on the skills and knowledge principals developed as a result of the evaluation process in reference to their learning and growth as instructional leaders. This chapter presents data collected from principal evaluators and principals who engaged in a new principal evaluation process that aligned with the AWSP Leadership Framework during the 2013–2014 school year.

Participants shared their experiences about the principal evaluation process in one-on-one interviews. The data collected generated the following themes: (a) evolution of the principal evaluation process, (b) the evaluator attributes and skills needed in the evaluation process, and (c) the connected, cyclical, and reflective nature of the principal evaluation process. Both the principal evaluator and the principals found the new principal evaluation process to be significantly different from the process used in prior years. Although there was hesitation at the beginning of the process, all participants reported feeling as though the changes made to the process were beneficial.

The first theme, the evolution of the principal evaluation process, outlines the format of the evaluation process as well as differences between the process used in the 2013–2014 school year and prior years. Two subthemes emerged within the theme of the evolution of the principal
evaluation process. The subthemes are (a) the old evaluation process and (b) components of the current evaluation process. The second theme, the evaluator attributes and skills needed for the evaluation process, speaks to evaluator characteristics and the strategies the evaluator used in the evaluation process. The subthemes of this theme are (a) conversations and communication, (b) questioning skills, (c) collaboration, (d) trust, and (e) support. The final theme, the reflected, connected, and cyclical nature of the principal evaluation process, addresses outcomes of the evaluation process that resulted in the principal learning and the modifications made in the work done in their building. The subthemes within this theme consist of (a) reflection; (b) connection to the principals’ work and learning; and (c) formative, summative, and continual learning.

**Evolution of the Principal Evaluation Process**

The principal evaluation process implemented in the Decker School District was formatted differently than the process that had been used in previous years. What follows is an analysis of the data explaining principal evaluators’ and principals’ experiences in past principal evaluation processes and their beliefs about past practice. After reviewing the principal evaluation process used in previous years, I will review the data from the evaluation process as it was implemented during the 2013–2014 school year. Then I will outline the different components of the evaluation process from the perspectives of the principal evaluators and of the principals.

**The old evaluation process.** To develop a full understanding of the changes made to the principal evaluation process for the 2013–2014 school year in Decker School District, it is important to review the experiences the principals had in previous years with their principal evaluations. The data indicate that the principals’ experiences with their principal evaluations were much different, both in format and in outcomes, in previous years.
All the principals indicated that in past years, they would see their evaluators two or three times for evaluations and for other unstructured visits during the course of the year to have informal conversations. When talking about her past evaluation, an elementary school principal said, “Specifically to evaluation, I met with my evaluator twice. And meetings were not real frequent beyond that. And if they were, they weren’t about the evaluation. They would be about something else—staffing, or that kind of thing.” A secondary school principal observed, “To me, the evaluation was much more management-based. The discussions were around things we were doing and needs we had.” However, one principal indicated that the previous school year, prior to the implementation of the new evaluation, she did have more structured conversations that focused on instruction and student learning. She said, “I had a lot of help from the principal evaluator, and I felt like I received input. And, we did talk about data.” The belief of the principals was that how often a principal saw their evaluator was determined by who was assigned as the evaluator. That is, there was not a standardized practice for the principal evaluation process that was followed by all principal evaluators in Decker School District.

During the first meeting of the year between the evaluator and the principal, the principal shared his or her goals for the year. The goals were principal-determined and developed. Goals were not aligned with evaluation criteria. “We did fill out a form that asked us about our goals for the year, and some of the conversations I had with my principal evaluator related to what I had established for myself,” an elementary school principal explained. A secondary school principal said, “I’m not sure about coming back to those goals. I don’t know if that was necessarily something that we did; it seemed we just tried to get to the end.” Thus, the principal felt as though reflecting on the goals at the end of the year was not really important but rather a step to finish the process. Additionally, the principals felt that conversations with their principal
evaluators were not focused on their goals. In reflecting on the evaluation process used in previous years, the principals reported feeling as though many times their evaluators took steps simply to complete the evaluation.

In the initial and subsequent meetings, the principal and the principal evaluator had informal conversations. A secondary school principal explained that the meetings were always kind of that informal conversation piece . . . not really specific about the evaluation. Maybe once at the beginning of the year when everybody talks about evaluation, whether it is teacher, administrator, or whoever, but you know, setting the goals. Then, the meetings were more informal visits.

Most of the principals said that in previous years, the conversations they had with their principal evaluators were very informal, or they felt as though they had no conversation at all. The lack of conversation led to the principals seeing the evaluation process as non-collaborative. Partially as a result of the lack of collaboration, the principals saw the principal evaluation process as one in which they did not learn and grow. All but one principal said something similar to what this secondary school principal clearly stated: “In the past, we didn’t talk about student growth and building goals and instruction.” An elementary school principal stated, “With the old process [it] seemed like there were two areas—exceeds expectations and satisfactory. Satisfactory was the red flag. No conversation took place. Do I sign it or not? What does it mean?” Principals did not feel informed based on the limited feedback provided in the previous evaluation process. One principal summed up her experience with past evaluations by saying, “I did not grow in the past. The process wasn’t collaborative. I mean, certainly evaluators ask you for a little input, but really they give you a report that says nice things about you.” In the past, evaluators
completed evaluations of principal performance as outlined by state laws, but those evaluations did not help the principals grow in their practice.

The final findings about the principal evaluation process used in the Decker School District in prior years related to the principals’ input into final evaluations and the knowledge the principals believed their evaluators had about their actual job performance. When principals reflected on past practice, they noted the way data were collected for the evaluation. In most cases the principal submitted items related to their job and those items ended up in the evaluation. One principal stated:

In past years, I would have known exactly what was going to be on the final evaluation because it’s what I fed my boss and that is what I sent him or her electronically. You know, sometimes, I didn’t even look at it because I knew . . .

In the past the principals felt that they needed to show and discuss with their evaluators information about their work to get the “right mark.” They referred to the final evaluation as earning a grade. An elementary school principal explained that either “you met the grade or you didn’t.” There was a feeling from the principals that in the past the principal evaluators actually knew very little about the work that was taking place in their school buildings. One principal explained that in the past what was actually happening in the building “used to be a secret—my supervisor did not know what I was doing.” The secrecy was not intentional, but there was not an evaluation process in place that allowed for the evaluators to understand the work of the principals they were evaluating. Principals also expressed feeling that in the past, due to the lack of clear criterion and rubrics, the principal evaluators did not know exactly what they should be writing about in the final evaluation. A secondary school principal stated, “The previous years’ evaluations were more about people just telling me what stuff is going on, not as [they were]
supposed to be, reflecting on my practice.” In the format used in previous years, principals did not feel as though they understood the evaluation process or had input into the process. After working in the new evaluation process for half of the year, an elementary school principal stated, “So, I think this one is definitely more collaborative, whereas the last one was what someone else thought of me. And quite frankly, I didn’t feel safe . . . contradicting any of it.” Based on the knowledge principals have now about evaluation processes, they felt as though the process used in previous years did not accurately reflect the work they were doing or should be doing. The process also did not expect them to reflect on their practice to improve and grow in their professional practices.

The new evaluation process. Having reviewed the data collected on the old evaluation process, I will now provide data collected on the new principal evaluation process used during the 2013–2014 school year. I will review six sections of the process: the meetings held between the principals and the principal evaluators, the self-evaluation completed by the principal, the evidence collected, student growth goals, use of the rubric in the evaluation process, and the final evaluation. The principal evaluators’ and the principals’ descriptions of their experiences will illustrate each of the components.

Meetings. In the principal evaluation process used during the 2013–2014 school year, the number and purpose of the meetings was very different from the number and purpose of meetings held in previous years. The process included frequent, ongoing meetings between the principal evaluator and the principal throughout the year. Principals met with their evaluator five or six times to have discussions that focused on the evaluation criteria. These meetings lasted for 1.5–2 hours. From a principal’s perspective, “the number of meetings was important; they kept
me focused on the right work.” Both the principals and the principal evaluators saw the meetings as very valuable time spent together. As an elementary school principal explained:

It’s really easier than trying to justify to someone, who you see once every whenever.

For me, working with our evaluator like this, it is normal to have her in my building. She is always right there. You can text her, or she’s right there. And, it’s ongoing conversations that guide me in the work I’m doing.

While they described their feelings in slightly different ways, all the principals indicated that they found the meetings challenging, meaningful and important. The meetings helped the principals stay focused on the work outlined in the rubric.

In addition to the five or six meetings the principal evaluators had with the principals, they also conducted 30- to 40-minute visits to the schools approximately once a month to observe in classrooms. Most of the visits were conducted with the principal and evaluator going into classrooms together and then having a conversation about instruction they saw during the observation. Occasionally the evaluator visited the school and the principal did not accompany the principal evaluator on the classroom visits. Principals found that the classroom visits, both the joint visits and those in which the evaluator visited alone, provided information additional to that shared in the conversations they had during their evaluation meetings. As a principal evaluator explained:

I completed the walkthrough visits, which kind of turned into a whole bunch of different things over the course of the year in addition to simply visiting classrooms. It’s morphed into picturing how the building could grow, [for example], “Oh, we don’t have a data wall. Okay. So, let’s make one. What do you need to know? How can I help?”
The principal evaluators saw the classroom visits as a valuable data collection opportunity. The visits were usually used to guide the next conversation the evaluator had with the principal. The time the principal evaluator spent in the building allowed the evaluator to become familiar with the principal’s work and to collect data used to guide their conversations.

**Self-evaluation.** Both the principals and the principal evaluators referred to the self-evaluation that was completed by some principals in August as the initial step in the principal evaluation process. Although some principals did not remember completing the self-evaluation in August, many did remember after reflecting on the principal evaluation process and how it progressed throughout the year. Evaluators did not require principals to complete the self-evaluation; rather, they encouraged principals to complete it as a starting point. A secondary school principal who did not remember completing the self-evaluation when he first reflected on the process said:

> At one of our meetings, we went through and rated ourselves and I remember doing that because I brought the idea back and had the teachers rate themselves. Yeah, I vaguely remember a self-evaluation—and the reason I didn’t remember it is because, I don’t know, human nature or something, but [the tool] stressed that I’m basic [in many criterion areas].

The process was scary to some, but they found after talking with their evaluators that it was intended to help the principals determine on which criterion to focus their learning. The principal evaluators felt as though the self-evaluation was a good first step in the evaluation process, but they said it was not required. Reflection and self-regulation are important components of an evaluation process. As part of the process, principals should engage in some reflection (Reeves, 2009). Many who completed the self-evaluation found it useful and had it
sitting next to them during their first evaluation conversation with their evaluator. One of the evaluators suggested that in the future the self-evaluations would be a first step in establishing a professional goal in addition to the student growth goals that were set by the principals. Both the principals who completed the self-evaluation and the evaluators felt as though the self-evaluation was a valuable step in the process. Two principals did not complete the self-evaluation; they saw it as optional and additional work they did not have time to complete. The principal evaluators planned for the self-evaluation to continue to be a part of the process with small modifications made to its implementation in the school year after the study was completed.

**Evidence.** As the new evaluation process was implemented at the beginning of the year, both the principal evaluators and the principals believed the collection of evidence for the process would result in an extensive compilation. The evaluators supplied the principals with criterion-tabbed binders and hanging files to organize their evidence. The hanging file included a laminated sheet of sample evidence put together by AWSP. Everyone believed the collection of artifacts as evidence was going to be a significant part of the evaluation. Principals were concerned. An elementary school principal said, “One of my concerns at the beginning was I was going to have to collect all this evidence, and I was worried about how I would have the time.” The original thought was that principals were going to be sorting a fair amount of evidence, and principal evaluators were going to have to review the submitted evidence. However, as an elementary school principal explained:

First we all wanted to collect stuff because it’s safe, right? I had all of my stuff in one place and organized and color-coded it. But, that isn’t really where the real work is, right? That isn’t where the learning is for me, for teachers, for anybody. It [evidence] helps me talk about my practice as I go through artifacts, but it isn’t my practice.
A secondary school principal explained,

We wanted stuff. We wanted portfolios. We wanted to know, “What stuff do I need to put in my binder?” We just had an overreliance on stuff because it was the thing we knew. But, I think in the end the artifacts only support the deep discussion.

Initially, the principals were very nervous about what they needed to produce. As the data show, they wanted to “look good” and were concerned about what it would take to impress their evaluators. As the process began to play out and the principal evaluators and principals were meeting, the collection of evidence took on a different look.

Evaluators collected a great deal of evidence during the meetings. The evidence came from the conversations the principal evaluator had with the principal. As a secondary school principal shared:

As we talked, the evaluator would add evidence to my rubric. The evidence is talked about in the meeting, and then often the evaluator will ask to see more about that topic. I pull out the artifact that supports what we were talking about.

Most principals said that during the conversations they had with their evaluator, they pulled out artifacts that supported their work around what they were discussing. In addition, principals said they sent copies of items such as their meeting agendas, training outlines, letters to parents, survey results, and newsletters to their evaluators. An elementary school principal said:

My evaluator would visit after [professional development] time with my staff and say, “So, how did your RTI go?” And I’m like, “Oh yeah, I sent you that agenda.” So, that was nice. And, it’s a way [for him] to kind of keep a pulse on what’s going on in 13 buildings without having to always be present. So, that was good.
This principal and others found that evaluators’ feedback about the documents sent to them showed that the evaluators were interested in the work they were doing. It also supported the ongoing work the principal evaluator did with the principals. When the evaluators actually reviewed the documents provided to them, they were better prepared for conversations with the principal. Another elementary school principal reported that after submitting different artifacts, she appreciated the responses from her evaluator:

The evaluator came back with questions such as, “This is unusual. Tell me more about that.” So, that helped. And, it felt like, “Oh my gosh! We’re participating! And, I want to share what I’ve done.” And then, there are questions about it. So, a lot of us have taken different ways of informing our evaluator about our work.

The principals noted that it was meaningful to them to have their evaluators provide feedback, ask questions, and use evidence the principal sent in discussions. The principals appreciated knowing the evaluators were reviewing the material. This step the principal evaluator took made a difference in the principal evaluation process.

The evaluators felt the conversations behind artifacts were very meaningful. One evaluator said, “The artifacts and evidence are important, but I don’t want people to spend too much time just pulling together all this evidence.” The other evaluator explained that the evidence requested from principals was specific to the areas in which the evaluator was working with the principal on the principal’s professional practice. Everything was not needed from everyone. The evaluators found that some principals would submit a great deal of evidence, but it was through the conversations that the evaluator learned what was really being done by the principal. One evaluator explained how evidence told the story:
The principal has great connections with people and develops wonderful relationships with everyone. However, he has struggled in the use of data, criterion three. Now, he sends me pictures of data walls and agendas of staff meetings with data discussions as an item.

The evidence showed that the principal was working on the area of his or her professional practice in which growth was needed. The next example shows how one of the evaluators viewed evidence. The evaluator said, “I’m starting to call it ‘examples of practice’ because ‘evidence’ sounds like a courtroom term. It sounds like ‘proof,’ and that’s not what we are asking.” Examples of a principal’s practice can be gathered through e-mail, during a conversation, or via submission of a hard copy of sample items of the work.

**Student growth goals.** The student growth goals were a new component of the evaluation process for principals. Each principal needed to establish student growth goals in the following areas: (a) academic growth of the entire student body, (b) academic growth by the students of a selected teacher(s), and (c) evidence of the achievement gap closing in an identified subgroup. The process of setting a student growth goal and the tool used to guide the principals in setting the growth goals was one of the more frustrating parts of the process for both the evaluators and the principals. However, data show that setting such goals resulted in significant growth for both the principals and the principal evaluators.

The evaluators asked principals to establish student growth goals that aligned with the focus of their teachers’ student growth goals and the building goals. The principals found that to be a good practice; as this secondary school principal noted, “My evaluator was great, allowing us to really set the goals based around our building improvement plan, so that it didn’t seem like it was additional work; it is just the work that we are doing.” Principals also found that directly
connecting their student growth goals to teachers’ student growth goals was a worthwhile practice. An elementary school principal who aligned her student growth goals to her teacher goals said:

> When we addressed the teachers’ student growth goals mid-year, it was like they knew my goals, because they are my goals. And so, it’s kind of nice. When we met, we were talking about our goals, not like the teachers giving me theirs. It was like, “Yours are mine, and mine are yours.” That was a brand new experience to have that really nesting from the building down to the subgroups and the classrooms. And, that’s been fun.

And a secondary school principal said:

> So, I based mine off of a collection of what I gathered from my teachers, because I knew we are going to be held accountable, and us more than the teachers. So my goals were real goals, and they have been shared; they have been adjusted.

Principals saw the teachers’ goals as their goals, which brought more significance and accountability to the goal-setting process.

A great deal of experimentation went into the form principals would use as they developed their goals. In addition, much trial and error was present in the work of the principals and the principal evaluators in developing, implementing, monitoring, and measuring whether a goal was met. Everyone involved seemed excited to use what they learned during the 2013–2014 school year and to apply it to the evaluation process in the 2014–2015 school year. One evaluator talked about moving forward with student growth goals:

> I’m going to be a little bit more focused on goals, continuing to come back to data somehow. That was a piece that I really think was a deficiency. We handled it. And, we
got through it and did some good work there. But, it was not as ongoing as I would’ve liked.

The evaluators and principals thought about how to modify the goal-setting process early in the spring to make adjustments as they established goals for the following year.

The evaluators were intentional about asking principals about the student growth goals they had set during the evaluation meetings. Conversations the principals had about their goals with their evaluators kept the student growth goals as a point of focus. One evaluator said, “I took this to be my responsibility to keep asking them questions about the progress with their student growth goals.” A secondary school principal said, “Every time I met with my evaluator, we talked about the student growth goals.” This continual focus on student growth goals resulted in comments such as this one from a secondary school principal: “The student growth goals changed the focus of the school, and it will change even more next year.” And an elementary school principal said, “The work around student growth goals has impacted the way I look at data and teachers look at data. Ultimately, it has impacted teaching because we all want our students to do well.” The persistence on the part of the evaluators in making sure all the principals wrote student growth goals and then continually monitored and assessed them throughout the year did not yield one negative comment from the principals.

**Rubric.** The tool used during the evaluation process was the rubric in the AWSP Leadership Framework, formatted to allow for the input of evidence for the components of each criterion. The AWSP Leadership Framework is based on eight criteria (see Appendix A). Each of the criteria is comprised of one to four components. The Decker School District used the framework as a tool to learn about the standards, collect evidence of the principal’s work, and
track ongoing evidence. All of the principals indicated it was a helpful tool on which to document evidence during the evaluation process. One principal called it a “living document.”

As the evaluators met with the principals and had discussion aligned with the rubric, they realized that covering all the criteria on the framework was going to take some very focused conversations. Thankfully, they felt the rubric aided them in having those conversations. From an evaluator’s perspective:

- It starts with the rubric and then the lists of evidence. And, those drove out the questions.
- What I appreciated about that rubric is often in conversations we make assumptions that we know what principals are doing. Using the rubric caused me to be deeper in my work.

When using the rubric, the principal evaluators realized they did not know everything the principals were or were not doing. As the principals conversed with the principal evaluators, the principal evaluators took notes on a rubric to collect evidence and highlight different parts of the rubric descriptors for the different components. An evaluator described his or her use of the rubric:

- I would sit and have a conversation with the person and highlight certain areas, so along the way they could see that they were proficient or moving into distinguished because as we talked and then highlighted the rubric, the principal’s placement on the rubric for that moment in time became evident.

One of the evaluators collected the evidence by putting it into a document on his computer as he talked with principals. The other took notes on a paper copy of the rubric and entered it into a Word version of the rubric after the meeting. After each meeting, both evaluators sent the updated rubric with highlights and evidence to the principal. Throughout the month, both the evaluator and principal added evidence to the rubric. Prior to a scheduled evaluation meeting
with the principal, the evaluator usually sent an e-mail to the principal with an agenda for their meeting indicating which sections of the rubric they would discuss.

From the perspective of an elementary school principal, using the rubric was “always a constant merging of our thoughts and our work together.” All the principals spoke to the document being a shared tool that was used to add evidence by both the principal and the evaluator. All the principals reported that they found the tool helpful. The principals realized that the principal evaluators used the highlighted areas of the rubric to guide their discussions. Parts of these discussions were about where the principal’s current level of work fell on the rubric. One secondary school principal spoke of a conversation in which the principal and the evaluator did not initially see eye to eye about placement on the rubric:

It’s good conversations when you determine placement on the rubric together. It’s not about my evaluator deciding what I do; it’s a much more powerful process if I decide where I am on the rubric. And I remember my evaluator saying, “Okay. So, tell me about that. Here is where I placed you on the rubric. Here is where you placed yourself. Tell me why, and let’s read through the rubric.” Then I realized, “I guess I am only basic.” I had more than one conversation where when I actually read the rubric I couldn’t argue. It was like, “Yeah, okay.” But, I read the rubric and know what I need to work on.

The principal accepted the work implied by the evaluator’s perception of where the principal stood in the context of the rubric. The principal’s willingness to accept the evaluator’s perception seemed to be attributable to the skills and attributes of the evaluator. The evaluator skills and attributes data is the next overarching theme that will be explained.
**Final evaluation.** The summative part of the principal evaluation process was the final evaluation meeting and write-up. Both the principal evaluators and the principals referred to the final evaluation meeting and write-up as summative in nature, but many also saw that it had formative characteristics because the information in the evaluation would be used to guide the principals’ work during the following year. However, as outlined in Washington Senate Bill 5895 (2012), the final evaluation was the final report on the principal’s performance, which had to be filed with both the district and the state. It scored principals on a four-point scale as unsatisfactory, basic, proficient, or distinguished in each of the eight criteria as well as with an overall summative score.

Prior to the final evaluation meeting, the principal evaluator sent the final evaluation to the principal with evidence and scoring listed. The principal then had the opportunity to provide additional artifacts if he or she felt information was missing. He or she would add the missing pieces and e-mail the evaluation back to his or her evaluator. The principal and the evaluator would then schedule a meeting in which they would sit down to review the principal’s work throughout the year. An elementary school principal commented that the final evaluation included “evidence from interactions, events, meetings, and documents the evaluator had seen throughout the year. It all contributed to the final evaluation.” Other principals called the final evaluation a summary of the year. A secondary school principal articulated an attitude expressed by many principals when he or she said of the final evaluation, “There were no surprises.” The principal added:

I remember trying to convince him I was really distinguished in an area, and I lost. But what he said in that situation, he said I just need more evidence. I wasn’t surprised by any of the scoring. We had talked about them all [all the criteria].
One secondary school principal said, “I can see it being a tougher conversation when the end result might say you’re not proficient, because then you’re going to be fighting for moving yourself up in certain areas but . . . ” The same principal said the final evaluation showed his work as “basic in a few areas,” adding, “I knew it was coming. I didn’t feel good about where I was in those areas, but they are areas where I need to improve.” Most principals acknowledged that they received one or more areas scored as “basic.”

The principal evaluators said the final evaluations were factual information about the work the principals had done throughout the year. Examples of the principal’s practice, collected during the evaluation process, were included in the final evaluation. The principal evaluators also noted that the principal evaluation did not have any commentary, such as, “Mr. Smith has been very successful and had a great year.” Reviewing some of the final evaluations showed that the comments were not commentaries but rather evidence of performance and recommendations for future work. The information included in the final evaluation was evidence from the principal’s work during the year. An evaluator clarified, “It is fine to have a combination of basic, proficient, and distinguished scores. The learning piece is next, so you’re strong in this area and need to work in this area. That is where we begin our work.” Another comment made by an evaluator about scoring and working towards growth was, “The incentive is not the scoring but the rubric language to know what it is principals need to do to move, for example, from proficient to distinguished.” The evaluators saw the final evaluation meeting as a time for reflecting on what happened throughout the year.

**Evaluator Attributes and Skills Needed in the Evaluation Process**

Analysis demonstrated that the data, attributes, and skills of the evaluators were a significant element of the findings. The evaluator led ongoing conversations that included
thought-provoking questions and resulted in a collaborative approach to the work in the evaluation process. Through these ongoing conversations and collaborative approach the principals trusted their evaluator and felt as though their evaluator supported them. The following data are broken into the subthemes of the conversations held as a part of the process, the questions were asked to encourage deeper thinking of the principals, the collaborative environment that was created, the trust principals had for their evaluator, and the supportive approach of the evaluator.

**Conversations and communication.** The conversations were an important form of ongoing communication in the evaluation process implemented in the Decker School District. The principals all used descriptors such as *authentic, real, meaningful, rich, helpful,* and *valuable.* As a secondary school principal explained, “The process, for me, it was the richest conversation that I’ve had with a supervisor. So I guess . . . the work just led to some great conversations, more conversations and more in-depth conversations.” An elementary school principal said, “Our conversations were authentic and real . . . this evaluation and having these conversations, I started thinking about the entire school. They were good conversations that made me think.” Another secondary school principal said, “The conversations, because they were different than conversations [we] had before; they weren’t difficult. But at times, they were challenging. I don’t think we’d grow if they were not challenging. So, challenging in a good way.” The principals felt as though the frequent conversations that pressed them to think at higher levels were a key part of the evaluation process. Principals said the same thing about the quality and importance of the conversations regardless of who their evaluator was.

Principal evaluators and principals both described different things happening during the conversations. The principals reported that the evaluators would read the rubric, and then they
would talk about what was being done, or not done, in a specific area. If it was an area of growth for the principal, the conversation was about how the principal might pursue work in that area. Much of the information documented in the rubric stemmed from the conversations. When I asked one principal, “How did the conversations you had with your evaluator impact your desire to grow in the areas of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and Response to Intervention (RTI)?” she explained:

We have been talking about tracking data for all students and finding a way to put structures in place to support all students. Sixty percent of our students did not exit the Learning Assistance Program (LAP) program. Dang! That led to discussions around Response to Intervention, RTI. I need to learn more about both RTI and CCSS. The conversations made me realize what I needed to learn.

A secondary school principal spoke about the conversations around the academic growth of students, saying, “What I heard was a very intentionally focused conversation about student learning and how we can really demonstrate and show growth. My supervisor was looking for that.” And, an elementary school principal summed it up with, “I’ve talked more about instruction with my boss this year than I have ever done in all the years prior.”

The evaluators also believed conversation played a vital role in the evaluation process. The evaluators saw the job of the principal as being very different at the time of the study than it was even two years prior. Therefore, they felt the evaluation and support needed to be different. One evaluator made the following analogy:

I equate it to the kid in college who is studying super hard, but they’re studying all the wrong stuff. In other words, they’re just not necessarily focused on the right things all the time. The rubric has helped us get to the right things. The conversations start small
and expand to talking more about what their practice is. Then, “What does the rubric say?”

From the evaluators’ view, the conversation was a part of changing practice. However, they realized that with some principals the process would be slow. That was a belief in part because the evaluators indicated that, much like the principals, they were learning and growing in their usage of the new Framework and evaluation criteria. One evaluator shared an experience that showed his own learning needed to occur, saying,

I had a few conversations where the focus wasn’t where it needed to be. I walked out at the end of our meeting thinking, “What just happened there?” We had talked about things, but there was no focus to the rubric. I had not been prepared.

The same evaluator spoke about the vagueness the conversations had at times. The evaluator expressed a desire to ensure that the meetings all had a purpose and that the conversations were meaningful, saying:

I worry about the vagueness of the conversation piece. People interpret things differently. I don’t know that somebody else is interpreting it the way I am because they connect it to what they know and I know different things than they know, so I try to connect the conversation to things they know.

Both evaluators put a lot of thought into the conversations they had with principals. One evaluator said, “Conversation is a strength because we’re talking about real practice, and we have a reason for it.” The evaluators felt the conversations needed to have a purpose.

Prior to meeting with a principal, the evaluators thought about the conversations they would have with the principals. An evaluator explained how a conversation was structured,
working to dig deeper in order learn about the principal’s practice around criterion three, planning with data:

I’d say, “Talk to me about a difficult conversation that happened at a staff meeting with regards to data; one where it was tense.” One might reply, “Well, you know, I didn’t have a lot of difficult conversations with the whole staff. But, I had a ton of them in the new teacher evaluation process.” He understood the question . . . so I’d say, “Well talk to me about some of the conversations with those folks.”

The goal for the evaluator was to dig deeper to learn about the principal’s practice and help the principal reflect on his or her practice. The evaluators found that all principals did not respond in the same manner. They saw the need to differentiate their work with different principals. One evaluator recalled, “When having conversations with some principals, all I needed to do was ask and they filled me in and shared much. With others, I had to keep pressing in different ways . . . just like working with kids in the classroom.” However, an evaluator said:

A couple of times during the data discussions, it got real tense. Working with secondary administrators to talk about data got really tough. A few times I almost wanted to let them off the hook and say, “Hey, this is about the conversation; it’s not really about the data. At this point, we’re practicing.” And, I actually did let one principal off the hook. She was upset and needed to process. The next time we met, she explained her plan. I want the impact of a data focus to be for the principal to start to own some of the pieces and want to do it. Whether it’s wanting to do a good job or because it’s good practice, but either way . . .
Ultimately, the evaluators felt that the conversations were far more important than the practice of identifying a principal as “basic” or “proficient.” The conversations were what helped the principals work toward changing their practice.

The conversations took place in the ongoing meetings. The principals felt as though the ongoing communication with their evaluator was instrumental in their learning. An elementary principal said, “I value the two-way communication we have had a number of times this year.” The number of times the principal evaluator and principal met and had these in-depth conversations were a meaningful part of the principal evaluation process. A secondary principal stated, “If you’re going to do that evaluation really well, you can’t just do it all through e-mail communication. You have to be here [in the school building] and see what the principal is talking about.” Participants expressed the opinion that the number of conversations held (between 6 and 10 formal conversations) throughout the year and the quality of the communication between the principal evaluator and the principal were key to the success of this new evaluation process.

**The evaluators questioning skills.** The data showed that the ability of the principal evaluator to both conduct quality conversations and ask higher-level questions was an important contributor to the evaluation process. However, the principal’s input about how the evaluator asked questions directly connected with the quality of the conversations. Again and again in data collection, the quality of the questions the evaluator asked the principals surfaced. The principals noted that the questions asked of them really pushed them to think about their professional practice. Along with the conversations, all principals, regardless of their evaluator, spoke about how the questions their evaluators asked pressed them to think and reflect on their decisions and actions.
The evaluators both felt as though it was their responsibility to help principals grow and learn. To do that, they both said, they asked quality questions. One evaluator said, “I took it on as my responsibility to keep asking the principals questions about their progress. So if somebody struggled, ‘Okay. What do we do about that?’” The evaluators were intentional about the questions they asked and saw the questions as one form of feedback they were giving principals. But at times, using questions with principals was uncomfortable and challenging for principals. The evaluators were aware that principals struggled when they were continually asked questions designed to get them to think about and reflect on their actions. Principals were used to simply being told what to do or that their actions were correct or incorrect. The evaluators worked to help the principals get to authentic self-evaluation as part of the process. One evaluator talked about the feedback and how he perceived principals accepting the process:

It felt like we were weaning them off of our feedback and into a real reflective conversation. My feedback is in the questions I’m asking and that’s hard for principals. They want a judgment and not feedback. [The principals want to say] “Okay. So, how am I doing, and what do you want me to be doing?”

Although some principals struggled initially with the questions they were being asked, this elementary school principal explained how she found the questions powerful:

Because of the questions asked, my evaluator isn’t telling me what to do. I’m always thinking about what I need to do. He didn’t need to tell me what I needed to do or where I was lacking because it is always coming from me after I answer the questions.

This quotation from an evaluator is an example of how questions were asked of principals: “I’d ask questions about next year. ‘How will you connect this year’s student growth goals to next year’s student growth goals to push your teachers to the next level?’” And, an elementary school
principal shared a specific example of questioning when she was going to have parents complete a survey. She explained that the evaluator didn’t just say,

“Oh, parent survey, great form of communication.” He said, “What does it look like?” I said, “Oh, by the way, we changed it.” “Why did you change it? Show me the old one. Let me see the new one. What questions do you hope to get answered through the survey?”

The questions the principal evaluators asked caused the principals to think deeply about the actions they were taking. The following are examples of additional questions asked of the principals by the principal evaluators:

- Tell me more about . . .
- Why did you choose to do this instead of go another route?
- What do you mean by . . .?
- Can you give me more explanation for . . .?
- Will your work in that area increase student learning?
- Why did you change that?
- What was your role in making the change happen?
- How will you change that practice for the following year?

The principals all were able to give examples of questions asked by their evaluator that caused them to reflect upon and think about their actions.

A secondary school principal said, “The evaluator asks the questions in a really authentic and curious way.” Another elementary school principal said, “The evaluator needed to have strong questioning strategies that are nonthreatening and real. My evaluator is very casual about it but prompts me in a way that makes me want to move forward.” Another secondary school
principal said, “With a few questions [that were asked], I felt myself bristling and thinking, *What do you mean by that?* But, we continued to talk, and I’d answer his questions and quickly relaxed.” The questions made the principals feel uncomfortable at times but ultimately made them think about their actions and next steps. An elementary school principal explained, “The evaluator asked really hard questions that challenged my thinking.” And another secondary school principal said, “The questions made me realize I wasn’t always intentional with my actions. Having to verbalize things made me look deeper at my actions.” The process of questioning by the evaluator was ongoing as shared by a secondary school principal:

> My evaluator has a way of asking a lot of good questions. And sometimes, when I answer, [it will lead us] through a couple of more questions in addition to the initial answer. So, I think it had to do with a lot of reflecting and me having to justify why I was making certain decisions or doing certain things. I think that was a growth piece. Through the questions, the evaluators were able to help the principals engage in critical, reflective thinking and become more self-evaluate.

**Collaboration.** The conversations that were held in the ongoing meetings and the questions asked of principals led to what both the principal evaluators and principals saw as a collaborative process. Six of the seven principals described the process as collaborative. The principal evaluators also found the process collaborative as they worked with principals and as they worked with each other to calibrate the process used to evaluate principals.

An elementary principal stated, “A strength of the process is the collaboration with my principal evaluator. We sit down and my evaluator wants to know what I think and what I am doing.” A secondary principal said, “For some reason with him, maybe it is his style, I just have no ego... we just work together.” And another secondary principal said, “We were constantly
merging our thoughts and working together.” The principals found that the principal evaluators were very open and listened well. The principals perceived the principal evaluators as wanting to know what they were thinking about their approach to their work.

Another way in which the principals saw the process as collaborative was in the learning that was taking place. A secondary principal stated, “In the process, I think we are all learning together. It is all about growth and we are in this together.” An elementary principal said, “As a result of the evaluation process and the time we spent together, I think the professional development time got better—both my professional development and what I was able to offer teachers.” The principals made a connection between collaboration with this process and personally learning new things, and as a result their teachers were learning new things as well.

The evaluators strived to maintain a collaborative environment, an environment in which the principal evaluator and the principal would talk about possible actions a principal should consider. A principal evaluator said,

Principals talked through what they wanted to do with a teacher and I would coach them, asking questions and helping them determine the data to collect. But ultimately they had to do the work because it was contextual and leadership specific.

A secondary principal said, “We were constantly merging our thoughts and working together.” Both the principal evaluators and the principals spoke about the numerous conversations they had about the work that was happening in the building. Because it was truly a conversation with the evaluator asking a number of questions to learn about the work the principal was doing and encouraging the principal to think about his or her work from different perspectives, the process was seen as collaborative. To summarize the collaborative efforts in place during the evaluation process, an elementary principal explained, “The purpose of evaluation is to improve our
practice, improve the practice of teachers, increase student learning, and to learn to work together—to truly be collaborative—teachers with principals and principals with their supervisor.”

**Trust and support.** Two qualities of evaluators that became evident through the data were the abilities to gain trust and to provide support for the principals. The principals and the principal evaluators said that it was important that there be a strong feeling of trust between the principal evaluator and the principal. For the process to be successful, the data indicated, the principal also needed to feel supported.

**Support.** The supportive relationship that the principals talked about was not one in which principal evaluators were expected to see the principals as not needing to learn and grow or as not having both strengths and areas for growth. As an elementary school principal explained:

> My evaluator is always there in a supportive capacity. But if I was doing something wrong . . . [my evaluator] would completely have no problem telling me, “Don’t do that.” But I see my evaluator as really supportive. And like the conversation we had the other day, as we were talking about my goals, we were talking specifically about one teacher. And the work I’ve done with that teacher. And the places I’ve made an impact, and what I didn’t get to. And, my evaluator walked me through a few strategies I could use with the teacher. Not in a telling way, but, “Hey, here’s something to think about.” It was really helpful as I thought about how I’m going to continue my work with that teacher.

The principals found the opportunity to talk with their evaluators and spend time strategizing the next steps they would take in various leadership situations valuable. A secondary school principal said, “My evaluator is very supportive but also willing to ask the hard questions.” And
an evaluator said, “When I ask the questions I’m listening for, ‘What support do you need from me? How can I provide help to you?’” The evaluators intentionally looked for ways to be supportive of the principal they were working with but were cautious not to simply tell him or her what to do. An elementary school principal summarized it by saying, “We all know that we have places that we need to grow in and that we have the support of our principal evaluator. It’s a very supportive process.” A principal evaluator illustrated the support piece as being at the heart of the work by saying, “My theory of action is: ‘You will bring your goals to fruition.’ My only question is, ‘What do you need from me to do it?’” The principals valued the support they said they received from the evaluators.

**Trust.** Trust is the other attribute principals identified as necessary for the process to be effective. An elementary school principal explained:

As principal evaluators and principals, we have the natural positional authority. But if that’s all you have and you don’t have the ability to come alongside people and really help them improve their practice, then at the end of the day, you’ve done nothing. You don’t have the trust, which I think is huge in this process. I’ve never had an administrator ask me about how and what I thought. And, it wasn’t like, “Oh, excuse me. I think you’re a three . . .” It was like, “Show me what you think.” The evaluator is really honest. But, it was safe to say, “I agree.” Or, “I disagree.” Or, “Let me explain that further.” If that were not there—it would have been a very different process for me this year . . . I probably would have a portfolio. I would have been saving everything I was doing. I would have spent so much time on trying to impress somebody as opposed to improving my practice.
Principals said that if the relationship was not safe, they would fall back into the old pattern of “Just listen and sign.” In the process, the principals saw the evaluators taking the time to understand their strengths and areas for growth. They gained trust in their evaluators because they saw them as strong instructional leaders. An elementary school principal explained, “The evaluator has to be honest and transparent so I can trust him in our work.” Another trend in the responses of the principals was the belief that there should not be a “gotcha mode.” As a secondary school principal said, “There definitely has to be some trust that the evaluator is there to help and support the principal and isn’t out to get you.” The principals saw the evaluators as nonjudgmental. They also described them as “a mentor,” “a coach,” and “open-minded.” Those are all descriptions that principals used when talking about the demonstrated level of trust between the principal and the principal evaluator.

The Reflective, Connected, and Cyclical Nature of the Principal Evaluation Process

This theme addresses outcomes of the evaluation process that resulted in the principal learning and the modifications made in the work done in the building. This theme contains three subthemes. The first reviews the data presented in which principals were encouraged by their evaluator to reflect on their practice and how the process of reflection was used and impacted the principals’ practice. The second subtheme assesses the connection principals made in their evaluation to the work they did and the learning they engaged in. The final subtheme reviews the formative and summative nature of the evaluation process and the resulting continual learning and changes made to the principal’s professional practice as a result of the evaluation process.

Reflection. Principals noted that they were much more intentional and reflective in their work as a result of the process and ongoing discussions. An elementary school principal said, “I
believe I’m good at making decisions, but when you really have to stop and think, ‘Why am I making that decision?’ it makes you think more before you act.” When the principals were asked to think about why they were doing what they were doing and to have conversations with their evaluators about their decisions, they responded by reflecting deeply on their actions. Another example from the data spoke to the relevance of the professional development offered to teachers by principals. Because conversations between the principal evaluators and principals were held on a regular basis, often the conversations were about the professional development the principal would be offering to his or her teachers. Through the conversations and questions asked by the evaluator, the principals were encouraged to think about and justify why they were working with teachers in the areas they identified as needing teacher professional development. The results from the conversations resulted in a change in the professional development offered due to the principals recognizing that a focus area different from the one he or she had originally focused on had a greater need for teacher professional development. In the following quotation, a secondary school principal explained how the evaluation process caused him to think about the professional development he intended to offer:

Here is an example of the process making a difference: I’d say, “I’m going to roll out some more Danielson with my staff.” My evaluator would say, “What is that really going to do?” The evaluator was leading me through what I needed to think about in what was often a tough conversation and which resulted in modified work [professional development lessons].

Finally, an elementary school principal summed up the need to be more intentional and reflective of her practice by saying, “I had to be more mindful of what I was doing.” The evaluation
process caused the principals to reflect on their actions and to be more intentional in the
decisions they made and the work they did in their buildings.

Partially as a result of the reflective practice that was incorporated into the evaluation
process, both the principal evaluators and the principals reported that the principal evaluation
process brought more focus to their work as it related to their goals and the evaluation criteria. A
principal evaluator said:

The criteria lend themselves to the real work. Nothing in there that was talked about with
principals felt like it was fake, like we were just having to say it or talk about it because it
was required. The criteria focused on the work of a principal.

A secondary school principal acknowledged, “The process caused me to grow because it
required reflection and the ability to justify why I was making certain decisions or doing certain
things.” With the evaluators designing their conversations and questions around the evaluation
criteria, a focus emerged in the ongoing conversations between the principal evaluator and the
principal that guided the conversations to be based on best practices for principals.

Many of the principals noted their increased focus on some criteria more than others.
One criterion of focus many cited was planning with data (i.e., State Principal Evaluation
Criterion Three). The focus on Criterion Three resulted in a change in the principals’ practice.
An elementary school principal explained her change in practice when she said, “I have
immersed myself more in the data, reading and understanding it as a result of conversations [with
my evaluator].” Another common area of focus that principals indicated was a result of the
evaluation process was the implementation and monitoring of Response to Intervention (RTI)
systems. RTI aligns with State Evaluation Criteria Three, Four (Aligning Curriculum), and Five
(Improving Instruction). Planning with data and RTI were just two areas in which the principals
indicated they changed their practice as a result of the reflection they did as part of the evaluation process.

In addition to identifying changes in practice, the principals and the evaluators also identified a change in the cultural “big picture” that arose as a result of the process. An elementary school principal said, “Our buildings are stronger because of the process.” That was the opinion most principals expressed. A secondary school principal offered the following thoughts when asked to reflect on the outcome of the new evaluation process:

I think . . . everybody would say their buildings [the staff and students] are stronger because of the process. I think there is more meaningful teaching and learning taking place. I would say more purposeful teaching, so the learning is at a different level. It [the evaluation process] pulled together: TPEP, Danielson, Common Core State Standards—everything new that came at us and helped make some sense of it through discussion. I think that was a nice byproduct. I think that, again, is part of the reason it [the evaluation process] is there.

The principals recognized that the work they were doing was different. As a result of the criteria, the conversations, and the resulting reflective practice used in the evaluation process, they focused on their work using the lens of an instructional leader. Their actions were more intentional, partially because of the reflection that resulted from the ongoing conversations. An elementary school principal pointed out,

It [the evaluation process] has kind of unwrapped our world a little bit. It kind of showed some dirty laundry here or there. It is okay. It has pushed us to be reflective, you know, we’re good, but we’re not great.
This quotation demonstrates that the evaluation process exposed principals and the work they were and were not doing. The principals noted that the process of reflection pushed and encouraged them to learn and grow, which ultimately resulted in a change in their practice. The evaluation process led to the principals making their approach to their work more systematic.

**Connection to work and learning.** When principals were asked how the principal evaluation process had impacted their decision to engage in professional development, the principals spoke to their own professional development. But, many also spoke to the professional development of their staff. Several used the work they did with their evaluator as a guide for working with their teachers both in professional development settings and in the teacher evaluation process. A secondary school principal making a connection to professional development said, “Our evaluator models what it should look like when we meet with teachers [in the evaluation process]. The goal is that there is a connection between the [teacher and the principal] evaluation processes.” Five of the principals spoke to the power of having an evaluation process modeled for them that they could in turn use with their staff.

As the principals indicated, the evaluators were very intentional about modeling practices principals could use with their teachers as they worked with them in the evaluation setting. An evaluator spoke of his work in this area:

Several times during conversations I’d say, “Okay, time out. Now, how will that look with a teacher? How would you have that conversation? . . . You are going to be working with a teacher. How are you going to say what I just said to you?” I would have those conversations and that changed the nature of our conversations a lot. It became much more coaching than evaluative at that time.
Principals found the similarities between the principal evaluation and teacher evaluation very powerful. This similarity provided continuity between the work principals were doing with their evaluators and the work the principals were doing as the evaluators of their teachers.

The other connection principals made between the principal evaluation process and professional development was in the professional development they would provide to their teachers. An elementary school principal said, “The evaluation process has impacted the planning of professional development for staff . . . Now I have a better gauge of where I want to go with the beginning of school and professional development for my staff.” And, a secondary school principal said,

A huge connection for me was that both the teachers and I needed to improve. That was really helpful. I realized I needed to improve in using data and then be able to share the information with the teachers. [I] told the teacher where they [sic] needed to improve, which was also in the use of data. But, [I also said], “Guess what? Me, too. So, let’s do this together.”

This work was seen as a positive by both the principal evaluators and the principals because the perception was that the work done with teachers was more meaningful due to the new principal evaluation process. A principal evaluator reflected:

The biggest value to principals is connecting their work to the teacher work. That was the biggest surprise. And, I don’t mean a surprise in a disappointing way. The work that it took for principals to figure out how to monitor a teacher[’s] effectiveness was interesting. It was hard work. It was kind of like, “Oh, yeah. What are we looking at, and how do we know when we see it?”
The principal evaluators explained that during the conversations they had with principals, they often talked about how they were working with teachers. They said that they needed different ways of approaching topics with their teaching staff and to figure out how to work toward change when change was needed. Both evaluators spoke about taking time to role-play with principals about how they would work with teachers. The principals also commented on the impact of the work they did with their evaluator on the work they were doing with teachers. A secondary school principal explained:

Every time I step in front of the staff to lead them, it had been influenced by conversations with my evaluator. Whether it be an activity we’re doing, the topic we’re tackling, or the professional development we are engaging in, conversations with my evaluator have caused me to improve my approach [when working with teachers].

Another secondary school principal said:

My work with my evaluator made me understand: The old “Let’s check some boxes off” was not meaningful or acceptable anymore. Now, it’s expected to really sit down and have meaningful conversations with teachers. So, I think that’s one example of how my time spent with my teachers got a lot better. I modeled my work [with teachers] off of the work I did with my evaluator.

An elementary school principal made a similar comment when she simply stated, “I did a better job working with teachers because of the evaluation process.” The effect of the evaluation process on the principals’ work with teachers was noted often in the data. Principals used the evaluation process modeled for them in their work with their evaluator and indicated that they, in turn, conducted evaluation conferences with their teachers using a similar format. The
replication of the evaluation process in their work with teachers is an indicator that the principals found the evaluation process meaningful and worthwhile.

**Formative, summative, and continual learning.** The evaluation process allowed for principals to engage in continual learning. Almost every time a principal met with his or her evaluator, he or she was able to reflect on learning that had taken place. The principal evaluator implemented formative assessments on a continual basis to provide for ongoing learning opportunities specific to each principal with whom he or she worked. When a secondary principal was asked about the learning opportunities presented to him throughout the year, he said, “I would say my professional development was with my evaluator. That was the best thing going during this year. And, I felt good about it, and I grew.” Other principals also spoke to the learning they experienced with their evaluators. Another secondary school principal said, “The discussions I had with my evaluator helped me identify CCSS and RTI as areas for growth. I discovered it by looking at the data and through setting goals.” An elementary school principal agreed, noting, “Because of the evaluation process, I will be engaging in professional development in RTI and planning with data.” The principals took their experiences from the principal evaluation process and applied them to their plans for continued professional development. Another area in which principals identified possible growth opportunities was the development of a principal Professional Learning Community (PLC) in which principals could collaborate with each other and share their ideas, actions, and plans for their work in and around the evaluation criteria. This desire to create principal PLCs was mentioned when an elementary principal said, “It would be helpful if as colleagues we got together to share goals, successes and ideas. We could learn from what others were doing. A focused principal PLC.”
The evaluators saw the principals responding to the principal evaluation process by engaging, or planning to engage, in professional development opportunities. As the evaluators worked with principals in the evaluation process, the principals identified common areas of need, RTI being one of them. An evaluator said, “The evaluation is supporting the work I am doing with RTI to help principals. [It] motivates me to do the work.” The evaluators also spoke to working with principals in the evaluation process and identifying areas of growth during the process. An evaluator related:

The school budget and how to use money from different funds was identified as a growth area. So, I have sent her to training about building budgets . . . and, every time I meet with her she pulls out her budgets and we talk about the different parts of the budget. [I] check in to see how the work is progressing.

By continually checking on the budget process, the evaluator was engaging in formative assessments to then determine the continued professional development the principal needed. The evaluators worked to use both external and internal resources to provide professional development for principals. During the ongoing meetings, a focus was on the areas in which individual principals needed to grow and learn. Both of the evaluators saw the principal evaluation process as an opportunity to work with principals in a growth model.

The principal evaluation process is a growth model that is cyclical in nature. Although a final evaluation was completed with each principal at the end of the school year, both the principals and the evaluators saw the final evaluation as a tool to use in identifying where to focus the continued learning for the principal. The principals made comments such as this one offered by an elementary principal: “During our final end-of-year evaluation discussion, I am thinking about what I will do next year.” A secondary principal said, “During the final
evaluation the discussion was, ‘What are you going to continue to work on next year?’” And another secondary principal said, “The process will be deeper for me next year as I am able to better articulate how my practice aligns with the rubric.” The principals saw the final evaluation, which was the summative component of the process, as a reflection on the school year that had just passed. They quickly took advantage of the opportunity to think about how their practice would change in the following year as a result of the evaluation process. An elementary principal said, “The final evaluation was more of a reflection on the year, my work, and practice. It was a summative evaluation but also included ‘What are you going to continue to work on next year?’” The evaluation process is cyclical because of the formative assessments and continual learning that take place throughout the process and into the next school year. Even the final evaluation looked toward the learning that would be the focus during the following year.

Overall, the perception of both the principal evaluators and the principals was that the principals grew in their professional practice as a result of the principal evaluation process. Specific examples of this growth were not clearly stated by the principals or evaluators, but they all noted that the process pushed them in ways no previous evaluation had. The process encouraged growth on an ongoing basis. An elementary school principal said, “The process was valuable because it made me think about my work and want to improve.” A secondary school principal said, “My work with my evaluator has helped me think about things differently and focus my work on a few key areas.” And, an elementary school principal observed, “Yes, I grew because every interaction I have with my evaluator now is about the rubric. It is always on your mind because it’s what is best for students.” All the principals drew a connection between the work they did in the principal evaluation process and identifying areas in which they should engage in personal professional development. Many identified the most important areas of focus.
as planning with data and planning around the implementation of an RTI program. The principals indicated that through the work done in the evaluation process, their work became more focused. As a result of the focus and continued conversations, the principals explained, they grew as instructional leaders in the identified focus areas.

The evaluators felt that both they and the principals had grown. One evaluator said, “I grew as much as the principals . . . I grew in the ability to be reflective.” The other evaluator said, “Working to approach the process as a growth model has been very real for me. Shaping principal practice is key.” A quotation from a principal evaluator was, “We are on the road to guiding practice in the right direction. However, there is so much room to grow.” In the first year of implementation of the new evaluation process, the evaluators reported feeling as though they were learning alongside the principals. The principals’ comments did not indicate that they recognized the growth the evaluators asserted had taken place concerning their own practice during the first year of the implementation of the new evaluation process.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

When considering the education of a child, many variables come to mind. Individually, most of the variables have little to no effect on learning. Research shows that when individual variables are combined and focused in a structured and meaningful way, a difference in student learning is often measured (Simkin, Charner, Saltarres, & Suss, 2010). The principal’s job is to pull together many different variables to create favorable conditions for the focused work of educating children. However, as recently as ten years ago, the notion of providing support and professional development for school leadership (e.g., principals) was absent from most district reform efforts. Today, improving school leadership ranks on the list of reforms second only to improving the quality of teachers (Leithwood et al., 2004; Marzano et al., 2005; Supovitz & Poglinco, 2001).

Purpose of the Study

Using this qualitative case study, I sought to learn about the experiences of principal evaluators and principals in one school district using the AWSP Leadership Framework. The study explored the principal evaluation process from the perspectives of both principal evaluators and the principals evaluated. From the evaluators’ perspectives, attention was on the implementation of the principal evaluation process, the focus of the principal evaluation process, the components of the principal evaluation process, and the perceived learning resulting from the process. From the principals’ perspectives, attention was on the skills and knowledge principals developed as a result of the evaluation process in reference to their learning and growth as instructional leaders.
Job responsibilities for principals have changed over the last ten years with a move away from a focus on the managerial components of running a building to a focus on instructional leadership. As a result of the change in job responsibilities, the manner in which the principal receives feedback, support, and guidance about his or her job performance needs to be modified. The principal evaluation process is one area in which the principal may receive feedback, support, and guidance. The study addressed the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What is the process used to evaluate principals?

Research Question 2: How do the principal evaluators and principals perceive professional learning as a result of the evaluation process?

Research Question 3: How do the principal evaluators and principals perceive the connection between the principals’ professional learning during the principal evaluation process and the principals’ practices as instructional leaders?

The focus of this chapter is on answering the research questions, summarizing the findings and connecting them to the literature, presenting conclusions drawn from the findings, and offering implications for practice and research. The next section answers the research questions and summarizes the findings while drawing a connection to the literature.

Analysis of the findings revealed three major themes. These themes emerged from the interviews of two district principal evaluators and seven principals. They were (a) evolution of the principal evaluation process, (b) the evaluator attributes and skills needed in the evaluation process, and (c) the connected, cyclical, and reflective nature of the principal evaluation process. Figure 1 is a model that depicts how the themes work together with characteristics of the evaluation process. The components of the evaluation process guide the work and will be continually revisited by the principal evaluator and principal. The attributes and skills of the
evaluator list the characteristics and skills needed by the principal evaluator. When the evaluation components and the attributes and skills of the evaluator are in place the principal is more likely to reflect on their practice, connect the learning from the evaluation to their professional practice, and allow for both the principal evaluator and principal to engage in an ongoing evaluation process.

![Diagram of Principal Evaluation Process]

**Figure 1.** Themes and the evaluation process. The model breaks down the principal evaluation process into themes and identifying characteristics of each theme. The arrows represent the ongoing connections between the different parts of the evaluation process.

The first theme, the evolution of the principal evaluation process, emerged from my conversations with both the principal evaluators and the principals and from a review of the documents used during the process. This theme elaborated on the formats of the principal
evaluation process principal evaluators and principals experienced during the 2013-2014 school year and the markedly different process used during previous years. In the context of the second theme, the evaluator attributes and skills needed in the evaluation process, it became apparent that during the principal evaluation process, conversations, questioning strategies used by the principal evaluator, a collaborative environment, support, and the trust a principal had for his or her principal evaluator all were significant contributors to the evaluation process. The third theme, the connected, cyclical, and reflective nature of the principal evaluation process, addresses outcomes of the evaluation process that resulted in ongoing principal learning and the impact the process had on the principals’ professional work and learning. Together, the themes provided answers to the research questions.

**Theme 1: Evolution of the Principal Evaluation Process**

**Traditional format.** Regarding the first theme, the evolution of the principal evaluation process, the principals expressed feeling as though the process used prior to the 2013–2014 school year for principal evaluation (i.e., the traditional format) was very simplified. Usually two or three meetings were held between the principal evaluator and the principal during the year, as is also documented in the research (Cranston, 2008; Goldring, Huff, et al., 2009). All of the principals interviewed indicated that they did not see value in the traditional principal evaluation format. As was found in the research, principals had questions about the fairness, consistency, value, and effectiveness of the traditional evaluation process (Goldring, Huff, et al., 2009; Portin et al., 2006; Thomas et al., 2000). Despite knowing that principal performance is a vital factor in improving student achievement (Kaplan et al., 2005), in the traditional principal evaluation process, districts rarely measure or document principal performance effectively (Westberg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009). The job of the principal has changed, and as a
result the principal evaluation process needs to change to effectively measure the performance of principals.

The traditional evaluation process did not motivate or improve the performance of principals (Reeves, 2009). In this study, principals indicated that the traditional evaluation resulted in a lack of job improvement and in little internal inspiration to improve as a result of their evaluations. Traditional principal evaluations appear to lack value for the principal because of the inconsistent format of the evaluation and the absence of alignment with meaningful standards (Catano & Stronge, 2006). As Clifford et al. (2012) noted in their research, “Principals see little value in current [traditional] evaluation practices” and “principal evaluations are inconsistently administered.”

Research Question 1: What is the process used to evaluate principals?

New principal evaluation process. The traditional process used for principal evaluation as compared with the new process used during the 2013–2014 school year in the selected district was substantially different. Evidence from the study shows that the newly implemented evaluation process was very interactive, with the principal evaluators and the principals both experiencing continual involvement in the process through ongoing meetings held throughout the year. The process included the following key components: (a) self-evaluation, (b) growth goals, (c) numerous meetings and/or conversations, (d) use of a rubric to guide the discussion in the meetings, (e) documentation of evidence, and (f) final evaluation. The self-evaluation and goal setting took place toward the beginning of the school year, but meetings or conversations also took place prior to their being completed to support principals’ development. The final evaluation was the final meeting of the year in June.
Principal evaluators and principals found the process much more meaningful than the traditional evaluation process. Reeves (2009) held for the process to be meaningful, it needs to be an ongoing process with the principal evaluator and principal spending a substantial amount of time together. The district-wide approach employed by all the evaluators in Decker School district (Stronge et al., 2013) did include principal evaluators spending a substantial amount of time working with the principal. The term *district-wide* does not imply that the process looked exactly the same for all principals. The process was modified to meet individual principals’ needs, but the standards and the rubric used in the process to evaluate principals were the same. Condon and Clifford (2010) found that the level of rigor in the principal evaluation process often varies greatly, even within a district. In the Decker School District, aligning the evaluation process with Washington State standards and using the AWSP Leadership rubric as a common rubric helped maintain a common level of rigor across the district.

**Rubric.** Both the principal evaluators and the principals saw the rubric as a very important tool. They found the clear principal performance descriptions provided in the rubric valuable for understanding principals’ areas of strength and areas needing growth. The new AWSP Leadership Framework rubric is to Washington State principals as the ISLCC standards have been to principals across the country since their development in 1996. The ISLCC standards were the first set of well-established standards for performance criteria that principal evaluators and principals used to guide the work of the principal (Derrington & Sharatt, 2008; Kaplan et al., 2005; McKerrow et al., 2006; Yavuz, 2010). The ISLLC standards became a foundation for the development of the AWSP Leadership Framework (Kipp, Quinn, Gordon, & Sharratt, 2012). The AWSP Leadership Framework is developed based on the new Washington State Standards for principal evaluation which are now the standards used to
evaluate and prepare all school administrators in the state. The AWSP Leadership Framework rubric was a consistent part of the principal evaluation conversations in Decker School District.

With the principal evaluator referring to the rubric on a continual basis in the ongoing meetings, the principal was encouraged and motivated to focus his or her work in the areas outlined in the rubric. Researchers found that when principals understand the evaluation criteria and the criteria are aligned with indicators of an instructional leader, principals are more successful in their job performance as an instructional leader (Goldring, Cravens, et al., 2009; Sun et al., 2012). The rubric provided both a tool to guide discussion and a description of the principal’s work. Both the principal evaluators and principals found the rubric to be an essential part of the evaluation process. Reeves (2009) found there to be value in the principal evaluator and the principal spending a significant amount of time discussing the principal’s performance and how it aligns with a standards-based rubric.

**Evidence.** The collection of evidence was a noteworthy part of the evaluation process. The evidence of the principal’s work resulted from ongoing documentation of the principal’s specific actions and plans. In addition to being aligned with standards, the principal evaluation process must be tied to a collection of evidence of the principal’s actions (Porter et al., 2010). A component of the Multidimensional Leadership Assessment (Reeves, 2009) includes the collection of evidence used to support the discussion the principal evaluator and principal have while assessing the principal’s performance based on the rubric. Principal evaluators and principals in this study found the collection of evidence to be a very important part of the conversations held during the meetings between them. The evidence included documents, observations completed by the principal evaluator, experiences shared by the principal, and other methods used to share the work of the principal with the principal evaluator. Both the principal
evaluators and the principals found discussion about how the evidence of the principals’ work aligns with the rubric, and how that work might be adjusted accordingly, to be meaningful.

**Growth goals.** In addition to the AWSP Leadership rubric and collected evidence, principal evaluators and principals also cited the growth goals principals established during their evaluations as invigorating the process and helping to connect it to student growth. As the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership established, it is key not merely to establish goals, but to ensure that the goals align with high standards and rigorous learning (Elliot, Murphy, Goldring, & Porter, 2009). Both principal evaluators and principals found the goals to be challenging to establish. They also found that the continual conversations they held to shape the growth goals, develop a meaningful timeline for progress, and gauge progress were beneficial. As principals in the Decker School District established growth goals, they and their evaluators made an effort to align the goals with the growth goals established by the teachers. Principals found the alignment meaningful because it made the work around the goals a building-wide effort. Research demonstrates that instructional results are stronger when the principal builds support for goals among staff and assists teachers in outlining their responsibility in meeting the goals (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood, 1994).

**Final evaluation.** As they conducted the final evaluations, both the principal evaluators and the principals provided input. The principal evaluators and the principals recognized that the final evaluation was a summative report but still saw the process as ongoing. The work completed during the 2013–2014 school year by the principal as aligned with the AWSP Leadership Framework would continue the following school year. Research shows that the principal evaluation process should be cyclical in nature without a permanent start and stop (Clifford et al., 2012). The process should be ongoing, allowing principals to continually assess,
Theme 2: Evaluator Attributes and Skills Needed in the Evaluation Process

In this study, evaluators had skills and attributes that helped to make the evaluation process meaningful for the principals. One such skill was the principal evaluator’s ability to communicate and lead a conversation that included quality questions asked of the principal. The conversation and questions required the principal to reflect on his or her practice. Lipton and Wellman (2013) developed a structure to allow principals to provide learning-focused supervision; they identified artful question construction as a powerful skill that may increase the learning potential of supervisory conversations. Lipton and Wellman’s work was developed for the principal’s work with teachers in the teacher evaluation process but could be applied in a similar setting to the principal evaluation process. Lipton and Wellman stated the following about effective inquiry (i.e., questioning):

For skillful supervisors, inquiry is not about gathering information. The goal of inquiry is to produce thinking and to help the teacher integrate the self-talk of expertise. As a result, effective inquiries reflect this internal dialogue and make it accessible to all practitioners. (p. 39)

The Decker School District principal evaluators took a questioning approach similar to that of Lipton and Wellman. Empirical research addressing the use of conversations and questions during the evaluation process does not currently exist. However, one researcher found an indirect connection between the use of questioning and professional development adult learners find meaningful. Billett (2002) identified intentional learning strategies such as modeling, coaching, and questioning as important components of adult learning resulting in increased
learning. As noted earlier, the conversations between the principal evaluators and principals and the questions the principal evaluators asked during those conversations all related directly to the work of the principal and aligned with the AWSP Leadership rubric.

**Research Question 2: How do the principal evaluators and principals perceive professional learning as a result of the evaluation process?**

*Professional learning.* The principal evaluators used the principal evaluation process in Decker School District to reach the final evaluation required by Washington State law to be submitted at the end of the school year. However, both the principal evaluators and principals in this study saw the process as a professional development opportunity for the principal at an individual level. Drago-Severson (2007) found that although adult learning may require skill development for meaningful change in a principal’s professional practice to take place, that development has to consist of more than simply learning about facts and skills. The principal evaluator provided professional development while offering supports, guidance, knowledge, and challenges to assist the principal in transforming his or her own practice. The ongoing conversations between the principal evaluators and principals, and the higher level questions asked of the principal by the principal evaluator were cause for the principal to reflect on his or her practice and experiences. Adults have a desire to learn about their practice and will seek to understand new concepts and strategies when they see the relevance to their work (Smith, 2003). The conversations and questions in which the principal evaluator engaged the principal aligned directly with the work the principal needed to accomplish in his or her building. The principals viewed the conversations and questions during the meetings with their principal evaluators as having a causal correlation with their work and with the evaluation process. The conversations held as a part of the evaluation process inspired and motivated principals, increased their interest
in the work they were doing, and challenged the principals to learn and develop their skills in the evaluation criteria as outlined in the AWSP Leadership rubric. During the evaluation process, the principal evaluators sought to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the principals with whom they were working and to support them in their professional learning. The conversations helped the principal evaluation process result in transformational learning.

A key outcome of the evaluation process implemented in Decker School District was the resulting professional development for the principals. With the principal being an integral part of the experience rather than a spectator of the evaluation process, the process became a learning experience. The implemented evaluation process was on-the-job learning at its best. Joyce and Showers (2002) found that for adult professional development to be effective, on-the-job support must be present to help professionals make new practices part of their daily routine. The format of a principal evaluation process in this study allowed for continued learning on the part of the principal with support from the principal evaluator.

**Collaboration.** Collaborative was a descriptor used by both the principal evaluators and the principals when they spoke about the evaluation process. Parylo et al. (2012) found that if principals are to grow as professionals, the principal evaluation process needs to allow for a collaborative working environment between the principal evaluator and principal. Principals expressed that because of the collaborative nature of the evaluation process, they felt comfortable focusing with their evaluator on their deficient areas and working to improve in those areas. The collaborative setting allowed the principal to engage in the evaluation process with a focus on learning to improve student achievement. When the principal evaluation process includes collaboration in the design, it generates trust among stakeholders (Clifford et al., 2012).
**Trust.** Trust was an attribute principals identified as having an impact on the implementation of the principal evaluation process. The principals’ feeling of being supported by their principal evaluator in a trusting relationship was a factor in the success of the evaluation process. The foundation of trust is established on the belief that principals want to do a good job, and when they understand where they need to improve, they will work toward improving their practices (McGrath, 2000). The principals in this study found the principal evaluators cooperative in offering support; developing ideas and strategies for problem solving; and being genuine in their efforts to help the principals learn, grow, and improve their practices. As Stronge (1991) found, for an “environment of trust to exist, the evaluation system must be honest about its intent, and hidden agendas must be forsaken” (p. 81). The development of a process with a collaborative approach using conversations and ongoing communication seemed to foster an environment of trust and cooperation between the principal evaluators and the principals in the Decker School District.

**Support.** The link between principals trusting their principal evaluators and feeling supported by their principal evaluators was very evident. Both the principals and the principal evaluators also identified the need for the principal to feel supported. A principal evaluator summarized the concept of support by saying, “You will bring your goals to fruition. My only question is, ‘What do you need from me to do it?’” Research indicates that “perceived organizational support, procedural justice and transformational leadership are determinants of trust in managers” (Connell, Ferres, & Travaglione, 2003, p. 281). The principal evaluators interviewed were supporting the principals to grow and learn in their work. Numerous discussions with the principals about their work as it related to the AWSP Leadership rubric, and the principal evaluators’ belief that principals wanted to develop their leadership practices,
assisted in developing the trust principals had in their principal evaluators. When abundant support is offered, the impact on the evaluation process is positive (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). The principals noted that they felt supported because they trusted the work they were doing with their principal evaluators and as a result strived to improve their practices.

**Theme 3: Connected, Cyclical, and Reflective Nature of the Principal Evaluation Process**

Today, it is important for principals to be model learners. The principal evaluation process used in this study allowed the principals to be learners and to apply what they learned to their work. The principal evaluation process in Decker School District is an example of a district in which learning is the work. As Fullan (2014) stated, “People are getting better at what they do because learning to be more effective is built into the values and routines of the [educational] organization” (p. 29). In this study, the principals were being evaluated on standards. The evaluation process assisted the principals in learning and in taking what they learned to use in their work with teachers and students.

**Research Question 3: How do the principal evaluators and principals perceive the connection between the principals’ professional learning during the principal evaluation process and the principals’ practices as instructional leaders?**

**Connection.** An example of the work that resulted from the ongoing principal evaluation process was the data collected that indicated principals were taking what they learned from working with their evaluators in the principal evaluation process and applying it to the work they were doing with teachers. One key application of their learning to their work was the way in which principals applied what they learned to their work with teachers in their evaluation process. Aligning conversations with the identified standards and the corresponding rubric for
performance and asking questions to encourage the teacher to reflect on his or her practice was part of the principal evaluation process. Fullan (2014) further clarified:

You don’t get [shared] depth at a workshop; you don’t get it just by hiring great individuals; you don’t get it just through evaluations. And you don’t get it through congenial relationships. You develop shared depth through continuous learning, by solving problems, and by getting better and better at what you do. Developing expertise day after day by making learning and its impact the focus of the work is what pays off. (p. 82)

Principals and their evaluators in Decker School District saw the principal evaluation process as an opportunity for principals to be learners, to benefit from job-embedded professional development on an ongoing basis, and to see an impact on the work they were doing at the building level.

Cyclical. Parylo et al. (2012) found that in order to use the evaluation process to assist principals in developing their professional practice, the evaluation process needs to be a formative instrument, contain open dialogue, and encourage the principal to engage in reflective practice. The process used in the Decker School District was formative in nature. The ongoing conversations that encouraged ongoing dialogue and the questions asked by the principal evaluators often assisted the principals in reflecting on their professional practice, resulting in both a formative and a cyclical process.

The evaluation process was characterized as cyclical because it was a series of events that happened again and again. Each of the meetings that took place between the principal evaluator and principal were similar in format. During the meetings the AWSP Leadership Framework was continually used to structure the conversation in the area where the principal was working to
develop their skills. The cyclical characteristics of the process allowed for the principal to continually focus their efforts around the key practices where a principal should be spending their time. From a broader view, the evaluation process was cyclical because as the process formally concluded with a final evaluation, the process was also seen as an immediate continuation of the ongoing work of the principal evaluator and principal in the evaluation process. The cycle continued.

**Reflection.** The study found the perceived outcomes of the principal evaluation process were that principals were more intentional and reflective about their work, principals modified the work they did with their teachers in the teacher evaluation process, and principals had an overall feeling that schools were better because of the new principal evaluation process. The new evaluation process used reflective practice to emphasize learning through questions and investigation to develop an understanding (Smyth, 1992) of where the principal would focus his or her work and improvement. The practice was effective as principals worked through the process of reflection with their evaluators and then developed an action plan for how to proceed in many different areas of their work. Principals then applied what they learned and then reflected on the effectiveness of the action with their principal evaluator. The principal’s actions became very intentional because of the ongoing reflection in which the principal and his or her evaluator were continually engaged. An example of this intentionality was apparent in the principals’ work with teachers in the teacher evaluation process. As noted, the principal evaluation process changed the principals’ practice in the way they worked with their teachers in the teacher evaluation process. They worked with teachers by focusing on asking quality questions and guiding teachers to reflect on their practice. The principal evaluators reported their belief that growth occurred across the district as a result of the rich conversations with
principals that were aligned with evaluation criteria, the ongoing reflective practice of principals, and the focused work of the principals. The evaluators perceived that principals grew as a result of the evaluation process and that because of the impact of the evaluation process on the principal’s professional practice and their resulting work with teachers, the teachers’ classroom skills increased.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

The way principals are evaluated is changing. The criteria used to evaluate them is changing, and specifically the process used to evaluate them is changing. Ultimately, the principal evaluation process is supporting the change in the principal’s role from principal as a manager to principal as an instructional leader. In this study, the evaluation process was described as an ongoing, yearlong, embedded assessment. Principals welcomed the experience of working with their evaluators in the continuous evaluation process. The complex evaluation process used resulted in a positive experience for both the principal evaluators and the principals. It seemed to work well, with the many different components of the process in place allowing principals to feel safe and open to the learning presented. Figure 2 depicts the workings of the cyclical evaluation process used in this study.
Figure 2. Cyclical evaluation process. The model displays the actions of the evaluator, resulting actions of the principal, and some key connectors in the process for the evaluation process.

As depicted in Figure 2, the principal needs to trust his or her evaluator and feel supported by him or her; the principal and the evaluator must have a collaborative working relationship; and the principal and the evaluator need to have ongoing conversations and communication. If a principal is to learn, the principal needs to trust the evaluator. Principals identified a trusting relationship with their evaluator as being very important. The trusting relationship established a level of comfort, which allowed the principals to show their vulnerabilities and address their weaknesses while working in the evaluation process. Without a high level of trust in their evaluator, principals noted, they would be more likely to make efforts to “cover up” their weaknesses instead of working together with their evaluator to learn and improve their professional practice.

The principals recognized the collaborative nature of the evaluation process, which led to their gaining trust in their evaluator and feeling supported in the work they were doing as a
principal. Reeves (2009) asserts that the collaborative evaluation model will become a best practice in evaluating principals. Research on the actual use of collaboration in the principal evaluation process is limited. However, collaboration is often identified as one of the evaluation standards or evaluation criteria for principals to attain. For instance, in Criterion One, creating a culture, of the AWSP Leadership Framework rubric (2014) for Washington State principal evaluation, the rubric states that a principal “actively models, supports and facilitates collaborative processes among staff.” The current job of principal will now often include the expectation that:

Principals can no longer simply be administrators and managers. Principals must be instructional leaders focused on improving student achievement. They must be the force that creates collaboration and cohesion around school learning goals and the commitment to achieve those goals. (NAESP, 2008, p. 2)

If principals are expected to work collaboratively with their staff, they must have the opportunity to collaborate with their evaluators and reflect on their professional practice. Working collaboratively with their evaluators creates an environment that is conducive to principals’ learning; it also provides the opportunity for principal evaluators to model the collaborative work, allowing principals to take what they learn and apply it as they work with teachers in the evaluation process, thereby providing ongoing learning for their teachers and developing the culture of their building.

Parylo et al. (2012), who conducted the only study found on the experiences of principals who were being evaluated, concluded that when a principal’s “evaluation was formative in nature and involved opportunities to collaborate, have open dialogue, and engage in reflective practice throughout the evaluation process, they were able to address and improve areas of
concern” (p. 234). This conclusion supports the findings of this study. Principals need to be able to work with their evaluator and reflect on their work. They need to work together and develop ideas to approach their work in helping teachers develop their instructional skill. Time is very precious to a principal. Shaping the evaluation process as a collaborative effort in which the principal evaluator and principal are working together to improve the principal’s professional practice makes the process meaningful. The work they do should be aligned with the evaluation criteria as it relates to the specific needs of the principal’s building. The process used to evaluate principals is very important because it can be an effective learning experience for the principal. As Davis et al. (2011) noted, “The quality of the conduct of principal evaluation may be more important than its content. Strong, trusting, and collaborative relationships between principals and their district office evaluators is especially critical to the success of the evaluation process” (p. 35).

Principals and principal evaluators in this study saw the principal evaluation process as collaborative at least partly because of the ongoing conversations and communication between the principal evaluator and principal. Both the principal evaluators and the principals perceived the conversations as having a high level of impact on the decisions the principals made about their work at the building level. The conversations provided the principals an avenue to reflect on their work and even change their approach to their work as they developed structures and systems. As a result of the conversations held during the principal evaluation process, the work done by the principals at the school level was often more intentional, with more thought behind the principal’s actions.

Thus, principal evaluators need to be able to lead a conversation that incorporates high-level questions. The conversations in which these questions were asked took place on a regular
basis as principals saw their evaluators in their school building in excess of ten times throughout the year in a combination of formal visits and drop-ins. The number of meetings between the principal evaluators and principals in the schools increased the value of the conversations because the evaluator had a better understanding of the challenges and the successes the principal experienced in his or her particular building. The time the principal evaluator spent in the school building developing an understanding of the school, as an individual entity, also increased trust between the evaluator and the principal.

The principal evaluation process as implemented in this study was identified as professional development for the principal. Principals found the evaluation process very helpful. Their ability to have numerous opportunities for professional dialogue with their knowledgeable evaluators positively impacted the principals’ learning. The evaluation process allowed the principals to recognize criteria on which they wanted to focus their work and to increase proficiency in their practice.

A powerful outcome of the collaborative structure of the evaluation process and the meaningful conversations was the modeling the principal evaluators did for the principals in their approach to the new evaluation process. Principals appreciated the collaborative evaluation process that allowed them to reflect on their practice. As a result, principals began to use similar strategies as they worked with their teachers in the evaluation process. They took what they learned from their work with their evaluator and applied it to their work with teachers. There were not any indicators that this was a planned outcome of the evaluation process. However, during the process, both the principal evaluators and the principals made the connection of the application of the principal evaluation model to the teacher evaluation model as they worked together in the principal evaluation process.
The work of principals with their teachers in the teacher evaluation process was further supported as principals acknowledged the nested quality of the work they did with their growth goals in the evaluation process and how they could be nested with the growth goals the teachers were setting as part of their evaluation. In addition to the growth goals having similarities, in Washington State the principal evaluation criteria and the teacher evaluation criteria were aligned to support the work of culture, data, content, instruction, and community at a deeper level (see Appendix H). The ability for principals to take the work they were doing as aligned with the evaluation criteria and apply it to the work they did with teachers in supporting them in their work around the teacher evaluation criteria supports the transfer of strategies used in the evaluation processes. A prominent finding in this study was the ability of the principal to take what his or her evaluator modeled and apply it to his or her work as the evaluator in teacher evaluations.

To bring the evaluation process to completion, it is important to note that the final evaluation document used as the summative tool in the evaluation of the principal did not contain any surprises because each evaluation criterion had been discussed at a detailed level. The final evaluation was a summary of all the criteria, identifying those in which the principal had developed skills and those in which continued work by the principal was needed. Although it was a summative evaluation, the final evaluation was seen as a summary of what had been accomplished and of the areas in which work needed to continue. The continued work would begin as soon as the following day. The immediate continuation of the work was part of what made the process formative and cyclical in nature.

It was cyclical because the process was continuing. A self-evaluation of the work the principal completed was repeatedly reviewed, both on an individual level and when the principal
evaluator and the principal met. After reviewing and reflecting on the work, the principal and
the evaluator either modified a plan to improve effectiveness or added next steps to the plan.
The principal and the evaluator engaged in continual conversation and reflection upon the work
the principal was doing. The process was formative as the principal evaluator continued to ask
questions about the principal’s work, offer support when necessary, and encourage the principal
to reflect on the work.

In summary, this study examined the process used to evaluate principals, the perceived
learning of the principal as a result of the evaluation process, and the perceived outcomes of the
evaluation process on the principal’s work. The findings from the research conducted in the
Decker School District demonstrate the principal evaluation process has changed to align with
the job of the principal as an instructional leader to enhance the principal’s work in that capacity.
The new evaluation process as it aligns with the work of a principal was found to be an
individualized professional development opportunity for principals. The process allowed for the
principal evaluator and the principal to work collaboratively in identified areas where the
principal needed to learn. And finally, the evaluation process as implemented did transfer to the
work the principals were doing with their teachers on a daily basis to improve the academic
achievement of students.

Implications for Practice and Research

As a leader who evaluates principals, I have truly learned from conducting this research.
Looking deeply across the data to find emerging themes has helped me understand the different
components of the principal evaluation process and how they impact both the principal and the
principal evaluator. The study has caused me to reflect on my own practice. As I continue to
work on improving my practice when evaluating principals, I am refining the questioning
strategies I use and working to design an approach to the student growth goals that is meaningful for the principal. Ongoing learning for everyone—the principal evaluator, the principal, the teachers, and the students—is an important element of the evaluation process.

From the data and the analysis, I end with findings that are the basis for my recommendations for district leaders and for future research. The three implications for district leaders are: (a) Principal evaluators need to spend time in the school building; (b) Principal evaluators need to receive training in using the new evaluation tools and the implementation of a new evaluation process; and (c) Trust, support, and collaboration between the principal and principal evaluator are needed. The implications for future research are that more research is needed on (a) how principal practice changes as a result of principal evaluation, (b) the use of questioning strategies in the evaluation process, (c) the implication of using the AWSP Leadership Framework as compared to other rubrics, and (d) the use of student growth goals in the principal evaluation process.

**Implications for district leaders.** The research on principal evaluation, and specifically the principal evaluation process, continues to grow. The emphasis of research on this area is partly a result of new policies and laws but also a result of the overarching research that has identified the significant impact a principal may have on a school (Leithwood et al., 2004; Marzano et al., 2005; Supovitz & Poglinco, 2001). District leaders have a moral responsibility to evaluate principals fairly and provide them with ongoing professional development because of the impact principals can make in a school. The results of this study indicate that the principal evaluation process may provide both a fair evaluation of a principal’s job performance and ongoing professional development for the principal. The following suggestions for district leaders will assist in developing a quality principal evaluation process.
Districts need to review the role of the principal evaluator. The person in the district who is responsible for evaluating principals has to be able to make meeting with principals on a regular basis a priority. The ability of the principal evaluator and the principal to collaborate and have ongoing conversations about the principal’s practice is key to the success of the evaluation process. For the conversation around the AWSP Leadership Framework to be able to reach the level of depth needed, a minimum of 1.5 hours needs to be allocated for each meeting. Monthly meetings with each principal would be ideal. Meetings every other month would be the minimum. In addition to the time for meetings scheduled with the principals for in-depth conversations around the rubric, the principal evaluator also needs time in their schedule to make drop-in visits to the schools and classrooms.

The time spent in the school building with the principal allowed the principal evaluator to develop a more accurate representation of the work of the principal in the school setting and understand the challenges and successes the principal experienced within his or her specific context. Rather than holding the evaluation meetings in the evaluator’s office at the district office, it is important that the evaluator meet with the principal in the principal’s office. Meeting in the principal’s office allows the principal to easily access evidence. The principal evaluator has to have the time to develop an understanding of the principal’s work in the principal’s school building. The more the principal evaluator understands about the specifics of the work of the principal with whom he or she is working, the more support, guidance, professional development, and evidence-based feedback the principal evaluator can provide. Collaboration, trust, and support all result from the principal evaluators spending a significant amount of time with the principal in his or her building.
As districts arrange for principal evaluators to spend more time working directly with principals as part of the principal evaluation process, it is also important that they provide professional development for the principal evaluators. The evaluators need to understand the different components that have been identified as leading to principal learning and how to help principals change their professional practice. They need to review best practices in principal evaluation. In addition to learning about the tools used in the evaluation of principals, principal evaluators need to learn about effective processes to use in evaluating principals.

The training evaluators receive may come from attending courses designed to provide professional development on evaluating principals. Principal evaluators may be connected with a mentor in a nearby district who is using a research-based evaluation process. Or, principal evaluators could review the research and work to establish an evaluation process based on the research that will work for their district. Training, regardless of the format, will take time. The district needs to allocate time for the principal evaluator to be trained.

Finally, as a district establishes the principal evaluation process, it is important to realize that the principal evaluator needs to establish a trusting relationship with the principals and be able to provide them support while working in a collaborative model. The sense of trust the principal feels toward his or her principal evaluator increases the principal’s willingness to let his or her guard down and be vulnerable with the principal evaluator. The principal evaluator needs to be able to spend time with the principals to develop the trust necessary to work collaboratively with principals. One of the pieces in developing trust is ensuring that the principal evaluator also has the resources to provide support for the principal when the need arises. Support might constitute ongoing conversations about how to approach a situation, or it might mean arranging for the principal to receive additional training. Ultimately, trust, collaboration, and support allow
for the evaluation process to develop into a professional development opportunity for the principal. The district needs to ensure that the principal evaluator has the ability to develop trust with principals, provide them with necessary support, and work collaboratively with them.

**Implications for future research.** Finally, I conclude my dissertation with four recommendations for future research. Continued research in this area is vital if the different components of the principal evaluation are to be implemented in school districts across the United States in a well-designed process that will have a positive impact on student learning.

The first area needing more research is the way in which a principal’s practice changes as a result of the principal evaluation. If the principal evaluation does not encourage principals to change their practices in a way that positively impacts the academic growth of students, there is more work to do. If time is to be spent on principal evaluation, the time should result in an increase in student learning. Research needs to be conducted to determine whether a connection exists between the work completed around the evaluation criteria in the evaluation and student academic performance.

Second, more research should be done on the use of questioning strategies as a part of the principal evaluation process. I found that the questions the principal evaluators asked caused principals to reflect, assess their actions, and change their practices. From the principals’ perspective, the questions asked by their evaluators resulted in learning. Research shows that questioning and discussion techniques are an important component of the learning process (Danielson, 1996). Research conducted specifically on the use of questioning in the principal evaluation process and how it results in principals’ learning would be beneficial.

The third recommendation for research is specifically aligned with the AWSP Leadership Framework. In this study, the AWSP Leadership Framework was used as the rubric to guide
conversations and determine a principal’s performance level. What is the difference between districts or states using the AWSP Leadership Framework and those using other rubrics to assess a principal’s performance? Are different rubrics used in similar ways? Do some rubrics support deeper conversations than others? How do the different rubrics developed for use in the evaluation of principals compare?

The final recommendation is that researchers continue to study the use of growth goals in the evaluation process. Research has been conducted on goal setting in the evaluation process, but more research is needed on establishing growth goals that are written with a focus on student academic growth. Common sense would seem to indicate that establishing growth goals would have an impact on student growth. The research I recommend would determine the components that should be included in the growth goal, the type of progress monitoring that should be in place for the goal, and whether the growth goal is an effective part of the principal evaluation. Is there a management system that has been or could be developed to assist in the process of setting and monitoring growth goals for principals? Ensuring that students are growing academically is a priority. The inclusion of a growth goal appears to be a meaningful part of the principal evaluation. Research needs to be conducted to further validate or deny that belief.
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## Appendix A

### Association of Washington School Principals Leadership Framework

#### Criterion 1 Rubric – Creating a Culture

*Creating a school culture that promotes the ongoing improvement of learning and teaching for students and staff.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>UNSATISFACTORY</th>
<th>BASIC</th>
<th>PROFICIENT</th>
<th>DISTINGUISHED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Develops and sustains focus on a shared mission and clear vision for improvement of learning and teaching</td>
<td>Does not communicate mission, vision, and core values; tolerates behaviors and school activities in opposition to a culture of ongoing improvement</td>
<td>Vision and mission are developing; connections between school activities, behaviors and the vision are made explicit; vision and mission are shared and supported by stakeholders</td>
<td>Communicates a vision of ongoing improvement in teaching and learning such that staff and students perceive and agree upon what the school is working to achieve; encourages and supports behaviors and school activities that explicitly align with vision; shares enthusiasm and optimism that the vision will be realized; regularly communicates a strong commitment to the mission and vision of the school and holds stakeholders accountable for implementation</td>
<td>Is proficient AND provides leadership and support such that shared vision and goals are at the forefront of attention for students and staff and at the center of their work; communicates mission, vision, and core values to community stakeholders such that the wider community knows, understands and supports the vision of the changing world in the 21st Century that schools are preparing children to enter and succeed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Engages in essential conversations for ongoing improvement</td>
<td>Avoids conversations; does not make time for conversations; is not available to staff, students, other stakeholders, does not communicate high expectations and high standards for staff and students regarding ongoing improvement</td>
<td>Communication reflects essential issues with members of the school community; supports a feedback loop that reaches students and staff; barriers to improvement are identified and addressed; conversations are mostly data-driven for the purposes of assessing improvement with infrequent high expectations for students</td>
<td>Assumes responsibility for accurate communication and productive flow of ideas among staff, students and stakeholders; provides leadership such that the essential conversations take place and in ways that maintain trust, dignity, and ensure accountability of participants; creates and sustains productive feedback loops that include staff members and students; keeps the dialogue ongoing and purposeful; regularly communicates high expectations and standards for staff and students regarding ongoing improvement</td>
<td>Is proficient AND establishes and promotes successful systems and methods for communication that extend beyond the school community; creates a productive feedback loop among stakeholders that keeps the dialogue ongoing and purposeful; methods are recognized and adopted for purposes beyond school; staff report confidence in their ability to engage in essential conversations for ongoing improvement; consistently communicates high expectations and standards for staff and students regarding ongoing improvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.3 Facilitates collaborative processes leading toward continuous improvement</td>
<td>Does not actively support or facilitate collaboration among staff; tolerates behavior that impede collaboration among staff; fosters a climate of competition and supports unhealthy interactions among staff</td>
<td>Demonstrates some understanding of the value of collaboration and what it takes to support it (i.e. building trust); facilitates collaboration among staff for certain purposes; emerging consensus-building and negotiation skills</td>
<td>Actively models, supports and facilitates collaborative processes among staff utilizing diversity of skills, perspectives and knowledge in the group; assumes responsibility for monitoring group dynamics and for promoting an open and constructive atmosphere for group discussions; creates opportunities for staff to initiate collaborative processes across grade levels and subject areas that support ongoing improvement of teaching and learning</td>
<td>Is proficient AND successfully creates generative systems that build the capacity of stakeholders to collaborate across grade levels and subject areas; is recognized by school community and other stakeholders for leadership that results in a high degree of meaningful collaboration</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.4 Creates opportunities for shared leadership</td>
<td>Offers no model or opportunity for shared leadership (i.e. delegation, internship, etc.); makes decisions unilaterally</td>
<td>Offers opportunities for staff and students to be in leadership roles; engages processes for shared decision-making; uses strategies to develop the capacity for shared leadership (i.e., Delegation, internship, etc.)</td>
<td>Provides continual opportunity and invitation for staff to develop leadership qualities; consistently engages processes that support high participation in decision-making; assesses, analyzes and anticipates emerging trends and initiatives in order to adapt shared leadership opportunities</td>
<td>Is proficient AND proactively cultivates leadership qualities in others; builds a sense of efficacy and empowerment among staff and students that results in increased capacity to accomplish substantial outcomes; involves staff in leadership roles that foster career development; expands opportunities for community stakeholders to engage in shared leadership</td>
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### Criterion 2 Rubric – Ensuring School Safety

**Providing for school safety.**

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<tr>
<td>2.1 Provides for Physical Safety</td>
<td>Neglects to consider the physical safety of students and staff; does not maintain and/or implement a current school safety plan; plan in place is insufficient to ensure physical safety of students and staff; major safety and health concerns</td>
<td>Maintains and implements a school safety plan monitored on a regular basis; minor safety and sanitary concerns in school plant or equipment; problems are confronted and resolved in a timely manner; eager to improve knowledge about school security and issues relating to school facilities; an emergency operations plan is reviewed by appropriate external officials and posted in classrooms, meeting areas and office settings</td>
<td>Implements a school safety plan that is based upon open communication systems and is effective and responsive to new threats and changing circumstances; proactively monitors and adjusts the plan in consultation with staff, students, and outside experts/consultants; staff proficiency in safety procedures as measured and monitored by group assessments followed by group reflection</td>
<td>Is proficient AND serves as a resource for others in leadership roles beyond school who are developing and implementing comprehensive physical safety systems to include prevention, intervention, crisis response and</td>
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<td>2.2 Provides for social, emotional and intellectual safety</td>
<td>Neglects the social, emotional or intellectual safety of students and staff; does not have an anti-bullying policy or behavior plan in place that promotes emotional safety; does not model an appreciation for diversity of ideas and opinions</td>
<td>Strives to provide appropriate emotional support to staff and students; policies clearly define acceptable behavior; demonstrates acceptance for diversity of ideas and opinions; anti-bullying prevention program in place</td>
<td>Assumes responsibility for the social emotional and intellectual safety of all staff and students; supports the development, implementation, and monitoring of plans, systems, curricula, and programs that provide resources to support social, emotional and intellectual safety; reinforces protective factors that reduce risk for all students and staff</td>
<td>Is proficient AND makes emotional and intellectual safety a top priority for staff and students; ensures a school culture in which students and staff are acknowledged and connected; advocates for students to be a part of and responsible for their school community; ensures that school community members are trained and empowered to improve and sustain a culture of emotional safety; cultivates intellectual safety of students and staff by advocating for diversity of ideas, respecting perspectives that arise, promoting an open exchange of ideas; involves school community in active intellectual inquiry</td>
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### Criterion 3 Rubric – Planning with Data

**Leading the development, implementation and evaluation of data-driven plan for increasing student achievement, including the use of multiple student data elements.**

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<tr>
<td>3.1 Recognizes and seeks out multiple data sources</td>
<td>Does not recognize multiple sources or quality of data or has a limited understanding of the power and meaning of data</td>
<td>Seeks multiple sources of data to guide decision making; emerging knowledge of what constitutes valid and reliable sources of data and data integrity</td>
<td>Systematically collects valid and reliable data from at least three sources to be used in problem solving and decision making; builds capacity of staff to recognize information as data by providing examples of using data throughout the building and in staff meetings; systematically gathers data on grades, attendance, behavior and other variables to inform efforts</td>
<td>Is proficient AND explores and uses a wide variety of monitoring and data collection strategies (both formal and informal) to triangulate data; responds to an identified need for timely data by putting new data collection processes in place to collect reliable and valid data</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.2 Analyzes and interprets multiple data sources to inform school-level improvement efforts</td>
<td>Reviews and shares limited school-level data only as required; interpretation of data may be incorrect or incomplete; uses data in ways unintended by assessment purpose</td>
<td>Uses numerous data analysis methods and eager to broaden knowledge of data analysis and interpretation; uses school-level data to inform improvement across eight Criteria</td>
<td>Analysis includes at least three years of data including state, district, school and formal and informal classroom assessments; interprets available data at the sub-scale level to make informed decisions about strengths and areas of need; provides teacher teams with previous year’s data and asks them to assess students’ current needs</td>
<td>Is proficient AND consistently leads in data interpretation, analysis, and communication; links at least three years of student data to teachers and builds capacity of staff to understand and use their data for improved teaching and learning; practices a high standard for data reliability, validity and fairness and keeps these concepts in the forefront of conversations with staff</td>
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<td>3.3 Implements data drive plan for improved teaching and learning</td>
<td>Plan is limited, not data driven and/or not aligned with the needs of the school; little stakeholder involvement and commitment</td>
<td>Plan is monitored, evaluated and revised resulting in data driven changes; works to build stakeholder involvement and commitment; models data-driven conversations in support of plan</td>
<td>Provides leadership such that plan is clearly articulated and includes action steps and progress monitoring strategies, and strategies in the plan are directly aligned with the data analysis process and are research based; leads ongoing review of progress and results to make timely adjustments to the plan; data insights are regularly the subject of faculty meetings and PD sessions</td>
<td>Is proficient AND creates a school culture of using data for decisions and continuous improvement in aspects of school life; orchestrates high-quality, low-stakes action planning meetings after each round of assessments; data driven plan specifically documents examples of decisions made on the basis of data analysis and results are documented to inform future decisions; provides coaching to other school administrators to improve their data drive plan and analysis</td>
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### 3.4 Assists staff to use data to guide, modify and improve classroom teaching and learning

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<tr>
<td>Goals and Practices to Instructional of Best 4.2 Alignment of Curricula to State and Local District Learning Goals</td>
<td>Does not assist staff to use multiple types of data to reflect on effectiveness of lessons, guide lesson and assessment development, differentiate instruction, and to determine whether re-teaching, practice or moving forward is appropriate; focuses more on student characteristics rather than the actions of teachers; no improvement in student academic achievement</td>
<td>Occasionally assists staff to use multiple types of data to reflect on effectiveness of lessons, guide lesson and assessment development, differentiate instruction, and to determine whether re-teaching, practice or moving forward is appropriate; strategies result in incomplete relationship between the actions of teachers and the impact on student achievement, minimum improvement in student academic growth</td>
<td>Regularly assists staff to use multiple types of data to reflect on effectiveness of lessons, guide lesson and assessment development, differentiate instruction (highly achieving as well as non-proficient) and to determine whether re-teaching, practice or moving forward with instruction is appropriate at both the group and individual level; strategies result in clear relationship between the actions of teachers and the impact on student achievement; demonstrated and measurable improvements in student academic growth readily apparent</td>
<td>Is proficient AND demonstrates leadership by routinely and consistently assisting teachers to use multiple types of data to reflect on effectiveness of lessons, guide lesson and assessment development, differentiate instruction, and to determine whether re-teaching, practice or moving forward with instruction is appropriate at both the group and individual level; explicitly demonstrates consistent and measurable improvements in student academic growth</td>
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| 3.5 Provides evidence of student growth that results from the school improvement planning process* | School improvement planning process results in no improvement in student academic growth | School improvement planning process results in minimal improvement in student academic growth | School improvement planning process results in measurable improvement in student academic growth | School improvement planning process results in significant improvement in student academic growth |

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### Criterion 4 Rubric – Aligning Curriculum

**Assisting instructional staff with alignment of curriculum, instruction and assessment with state and local district learning goals.**

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<tr>
<td>4.1 Alignment of Curricula to State and Local District Learning Goals</td>
<td>Has incomplete or insufficient knowledge of state and local district learning goals and to determine whether re-teaching, practice or moving forward is appropriate; focuses more on student characteristics rather than the actions of teachers; no improvement in student academic achievement</td>
<td>Has emerging knowledge and understanding of state and local district learning goals across grades and content areas to facilitate some alignment activities with staff</td>
<td>Every class has a curriculum based on the standards of the state and district learning goals/targets; has deep knowledge of state and local district learning goals and how to align these with curricula for diverse populations; systematically focuses staff on alignment; establishes a system that uses a feedback loop from the instruction and assessment alignment work to make adjustments to curricula</td>
<td>Is proficient AND provides leadership and support such that all teachers have fully aligned curriculum materials (including high achieving) and training on how to use them; staff takes ownership of the alignment processes of goals to curricula; staff understand alignment of curricula to state and local district learning goals as foundational to the improvement of teaching and learning; staff use feedback loop from their classroom instructional practices and assessments to suggest adjustments to curricula</td>
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| 4.2 Alignment of Best Instructional Practices to State and Local District Learning Goals | Has incomplete or insufficient knowledge of best instructional practices across grade levels and content areas; does not effectively assist staff to align instructional practices to state and district learning goals | Has sufficient knowledge and understanding of best instructional practices across grade levels and content areas to facilitate some alignment activities with staff; emerging knowledge of culturally-relevant teaching & learning methodologies | Has deep knowledge of best instructional practices for diverse populations and how to align these with curricula; systematically focuses staff on alignment; establishes a system for ongoing alignment that involves staff; continually supports, monitors alignment and makes adjustments; has teacher teams cooperatively plan aligned units, reviews them and then gives teachers feedback; reads and shares research that fosters an ongoing, school wide discussion on best practices for non-proficient to above proficient student | Is proficient AND provides leadership and support such that staff understand alignment of best instructional practice to state and district learning goals as foundational to the improvement of teaching and learning; staff takes ownership and backward-design high quality, aligned units to discuss with their teams; ensures that staff is current on professional literature regarding instructional practices |
| 4.3 Alignment of assessment practices to best instructional practices | Has incomplete or insufficient knowledge of assessment in terms of reliability, validity and fairness; does not effectively assist staff to align assessment to instructional practices | Has emerging knowledge and understanding of assessment in terms of reliability, validity and fairness; facilitates the implementation of certain aspects of a balanced (diagnostic, formative and summative) assessment system; facilitates the alignment assessment to best instructional practices in some grade levels | Has deep knowledge of assessment; every course has a document (syllabus, course outline or learning objectives) that identifies the learning outcomes in language accessible to students and parents; student work created in response to teachers’ assessments of the learning outcomes accurately reflect the state standards and district learning goals/targets; continually provides support to systematically focus staff on alignment of assessment to instruction using best practices; establishes a system for ongoing alignment of formative and summative assessment that involves staff members | Is proficient AND provides leadership and support such that staff takes ownership of the alignment processes of assessment to instructional practices; staff understand the alignment of assessment to teaching as foundational to the improvement of teaching and learning |

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**Criterion 5 Rubric – Improving Instruction**

**Monitoring, assisting, and evaluating effective instruction and assessment practices.**

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<tr>
<td>5.1 Monitors instruction and assessment practices</td>
<td>Does not adequately monitor instruction and assessment practices of staff; untimely and irregular evaluations; provides insufficient feedback to staff regarding instruction and assessment practices</td>
<td>Develops and uses observable systems and routines for monitoring instruction and assessment practices; provides some effective feedback to staff; feedback is linked back to instruction and assessment; partly familiar with evaluating technology-rich instruction</td>
<td>Develops and uses observable systems and routines for monitoring instruction and assessment; uses data consistently to provide staff meaningful, personal feedback that is effective for improving instruction and assessment practices; ensures that teachers go beyond what students fail to learn and delve into why (root causes); deep understanding of evaluating technology-rich instruction</td>
<td>Is proficient AND consistently demonstrates leadership in the practice of monitoring effective instruction and assessment practices; develops exemplary systems and routines for effective observations of staff; shares systems and routines with colleagues and stakeholders; regularly monitors, reflects on and develops or adjusts systems as needed to improve assessment practices</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.2 Assists staff in developing required student growth plan and identifying valid, reliable sources of evidence of effectiveness</td>
<td>Does not meet with faculty members to develop, review and modify student growth plans; student growth plans do not meet minimum requirements; does not assist staff in the identification of performance indicators or performance indicators are not sufficient; assessment results of selected teachers show little to no academic growth of students</td>
<td>Meets minimum teachers’ contract requirements to develop, review, and modify student growth plans (individual or groups plans) based on identified areas of need; assists identification of performance indicators to monitor and benchmark progress; assessment results of selected teachers show minimum academic growth of students</td>
<td>Meets with faculty members regularly (beyond minimum teachers’ contract) to develop, review, and modify student growth plans (individual or group plans); assists identification of performance indicators to benchmark progress; research-based planning and performance-linked goal setting strategies, such as “SMART” goals, are used allowing timely feedback to make mid-course corrections and improve teacher practice; assessment results of selected teachers show measurable and improving academic growth of students</td>
<td>Is proficient AND consistently demonstrates leadership in the practice of developing comprehensive student growth plans; regularly meets with faculty members to reflect on student growth plans and progress; assessment results of selected teachers show consistent academic growth of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Assists staff in implementing effective instruction and assessment practices</td>
<td>Does not fully support staff in their efforts to improve teaching and assessment; does not have knowledge or understanding of best instruction and assessment practices; does not make assisting staff in improved teaching and assessment a priority</td>
<td>Facilitate staff in the implementation of effective instruction and balanced assessment systems assessments; emerging knowledge of applied learning theories to create a personalized and motivated learning environment</td>
<td>Facilitates and supports staff in the implementation of effective instruction and assessment practices; has deep and thorough knowledge and understanding of best practices in instruction and assessment; devotes considerable time and effort to the improvement of instruction and assessment; assists staff to use the most effective and appropriate technologies to support teaching and learning</td>
<td>Is proficient AND serves as a driving force to build capacity for staff to initiate and implement improved instruction and assessment practices; encourages staff to conduct action research; seeks ways to extend influence of knowledge and contribute to the application of effective instruction and assessment practices</td>
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<td>5.4 Reliably and validly evaluates staff in effective instruction and assessment practices</td>
<td>Evaluates lack strong evidence yielding potentially unreliable staff evaluations; makes claims about staff performance that are not valid; does not establish systems or routines that support improved instruction and assessment practices; little to no understanding of student diversity and its meaning in instruction and assessment</td>
<td>Regularly and systematically evaluates all staff yielding valid and reliable results; recommendations lead staff to some improvement in instruction and assessment practices; developing understanding of student diversity (culture, ability, etc.) and its meaning in instruction and assessment</td>
<td>Evaluates staff reliably and validly; provides triangulated data evidence to support claims; recommendations are effective and lead to consistently improved instruction and assessment practices</td>
<td>Is proficient AND consistently demonstrates leadership in the practice of thoroughly, reliably, and validly evaluating staff in such a way that continuous improvement in instruction and assessment becomes the professional standard; provides detailed, formative assessment with exemplary feedback that leads to improvement; builds capacity in staff to accurately and validly assess self and others, promoting a culture of continual improvement due to ongoing evaluation of effective instruction and assessment practices</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.5 Provides evidence of student growth of selected teachers*</td>
<td>Multiple measures of student achievement of selected teachers show no academic growth</td>
<td>Multiple measures of student achievement of selected teachers show minimal academic growth</td>
<td>Multiple measures of student achievement of selected teachers show measurable academic growth</td>
<td>Multiple measures of student achievement of selected teachers show significant academic growth</td>
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Criterion 6 Rubric – Managing Resources

Managing both staff and fiscal resources to support student achievement and legal responsibilities.

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<tr>
<td>6.1 Managing human resources (assignment, hiring)</td>
<td>Does not adequately address issues in hiring, retention, and placement of staff for the benefit of students in classrooms; does not put student needs at the forefront of human resource decisions; does not make an effort to ensure quality personnel in each position</td>
<td>Places the needs of students at the center of some human resource decisions with moderate effect; possesses some skills and knowledge required to recruit and retain highly qualified individuals in school positions</td>
<td>Places students’ needs at the center of human resource decisions and decisions regarding hiring, retention and placement of staff; conducts a rigorous hiring process when choosing staff; focuses energy on ensuring productivity through staff placement</td>
<td>Is proficient AND optimizes the school’s human resources and assets of staff members to maximize opportunities for student growth; is distinguished in management of human resources and is called upon to share those successful processes outside of school; efforts produce a positive work environment that attracts outstanding talent; continuously searches for staff with outstanding potential as educators and provides the best placement of both new and existing staff to fully benefit from their strengths in meeting the needs of a diverse student population</td>
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<td>6.2 Managing human resources (ongoing professional development)</td>
<td>Staff receive inadequate opportunities for professional development to meet student’ and staff’s needs; professional development offered is not of sufficient quality to be effective</td>
<td>Professional development plan somewhat aligns to organization’s vision and plan; PD is partly effective in leading to minor improvements in staff practice; little or no documentation of effectiveness of past professional development offerings and teacher outcomes</td>
<td>Professional development plan has three to four areas of emphasis, job embedded, ongoing and linked to the organization’s vision and plan; systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of past PD offerings and outcomes; creates and supports informal professional development (i.e., professional learning communities); offers PD that meets teachers’ needs and has elements of high quality PD (sufficient duration, content, etc.)</td>
<td>Is proficient AND has adopted research-based strategies for evaluating the effectiveness of PD documenting growth in teacher knowledge to student outcomes; can identify specific PD offerings of prior years that were systematically reviewed and either eliminated or modified to support organizational goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.3 Managing fiscal resources</td>
<td>Does not make fiscal decisions that maximize resources in support of improved teaching and learning; provides little or no evidence of lists of milestones or deadlines in managing time or fiscal resources; does not work with teachers to establish goals for student achievement linked to individual teacher professional development</td>
<td>Makes some fiscal decisions that maximize resources and support some aspects of improved teaching and learning; projects are managed using milestones and deadlines but not updated frequently; sometimes meets project deadlines but impact not frequently documented; frequently works with teachers to establish goals for student achievement linked to individual teacher professional development</td>
<td>Engages others in dialogue on budget decisions based on data, School Improvement Plan, and district priorities that support learning; makes fiscal decisions that maximize resources and supports improved teaching and learning; uses defined process to track expenditures; frequently monitors data, documents and evaluates results; uses findings to improve fiscal decisions made in the future; documented history reveals ability to manage complex projects and meet deadlines within budget; regularly works with teachers to establish goals for student achievement linked to individual teachers professional development</td>
<td>Is proficient AND demonstrates leadership in the design and successful enactment of uniquely creative approaches that regularly save time and money; results indicate that strategically redirected resources have positive impact in achieving priorities; guides decision-making such that efficacy grows among stakeholders for arriving at fiscal decisions for improvement of teaching and learning; augments resources by writing successful state and/or federal grants; seeks numerous external funding sources; consistently works with teachers to establish goals for student achievement linked to individual teachers professional development</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Communicates with community to promote learning</td>
<td>Communication is sparse and opportunities for community involvement are not fully realized or made available; not visible in community or perceived as community advocate</td>
<td>Communication with the community is regular, yet is mainly informational rather than two-way; channels of communication are not accessible to all families; practices some discretion when dealing with personal information about students and staff.</td>
<td>Builds effective communication systems between home, community and school that are interactive and regularly used by students, school staff and families and other stakeholders; uses multiple communication channels appropriate for cultural and language differences that exist in the community; practices healthy discretion with personal information about students and staff.</td>
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<td>7.2</td>
<td>Partners with families and school community</td>
<td>Demonstrates little effort to engage families or the community in school activities; fails to share the vision of improved teaching and learning beyond school; does not identify and utilize community resources in support of improved student learning</td>
<td>Encourages and supports involvement of community and families in some school activities; shares the vision for improving teaching and learning with some families and communities; identifies and utilizes some community talent and resources in support of improved teaching and learning; limited family participation in some school decision-making processes and engagement activities</td>
<td>Encourages and supports consistent and ongoing community and family engagement for stakeholders in school activities; consistently implements effective plans for engaging community outside of school to participate in school decision making to improve teaching and learning; community resources are identified and utilized in support of improved teaching and learning; actively monitors community involvement and adjusts, creating new opportunities for families and community to be a part of the vision of improving teaching and learning.</td>
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Criterion 8 Rubric – Closing the Gap
Demonstrating commitment to closing the achievement gap.

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<tr>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>Identifies barriers to achievement and knows how to close resulting gaps</td>
<td>Is unaware of achievement gaps that exist in school population and how the school and teachers have played a role in perpetuating gaps; attributes gaps to factors outside of the school’s locus of control; opportunities to learn and resources are not distributed equally among students.</td>
<td>Demonstrates emerging awareness of specific school-wide achievement gaps and issues of equity access; recognizes responsibility and has some confidence in teachers and school to impact these gaps; creates new opportunities to learn</td>
<td>Identifies learning gaps early using formative assessments; demonstrates complete knowledge and understanding of the existence of gaps; accepts responsibility for impacting these gaps; identifies and addresses barriers to closing gaps</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.2 Demonstrates a commitment to close the achievement gap</td>
<td>Does not acknowledge the responsibility of school to close gaps; does not consider subpopulations when constructing school learning goals and targets; does not have a plan to close gaps</td>
<td>Achievement data is accessible and shared with a portion of the school community; attempts to target efforts towards closing achievement gaps; uses culturally-relevant methodologies to close gaps; demonstrates emerging progress in closing gaps</td>
<td>Achievement data is accessible to all members of the school community including non-English speaking parents; constructs plan with specific strategies to impact gaps; communicates, monitors and adjusts efforts to effectively make progress toward reducing gaps; models and builds the capacity of school personnel to be culturally competent and to implement socially just practices; demonstrates improvement in closing identified gaps</td>
<td>Is proficient AND successfully keeps the work of closing gaps at the forefront of intention for staff and community members; assumes responsibility for closing gaps; builds capacity in staff members and others to advance learning for students; has deep knowledge and understanding of the nature of gaps that exist at the level of group and at the level of individual students who are not reaching full learning potential</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.3 Provides evidence of growth in student learning*</td>
<td>Achievement data from multiple sources or data points show no evidence of student growth toward the district’s learning goals; there are growing achievement gaps between student subgroups</td>
<td>Achievement data from multiple sources or data points shows minimum evidence of student growth toward the district’s learning goals for identified subgroups of students</td>
<td>Achievement data from multiple sources or data points show evidence of improving student growth toward the district’s learning goals; the average achievement of the student population improved as does the growth of each subgroup of students identified as needing improvement</td>
<td>Achievement data from multiple sources or data points show evidence of consistent growth toward the district’s learning goals; there is consistent record of improved student growth, on multiple indicators, with identified subgroups of students</td>
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Appendix B

Principal Evaluator Interview #1 Questions

Introduction: Please provide information about your background in education, the positions you have held, and any specific training you have had that supports you in your current role.

1. What is your background as a principal evaluator?
2. What type of training have you had in regard to principal evaluation?
3. How much support do you receive as a principal evaluator and whom do you receive support from?
4. What is the process you will be using this year to evaluate principals?
5. What has the process been in prior years?
6. This year, when did you first begin talking with principals about the principal evaluation process?
7. Is there a self-evaluation completed by the principal?
8. Is there a goal-setting process?
9. Who are the principals you work with who you believe will work together with us in this study?
Appendix C

Principal Evaluator Interview #2 Questions

1. When was the AWSP Leadership Framework first presented to the principals?

2. How did you present the AWSP Framework initially? Why was that method chosen as the way to introduce the AWSP Framework?

3. What do you believe principals need to know about the new state principal evaluation criteria?

4. Please explain the process used in the principals’ evaluation.

5. What has the process been in prior years?

6. How was the process determined?

7. This year, when did you first begin talking with principals about the principal evaluation process?

8. Is there a self-evaluation completed by the principal?

9. Is there a goal-setting process?

10. How is the evaluation process implemented differently for different principals? Focused vs. comprehensive?

11. Please tell me about the specific paperwork or documents used so far this year during the evaluation process.

12. How is conversation between the evaluator and principal before during and after the evaluation process used?

13. How much time do the evaluator and principal spend working together on topics that are directly aligned with principal evaluation?

14. How will the progress of the principal be monitored throughout the year?
15. What sources of evidence will be gathered during the evaluation process? Who will collect the artifacts/evidence?

16. What type of professional development has been or will be offered to principals about the AWSP Framework, the evaluation process, or components of the evaluation?

17. What impact do you hope the principal evaluation process has on the way the principal completes his or her job?

18. To date, what are the strengths and weaknesses you have seen in the evaluation process you are using with principals?

19. Who are the principals you work with that you believe will work together with us in this study?
Appendix D

Principal Evaluator Interview #3 Questions

1. Reflecting back on the year, please describe your experience of evaluating principals.

2. Please explain the timeline of the evaluation process.

3. How well do you feel the principal evaluation process was implemented?

4. What factors do you think impacted the implementation of the process?

5. Please tell me about the degree of usefulness of the paperwork or documents that have been used during the process.

6. During the evaluation process, what was provided to the principal to inform his or her work as an instructional leader?

7. What type of feedback have you given to principals during the principal evaluation process? Which do you feel was most important and why? How was the feedback given? Do you give feedback specific to criteria? What was the impact of the feedback?

8. What determines if the feedback was formally documented?

9. How was progress monitored throughout the year?

10. Was evidence collected throughout the year or submitted at the end? How was the evidence collected and was it an accurate reflection of the work done by the principal?

11. As a result of the evaluation process, what actions have been taken by both the principal and evaluator?

12. What have been the challenges of the process?

13. What have been the advantages of the process?

14. What is the value of the process to you?

15. Is the evaluation process impacting the professional growth principals are engaging in?
16. Has the evaluation process impacted the principal’s practice? Do you have any examples?

17. What decision do you believe were made by principals that were a result of the principal evaluation process?

18. Can you name some specific improvements in student learning and teacher effectiveness that you contribute, directly or indirectly, to the evaluation process? Explain with examples.

19. What do you believe was the purpose for the principal evaluation? (Provide feedback, measure growth, determine support needed, improve teaching?)

20. As the evaluator, what actions, practices, or protocols do you believe best help the principals you work with to continually improve their practice?

21. Now that the process is complete, how successful do you believe the principal evaluation process was?

22. As you look forward to next year, what modifications or adjustments will you make to the current principal evaluation process? Why will you make those changes?

23. Is there anything else you would like to add that you believe would benefit this study?
Appendix E

Principal Interview #1 Questions

1. Please provide information about your background in education, the positions you have held, and any specific training you have had that supports you in your current role.

2. When was the first time the AWSP Leadership Framework was presented/discussed in this district?

3. How was the AWSP Leadership Framework initially discussed/presented in this district?

4. Please explain the process of principal evaluation. What are the steps that will be taken throughout the year to complete the process?

5. How is the evaluation process implemented differently for different principals? Focused vs. comprehensive?

6. How was the process determined?

7. Please tell me about the specific paperwork or documents used so far this year during the evaluation process.

8. How is conversation between the evaluator and principal before during and after the evaluation process used?

9. How much time do the evaluator and principal spend working together on topics that are directly aligned with principal evaluation?

10. How are the conversations held as part of the principal evaluation process structured?

11. What sources of evidence will be gathered during the evaluation process? Who will collect the artifacts/evidence?

12. What do you believe principals need to know about the new state principal evaluation criteria?
13. What type of professional development do you believe you need in regard to the AWSP Framework, evaluation process, or components of the evaluation? Have you attended any professional development on these topics yet this year or do you have plans to attend any training?

14. Does the evaluation process impact the way you are approaching your work?

15. How will your progress be monitored throughout the year?
Appendix F

Principal Interview #2 Questions

1. Reflecting back on the year, please describe your experience of being evaluated as a principal.

2. Please explain the timeline of the evaluation process.

3. Please tell me about the specific paperwork or documents that have been used during the process. What was their degree of usefulness? Would you be willing to share any of those documents?

4. How well do you feel the principal evaluation process was implemented?

5. What factors do you think impacted the implementation of the process?

6. What performance information have you received during your evaluation process that has impacted your work as an instructional leader?

7. How was feedback given to you as part of the evaluation process? In writing, in person or both?

8. Would you describe the process as formative or summative? Please explain.

9. How was progress monitored throughout the year?

10. What determines if the feedback will be formally documented?

11. What feedback did you receive during the principal evaluation process that you felt was most important and why?

12. As part of the principal evaluation process what evidence did you collect along the way?

13. As a result of the evaluation process, what actions have you taken?

14. What have been the challenges of the process?

15. What have been the advantages of the process?
16. What is the value in the process to you?

17. Has the evaluation process impacted your decision to engage in professional growth?
   Explain.

18. How has the evaluation process impacted your practice? Please describe ways the process
   supports or helps you.

19. Do you believe you will change your practice based on the outcomes of your final
   evaluation? Why or why not?

20. Were there decisions you made that you believe were a result of the principal evaluation
   process?

21. What type of feedback are you getting on each criterion? What is the impact of the feedback?

22. Can you name some specific improvements in student learning and teacher effectiveness that
   you contribute, directly or indirectly, to the evaluation process? Explain with examples.

23. What do you believe was the purpose for the principal evaluation? (Provide feedback,
   measure growth, determine support needed, improve teaching?)

24. Now that the process is complete, how successful do you believe the principal evaluation
   process was?

25. How well do you feel the principal evaluation process was implemented?

26. What factors do you believe influenced the process?

27. What suggestions would you make for the improvement of the current process of principal
   evaluation?

28. How could your supervisor best support your work to continually improve your
   effectiveness?

29. Is there anything else you would like to add that you believe would benefit this study?
Appendix G

Flow Chart of Themes and Corresponding Categories

Theme 1 – Evolution of the Principal Evaluation Process

Theme 2 - Evaluator attributes and skills needed for the principal evaluation process

Theme 3 – Connected, cyclical and reflective nature of the principal evaluation process
Appendix H

Washington State Teacher/Principal Evaluation Criteria

Below are the Washington State teacher evaluation criteria and the Washington State principal evaluation criteria. The criteria align, and both address the work of building culture, working data, understanding content and standards students need to learn, providing quality instruction, and working to engage the community in education.