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Wisconsin Principal Evaluation and Professional Learning Study: Part 2

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About the Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative

The Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative (WEC) is housed at the Wisconsin Center for Education Research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. WEC's team of evaluators supports youth-serving organizations and initiatives through culturally responsive and rigorous program evaluation. Learn more at http://www.wec.wceruw.org.

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Acknowledgements

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Section 1

Introduction

Introduction

The Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative and Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness Research Partnership initiated a two-part study to learn about how principals are evaluated and supported five years into statewide implementation of the Educator Effectiveness System. Based on interviews with 18 principals across the state, the part 1 study found that principal evaluation was less formal or structured than district approaches to teacher evaluation. While most principals appreciated the informal nature and the opportunity for ongoing dialog allowed by the process, others reported minimal interactions with their supervisors and regret at missed feedback opportunities. Supervisor investment of time and effort into the principal evaluation process appeared to influence principals perceptions of system utility and impact on their learning and development.

The part 2 study explores in more depth how Wisconsin school districts support principal leadership development within and outside the context of the Educator Effectiveness System. We asked interviewees in four districts about their district context, school context, principal evaluation process and its impact, other professional learning opportunities, development of future leaders, and the extent to which principal evaluation supports district and school improvement priorities. Following an overview of the state's principal evaluation system, we briefly describe the districts included in this cross-case study, then report findings on the district evaluation process and perceived impacts and conclude with questions for policy and practice.

To support leadership development and evaluation, Wisconsin districts may select the state Educator Effectiveness (EE) model or an equivalent model. The CESA 6 Effectiveness Project (EP) model for teacher and principal evaluation represents the most commonly selected equivalent, with about 40 percent of districts choosing that approach. Roughly 60 percent of districts have adopted the state model and a small number, not included in this study, use the CESA 3 model or apply for their own approach.

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) summarizes basic requirements for teacher and principal evaluation. These requirements include: a) orientation to the system; b) evaluator training; c) planning meetings and ongoing dialog; d) evidence collection and related feedback; e) self-reflection; and, f) implementation of goals for student learning and professional practice. The requirements pertain to state model, CESA 6, and other equivalent models.[1] In essence, the EE principal evaluation process centers on goal setting and feedback using leadership standards represented by the Wisconsin Framework for Principal Leadership (for state model districts) and the School Administrators Performance Evaluation System (for CESA 6 model districts). Table 1 illustrates the requirements of each System.

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1   For more on the six requirements, see: https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/ee/pdf/ee-system-six-requirements.pdf

Table 1: Educator Effectiveness Summary Year Required Elements for Principals*

REQUIRED EE ELEMENTS	DPI STATE MODEL	CESA 6 EFFECTIVENESS PROJECT (EP)
Provide orientation and training on the System	✓	✓
EE conferences (3)	✓	✓
Observations and feedback	1 formal and 2 informal observations with ongoing feedback	5 rapid cycle observations with 3 collaborative conversations or 1 formal and 2 informal observations with ongoing feedback
Complete a self-review in their Summary Year	Based on the WI Framework for Principal Leadership	Based on School Administrators Performance Evaluation System
Yearly Student/School Learning Objectives (SLOs) and Professional Practice Goals (PPGs)	✓	✓
Stakeholder surveys (teacher, parent or student)	Optional	Previously required, now optional but strongly encouraged

* Summary years = first year of employment in the district and every following third year

To further support the positive impact of the EE System on teacher and leader development, the DPI articulates five learning-centered principles. The principles include:

① a context of trust that encourages risk-taking and learning from mistakes;

② a common model of effective practice (i.e., WFPL, CESA 6 SAPES) to center conversations about school leadership and inform professional learning within and outside the evaluation context;

③ educator-developed goals that are regularly referenced to frame the evaluation process;

④ cycles of continuous improvement guided by specific and timely feedback to drive practice; and

⑤ an evaluation process leveraged to support other school and district improvement strategies.[2]

This cross-case report is based on findings from four participating districts and includes the following sections: district context; principal evaluation process; principal evaluation impacts; identification of future leaders; and, a summary of key findings and questions for policy and practice. The individual case studies informing this report appear in Appendix A.

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2   See principal evaluation user guide for elaboration on 5 principles and related research:
https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/ee/pdf/principalprocessmanual.pdf

Section 2

District Context

District Context

In order to represent a variety of districts, the study team selected districts based on a review of survey data from the external evaluation of the Wisconsin EE System,[3] regional location, and size. The study includes two districts using the state model and two using the CESA 6 model for principal evaluation. As reflected in Table 2, the four districts were located in three CESAs and range in size from 1,313 to 11,234 students. The districts were relatively high performing, with three of four exceeding expectations on the state report card.

Table 2: District Overview

DISTRICT	LOCATION	STUDENT ENROLLMENT	NUMBER OF SCHOOLS	DISTRICT REPORT CARD	EDUCATOR EFFECTIVENESS MODEL
Waukesha	CESA 1	11,234	25: 3 high, 4 middle, 13 elementary, and 5 charter	Exceeds Expectations	DPI model
Wausau	CESA 9	7,786	20: 2 high, 2 middle, 13 elementary, 1 virtual, and 2 charter	Meets Expectations	DPI model
Wautoma	CESA 5	1,313	4: 1 high, 1 middle, and 2 elementary	Exceeds Expectations	CESA 6 EP model
Lodi	CESA 5	1,491	5: 1 high, 1 middle, 1 elementary, 1 primary, and 1 charter	Exceeds Expectations	CESA 6 EP model

Source: 2020-21 DPI district report card

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3   The study team appreciates the support provided by the Office of Socially Responsible Evaluation in Education at UW-Milwaukee.

We conducted interviews with principals, assistant/associate principals, and teacher leaders from three schools in each district at the elementary, middle, and high level. We also talked with district administrators and district directors involved with principal evaluation or support. The case studies were conducted during the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years. During the 2020-21 school year, questions also asked about experiences and adaptations due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study was designed to provide more context and a deeper picture of principal evaluation and professional learning than was possible in Part I of the study by including principals, their supervisors, other district leaders, and teacher-leaders. Twenty-nine individuals participated in interviews: 12 principals, 4 associate/assistant principals, 6 principal supervisors, 5 teacher leaders/coaches, and 2 district directors. Appendix B includes interview protocols for each participant group.

Given the limited number of districts and participants included in the sample, the study findings do not generalize to the rest of the state. It is also possible that some school and district leaders within these districts who were not included in the study may have had different experiences. Despite the limitations, the findings are illustrative of district practices and produce insight into how principal evaluation has unfolded in these contexts, its connections to professional learning and organizational improvement, and potential areas for system improvement.

Section 3

Principal Evaluation Process

Principal Evaluation Process

We next describe the evaluation process, including how the districts implemented and modified their approach to principal evaluation, the alignment of the evaluation process to school and district priorities, and connections between evaluation and principal professional learning.

Principal Evaluation Implementation

To understand implementation, we asked principals, assistant/associate principals, and principal supervisors to discuss the evaluation process in their districts, including goal setting, evaluation dialog, use of evidence, and feedback provided. Unlike Part I findings, principals in our case studies all reported frequent interactions with their supervisors, both within and outside of the evaluation process. Consistent with findings from the Part I study, however, each district approached principal evaluation as an informal set of interactions characterized by formative support and collaborative dialog. Also consistent with the Part I study, use of leadership standards was limited. Recognizing the load principals bear for teacher evaluation and their own evaluation, among myriad school leadership roles, each district took strides to lessen the burdens of the evaluation process. Other commonalities across districts relate to goal setting as part of annual district data retreats and use of surveys to support goal setting. These findings, along with adaptations due to the COVID-19 pandemic, are expanded on below.

Frequent, Informal Interactions

Principals stated that they had regular interactions with their supervisors as part of their working relationship. For example, in Wautoma all school administrators and the district administrator said that they held frequent conversations, and that the evaluation model encouraged a "team approach." One principal mentioned working "side by side" with the supervisor on many things, and thus observation was an informal part of regular interactions. Another said that the district administrator was in the building "almost daily" and did not say "I'm observing you today;" instead, there was a "level of respect that when he's around he's monitoring me and then he's going to reflect and respond as part of my observation." This principal agreed that the observation process was informal and that the district administrator was a "constant observer." A third shared that "he's always in the school and he knows what's going on." Principals also reported that they were comfortable when the district administrator is in the buildings because he was there so frequently.

In Waukesha, observations are frequent, with informal visits "all the time." Principal supervisors conduct regular monthly visits that include a "rounding meeting" with basic questions about what is working, what is a barrier to the work, what can support them as principal, and who in their school should be recognized and why. Support for principals is available as needed through ongoing dialog, regular meetings, and access to district leaders. As a principal supervisor mentioned:

> I've tried to make myself available to everyone when they need me... If we have that relationship established, [and I'm] available on weekends and at night, that's foundational. The relationship piece we have established. Then when we give them feedback, that is enabled by trust. We see [the feedback] in action through conversations and regular visits.

Limited Use of Leadership Standards

Another commonality across the districts was the limited use of the leadership standards, either WFPL or SAPES, within and outside the evaluation context. In most instances, they were primarily referenced when principals self-reflected or during final evaluation discussions. One Wausau principal said, "It's used in self-reflection and… [it] helps with PPG if there are areas where I see I need improvement." Another stated that the WFPL serves as a guide but is not explicitly referenced outside of the evaluation context. As he explained, "…well, I guess we don't reference necessarily specifics to the rubric…but it is a guiding piece that you think about in terms of leadership. We just had that conversation last week, just looking at climate and culture within our building and having those discussions [which are reflected in the rubric]." A third principal shared, "I think it's a great reflection tool. Probably don't go back to as much as I should outside of the formal piece of it." In Waukesha, several principals also mentioned that the WFPL serves as a guide for self-reflection, but is not typically referenced outside of the evaluation process. As one described, "I think you just use it as a guide, especially when we're doing the self-review. I think it's a good reflective tool. Just to see, like, right now I'm looking at recruiting and selecting [WFPL component 1.1.1]. It's a good piece of like, 'okay, where do I need to go next?'" Similarly, in Wautoma and Lodi, principals reported that the use of the evaluation framework, SAPES, is limited to the evaluation process. It was specifically cited as a tool for reflection and as a guide for improvement.

Easing the Burden

Each district has taken steps to ease the evaluation burden on principals. This is in part due to principals' dual role of evaluating teachers and engaging in their own evaluation processes, each of which entails time to prepare, planning meetings, uploading documentation, reviewing evidence, and providing feedback. Principals from Wausau, Waukesha, and Wautoma all reported that artifact collection is streamlined and focused. In Wausau, principals are encouraged to focus on five or six of the 19 components. This not only eases their burden, but it also allows their supervisor to concentrate observations and feedback. In Waukesha, the district adapted its approach to take advantage of evidence collection and scoring flexibility. They do not formally score performance or require evidence collection on all components from the WFPL. They narrowed the focus on leadership competencies based on identified needs and important leadership actions for success with their common district and school improvement process, which is based on the School Administrators Institute for Transformational Leadership (SAIL). They stressed that evidence collection is something they do through the SAIL process. In Wautoma, artifacts are shared through the district documentation log. Administrators are highly encouraged to submit "the bare minimum to get your point across." Similar to guidance from CESA 6, the district advises submitting evidence applicable to more than one standard and that the emphasis should be on the quality, not the quantity, of artifacts.

Goal-Setting Retreats

Three of the four districts referenced "retreats" prior to the start of the school year where they developed their School Learning Objectives (SLOs) for the year. In Lodi, goal setting begins with a yearly retreat with the Board of Education and the administrative staff. From the district goals, principals develop their school goals. In Wautoma, district and school administrators reported that they come together as a team in August to create their strategic plan and from that process develop their SLOs. And in Wausau, data meetings where schoolwide goals and teacher goals are developed to support alignment occur at the start of the school year. Waukesha also holds annual retreats as part of the district's SAIL process that focuses on school improvement planning. The plans often inform school goals including School and Student (classroom) Learning Objectives.

Survey Usage

Districts using the CESA 6 model leveraged surveys as part of their EE process. The two CESA 6 districts used the surveys to provide feedback on school climate as well as leadership, with the results informing school priorities and progress monitoring. In Lodi, for example, each principal talked about the surveys they administer to help with their goal setting. They have discretion with from whom to collect survey feedback (students, staff, or parents) and how to structure the survey. The survey responses are not shared with the district administrator. Instead, principals summarize what they learned from the results and discuss the insights with the district administrator in follow-up conversations. Each of the principals reported that they found the surveys to be a useful component of the system. As one principal explained, "we try to do it every year and I like to do ones for different stakeholder groups. To be honest, the student one is the one that I like the most because they are the ones who see me on a daily basis. I have strategies I've developed on my own based on some key indicators." Another principal developed his own surveys and creates questions linked to different leadership standards. As he shared, "they are tweaked a little based on the population; what I ask staff is not quite the same as what I would ask students or parents."

COVID-19 Adaptations

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the four districts modified their approaches to principal evaluation and enhanced support of their principals. Three of the four districts took advantage of the EE waiver offered by DPI and opted out in an attempt to "take something off [teachers' and principals'] plate." In two of the three districts, principals were still encouraged to engage in goal setting and have conversations with their supervisors as a way to maintain focus and obtain support. In one of the districts, the administrative team was still goal setting and having related conversations. Some district leaders expressed disappointment with the waiver decision since they had been messaging that the process is about growth and not compliance. The one district that did not apply for a waiver shared that they did not want to "minimize the importance of being good at what [they] do." Instead, they continued to implement their local evaluation system but with more flexibility. Similar to the districts that took advantage of the waiver option, they focused efforts on SLOs and PPGs.

In terms of enhanced support, across all four districts principals shared that their supervisors made themselves more available, and they had more frequent meetings with their peers and their supervisors. The frequent meetings were an opportunity to regularly share experiences, collaboratively plan and problem solve, and provide each other support during this unprecedented and traumatic time. Principals expressed appreciation for the meetings and regular discussions. One of the district administrators we spoke with stressed that this collaborative working relationship between himself and the principals was the biggest support to principals during the COVID-19 pandemic. He also said that his role as principal supervisor became much more about "reassurance" to the principals and being on the front line of managing COVID-19.

Alignment/integration of principal evaluation and improvement priorities

Integration is one of the five learning-centered evaluation principles outlined by DPI and relates to leveraging the EE system to support school and district priorities. We found multiple examples across the four districts of evaluation processes and measures reinforcing local leadership priorities. These examples primarily involved aligning School (principals') and Student (teachers') Learning Objectives, and overlapping school improvement processes with principal evaluation implementation, including opportunities to address educational equity.

SLOs are the most frequently cited aspect of the EE system supporting school and district priorities and aligning the work of teachers and principals. As noted above, principals often set their SLOs to help address district as well as school priorities. When asked about whether and how their school or district priorities included equity outcomes, most principals responded affirmatively with general examples of SLOs focused on addressing learning gaps for different groups of students (based on race, poverty, or special education).

While most principals allowed flexibility, teachers were encouraged to set their classroom priorities to reinforce the school goal. As one principal described, "I clearly let staff know that we are picking this SLO because it matches a district objective and it also reflects an area that we need to grow." Another principal in this district echoed their colleague: "Teacher learning objectives need to relate to building goals; building goals need to relate to district goals. So, I think certainly everything is connected or impacted by the other." As one Wautoma principal explained, "everything is interwoven... If our strategic plan is school culture and certain components of the accountability report card then that's where [principals'] SLOs should be driven, same with teachers."

Each district tied aspects of the EE System to their strategic planning process. For instance, Waukesha leverages the SAIL process as the primary way to support improvement planning and implementation around priority areas. District leaders and school teams annually engage in improvement planning and leadership team development through SAIL, which the district adopted in 2015. The use of SAIL represents a common strategic planning and implementation process that is anchored in school data and allows for school leadership flexibility, while also promoting distributed leadership. During Summary years of the evaluation cycle, principals develop their PPGs and SLOs and engage in dialog with their evaluators around their goals and the building benchmarks and indicators. During Supporting years, principals also complete SLOs and PPGs. Then, instead of engaging in conversations with their evaluators, they receive coaching and feedback from the assigned SAIL coach. Further, the district developed annual building benchmarks that frame leadership expectations in five areas: focusing direction; cultivating collaborative cultures; deepening learning and high leverage practice; securing accountability and ensuring excellence; and data and key results-coherence. Key activities, data sources, target dates, change stages, and relationship practices from the WFPL help principals identify relevant evidence sources and frame reflection and dialog with their supervisors. Below is an example from the 2020-21 Building Benchmarks document created by Waukesha, highlighting one of the five areas included. "Change Stage" is where school leaders will document evidence of the areas current stage: initiation, implementation, or institutionalization.

Waukesha Building Benchmarks Template:

L5	DATA AND KEY RESULTS-COHERENCE	TARGET DATE	CHANGE STAGE	PRINCIPAL PRACTICE
L5.1	"Literacy goal aligned to an ESAIL or an AVID CCI indicator. Show us progress in reaching goal of 80% of teachers will be meeting/impacting/institutionalizing expectations in the identified indicator by June 2021. What are your lead and lag measures saying? What are the key results you are seeing so far in student achievement, redefining ready indicators or teacher practice results? What is your scoreboard?"	December and March Reviews		"1.2.2 Student Achievement Focus 1.2.4 Schoolwide Use of Data 2.2.2 Communication"

Wausau developed an equity classroom walkthrough tool in the spring of 2021 (see Appendix B of Wausau case study included as Appendix A-4). The tool was designed to fill a void for the district by having a specific focus on equity-centered adult practices. As a district leader explained, "I believe strongly that [focusing on equity is] the right work and the calvary is not coming. There is no silver bullet solution. We are the solution. We are the adults in the buildings. When we are not getting results, we have to be open to self-reflective thinking and work." The tool is aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching components. As part of their leadership practice, the information from walkthroughs may inform principals' evaluation goals and dialog with their supervisors. A district leader explained the connection between the evaluation process and equity:

> For equity, like a lot of districts in Wisconsin and around the country, as we become more sophisticated at looking at data, we are disaggregating more and looking at underperformance of marginalized groups. I have to believe that while equity wasn't [a] consistent part of my conversations for my evaluation as principal, it will now become [a] more consistent part of the conversation of principals. I think that will naturally happen.

Lodi developed processes for common professional practice goals and instructional rounds as leadership tools aligned to their district priorities. District and school leaders identified four areas that teachers could choose from for their professional practice goals, reflecting district priorities for technology use, writing/literacy, social emotional learning, and formative assessment. These areas served to focus an instructional rounds process that involved teachers, a teacher leader, and principals. The rounds occur on six days during the school year. As one principal described:

> We are not looking necessarily for the same thing in each room, so we have tried to focus it more to meet a teacher need as well. If a teacher wants to work more on integrating technology, we might bring them into a peer's classroom that is focusing on that on a given day. I've brought some in to see other classrooms with very good management, or very good instructional strategies. It depends on that.

Principals use the data from these processes to inform their own evaluation activities, focus, and discussions.

In Wautoma, district and school administrators collaboratively review data during the summer as part of their strategic planning. In the process, they develop aligned school learning objectives and professional practice goals that support their SLOs. Like in other districts, principals also encouraged teachers to set SLOs that inform their classroom practice, student learning results, and the school priorities.

Connections between principal evaluation and principal professional learning

Each district valued principal professional learning as evidenced in opportunities made available, encouragement, and feedback. Professional learning occurred during regular district leadership meetings, through opportunities connected to district priorities (e.g., standards based-grading, leading for equity, social-emotional supports, AVID), and via external workshops or conferences offered by the Association of Wisconsin School Administrators or other organizations. Some principals also engaged with their supervisors in ongoing coaching conversations around problems of practice.

Despite these opportunities, the main way principal evaluation informs professional learning is through the goal setting, formative feedback, and principal self-reflection. While these elements represent important learning opportunities, the results of the evaluation process do not typically lead to identification of future formalized professional learning. One district leader summed up this common finding, during monthly conversations with principals:

> Our professional learning has been very much universal. When we are thinking about the equity piece, we've worked on the equity [walkthrough] tool, but we have not developed systems or processes at this point to individualize or personalize professional learning for principals based on their evaluation. We don't have a formalized process. Right now, professional learning for principals [stems from the principal supervisors] sharing what they think of a need for a group of principals.

Although explicit connections between evaluation results and engagement in formal professional development were not apparent, engaging in goal setting, self-reflection, and feedback conversations informed leadership learning.

Section 4

Impact of Principal Evaluation

Impact of Principal Evaluation

Similar to the perceived relationship between the evaluation process and professional learning, principals indicated that the evaluation process impacted their practice primarily through goal setting, self-reflection, dialog with their supervisors, and affirmation. Most principals described subtle leadership practice changes as a result of their evaluation. The impact was enhanced, however, through coherence with district improvement processes.

Regarding goal setting, which was referenced as beneficial by several principals, one stated that,

> … we internally know where we want to go, but it helps me clarify it and grounds me. Sometimes you make assumptions about data points, but by walking through the process you are making sure those assumptions are correct and once in a while you find differences. [It] helps formalize it [and] also kind-of helps me focus. There are lots of things we do as leaders, lots that gain our attention and you could look at improvements of every single academic area across the board, the SLO and PPG help you realize what's the biggest need, helps you focus your staff too.

Dialog with and feedback from supervisors represented another area of impact. As one principal commented, "I don't like the work involved with it, but I love the thoroughness of it, and the conversations that exist… they're rich and they're meaningful. I'm not somebody to shy away from honest conversation…and it also gets away from assumptions." Another principal explained:

> I think more than anything it's the conversation with [supervisor]. Throughout the year when we meet on the different pieces. The principal evaluation process may be a catalyst for that, but we do that discussion anyway. Hopefully, that is a basis for my personal professional goals.

Similarly, a principal in another district spoke positively about feedback that incorporated coaching prompts:

> I think he lets me have a voice, so rather than telling me what to do, he'll ask me questions to understand the situation and also to try and help me work through it rather than simply saying this is what you should do. And that way, I'm not becoming so dependent on him. I'm developing more as a leader also.

Several principals also spoke about the importance of reflection influencing their practice, as illustrated below:

- It allows me to reflect on the feedback I've received from [supervisor] and my own reflection on how I think I do along with student and staff results from surveys. So if I wouldn't have to do that, I don't know how formally I would do it myself. So, because I have to go in there and put things in there, it definitely makes me actually think about what I want to do and what's important versus just hoping it'll get fixed. There is an accountability piece for me, going 'I need to improve this, so things improve as a whole.'

- I think the biggest part is the reflection piece and the survey piece. I think those are the strongest pieces. And in the summative year, the conversation with my supervisor on areas he feels can grow. It's not all sunshine and roses. [I] want to learn how to improve. And we all have areas we focus on.

- We work at a school where we have some challenges in student achievement, particularly our students of color, that gets magnified. So, I think it's helped me keep a balance of that achievement focus and equity mindset, but also attending to the culture.

Supervisors also affirmed the power of self-reflection. As one commented, "I think, probably [the] biggest that I see or observe in principal practice is just a more self-reflective approach to the role. I think the evaluation process really shines the light on the need for principals to make time and space to really reflect on their goals and … steps to take to reach them."

Some supervisors expressed their view that the evaluation process alone likely does not lead to substantial changes in principal practice. Instead, the impact occurs with alignment between complementing aspects of leadership indicators, the school improvement process, and the evaluation process. As one supervisor stated, "I believe the [evaluation] components, in conjunction with our local accountability measures, [are] providing more impact. And I think our local direction around our clarity with principal accountability is what they would point to as stretching them as a leader."

A supervisor in another district explained that impact on practice is in part due to the priority placed in it by evaluators. As she explained:

> I think because I model the process and continually talk about it as personal professional growth. Our elementary school team knows I take it seriously. [It's] not just a check off, but becomes who we are and what we do. I'm modeling actions that show I respect the process. I will see that in how principals leverage the process in discussions with teachers. The value of the process. A significant change over time [is the focus] used to be about the adults, [but it is now] shifting to conversations about students.

Another supervisor mentioned that the principal evaluation process did provide the needed structure and support for new principals and helped with their induction into the district.

Section 5

Future Leader Identification

Future Leader Identification

Finally, we asked district and school leaders how future principals were identified and developed for the role. Across the four districts, the process was typically informal, based on relationships and everyday interactions. In Waukesha, the efforts appear to be the most purposeful. Future leaders were identified in a number of ways, including demonstrating leadership capacity during SAIL participation, through formal leadership roles (such as department leads and instructional coaches), and from partnerships with area higher education programs. Those leaders are encouraged to pursue administrator licenses.

In the other districts, future principal identification was not systematic. As a Wausau leader shared:

> That is an excellent question of which we maybe are not as intentional as we should be. I'll speak for, just from myself, when I was a campus principal, I would look for staff in my building, whether they saw it within themselves or not, that had leadership potential, and I would engage in conversations and encourage them to explore those opportunities. I do that somewhat informally. I think now in my position, because I don't interact so directly with teachers, however, I typically am asked to have a voice at the table when we identify content leadership teams. And my lens for that is I'm thinking about people that I've either seen and I feel might have the potential or would have the insights to continue to kind of encourage them in that leadership capacity to speak for other peers.

A leader from Lodi shared that they observe leadership behavior by someone, such as a department chair, and then encourage them to pursue an administrative license. If someone is looking to further their education, the district offers a financial incentive. The same leader in Lodi also stated their Board has "been very supportive of increasing and developing leadership across the district."

In Wautoma, several teachers had become principals. One study participant stated that "administrators are always supportive of going back to school." However, there was some concern expressed that the district has "…a very young administrative staff, [and we] don't know when openings are going to occur or if they're going to occur, so there's always the trepidation if [we] encourage them to be an administrator, they're going to leave and go somewhere else."

Section 6

Key Findings and Implications

Key Findings and Implications

Drawing on the cross-case analysis, we next summarize key findings and pose related questions for principal evaluation and professional learning policy and practice.

Streaming Paperwork and Process

Districts in this study have taken steps to ease the evaluation burden by streamlining some processes and limiting the collection and uploading of artifacts for evidence of performance. Despite these efforts, several principals and leaders still expressed some dissatisfaction with burdens represented by aspects of the evaluation process. The Elevating Success EE pilot study, which occurred during 2021-22, included a number of ways to narrow the focus on limited professional practice components, de-emphasizing the importance of forms and stressing the importance of dialog and feedback. The pilot also elevated equity prompts for reflection, observations, and feedback:

- How will these Elevating Success pilot flexibilities and promising practices be communicated to the field?

- What additional suggestions might be possible to further simplify paperwork, limit the scope to high leverage goals, and prioritize feedback and coaching, particularly around educational equity?

Aligning Principal Evaluation to Improvement Strategies

Districts in our study connected principal evaluation to district and school improvement priorities. These connections support policy coherence and provide tools, clarity, and feedback on how the evaluation process can support common district and school goals. The alignment also helped center leadership and enhanced the impact on practice. Although personnel evaluation dialog and results are frequently kept private, there may be opportunities to further share goals and provide peer feedback if the intention is to align with larger organizational priorities and improvement processes.

- In what ways can these connections be communicated to district leaders, other district staff, policy makers (e.g., school board), and the broader community?

- Do principals, school leadership teams, and teacher peer groups have dedicated time to collaborate on improvement goals and provide feedback to each other on EE-related goals outside of the evaluation context?

Building Connections Between Principal Evaluation and Principal Professional Development

Although each district leveraged the evaluation process to support district and school goals, connections between principal evaluation and formalized professional learning were murky. Improving connections to professional learning opportunities by using the EE leadership standards as a common model of leadership practice and by referencing the EE processes in professional development may further enrich leadership development.

- How might districts create more coherence between formalized principal professional learning and the principal EE standards and measures?

- Are there examples of districts that have made these connections and, if so, what can other districts learn from them?

Leverage Leadership Standards for Pipeline Support

Leadership standards framing the evaluation process in both CESA 6 EP and state EE model districts were not deeply used within or outside the evaluation context. In some cases, the standards were mainly used for self-reflection and professional practice goals, but may not have framed feedback or other professional learning opportunities (e.g., coaching, mentoring). In addition, most districts had an informal process for identifying and building future leaders.

- To what extent are common leadership standards informing the development of principals across the leadership spectrum?

- How can the leadership frameworks help bring coherence to leadership practice across the career stages of principals?

- What supports or guidance would help districts strategically plan for principal turnover and succession?

Reflecting on these proposed questions for consideration may help state and district leaders strengthen principal evaluation implementation by 1) tightening alignment to district priorities; 2) making the System more focused, meaningful, and feasible for principals to navigate; and 3) consistently referencing and leveraging leadership standards that can provide a map for principal growth across the state.

Section 7

Appendices

Appendix A: District Case Studies

Wisconsin
Evaluation
Collaborative

Principal Learning–Centered Study:
School District of Lodi Case Study

Steve Kimball & Jessica Arrigoni

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UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON

WEERP
Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness Research Partnership

Report Information

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Introduction

This case study brief is part of a larger study conducted by the Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative (WEC) and the Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness Research Partnership (WEERP) examining how Wisconsin school districts support principal leadership development within and outside of the context of the Educator Effectiveness (EE) System.

This brief includes five sections:

1. district context;

2. an overview of the principal evaluation process;

3. principal professional learning;

4. supports during the COVID-19 pandemic; and

5. a summary of key findings and questions district leaders may wish to consider.

Wausau

Wautoma

Lodi

Waukesha

District Context

The Lodi school district is located in south central Wisconsin. The district encompasses areas in both Columbia and Dane Counties. The community is largely rural and includes a small town. Over the years, a growing number of residents also commute to the Madison area for work. Lodi has 5 schools: Lodi Primary (4K), Lodi Elementary, Lodi Middle, Lodi High, and Ouisconsing School of Collaboration (a public charter school). The following table summarizes the district's context.

District Overview

Location

Cooperative Educational Service Agency (CESA) 5

Student Enrollment

1,516 (2019-20)

Number of Schools

Five: 1 high school, 1 middle school, 1 elementary school, 1 primary school, and 1 public charter school

Educator Effectiveness Model

CESA 6 EP model

District Report Card (2018-19)

Exceeds Expectations

The principals' years of experience as school leaders within the district range from three to 15 years. Due to district budget constraints, a number of years ago the district had to consolidate the pupil services and curriculum and instruction positions. Because special education responsibilities consumed much of that person's time, some curriculum responsibilities were divided between the districts' 4 principals.

The district administrator interviewed during the 2019-20 school year retired at the end of the year, after 21 years in that position. This transition led to several other district leadership changes in the 2020-21 school year. The high school principal became the district administrator and the high school associate principal became the high school principal. In addition to those changes, one of their principals retired at the of the 2019-20 school year and the district hired a dedicated Director of Instruction (previously, one district leader held the director of instruction and director of pupil services roles). The following tables summarizes the district's student demographics.

Student Demographics*

RACE/ETHNICITY	PERCENT
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0.5%
Asian	1.3%
Black or African American	0.3%
Hispanic/Latino	3.9%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0.1%
White	91.3%
Two or More Races	2.5%

STUDENT GROUPS	
Students with Disabilities	15.5%
Economically Disadvantaged	16.5%
English Learners	1.9%

* Data collected from 2018-19 DPI district report card

This report reflects the processes in place under the previous district administrator who retired at the end of the 2019-20 school year. Processes may change under the new district leadership.
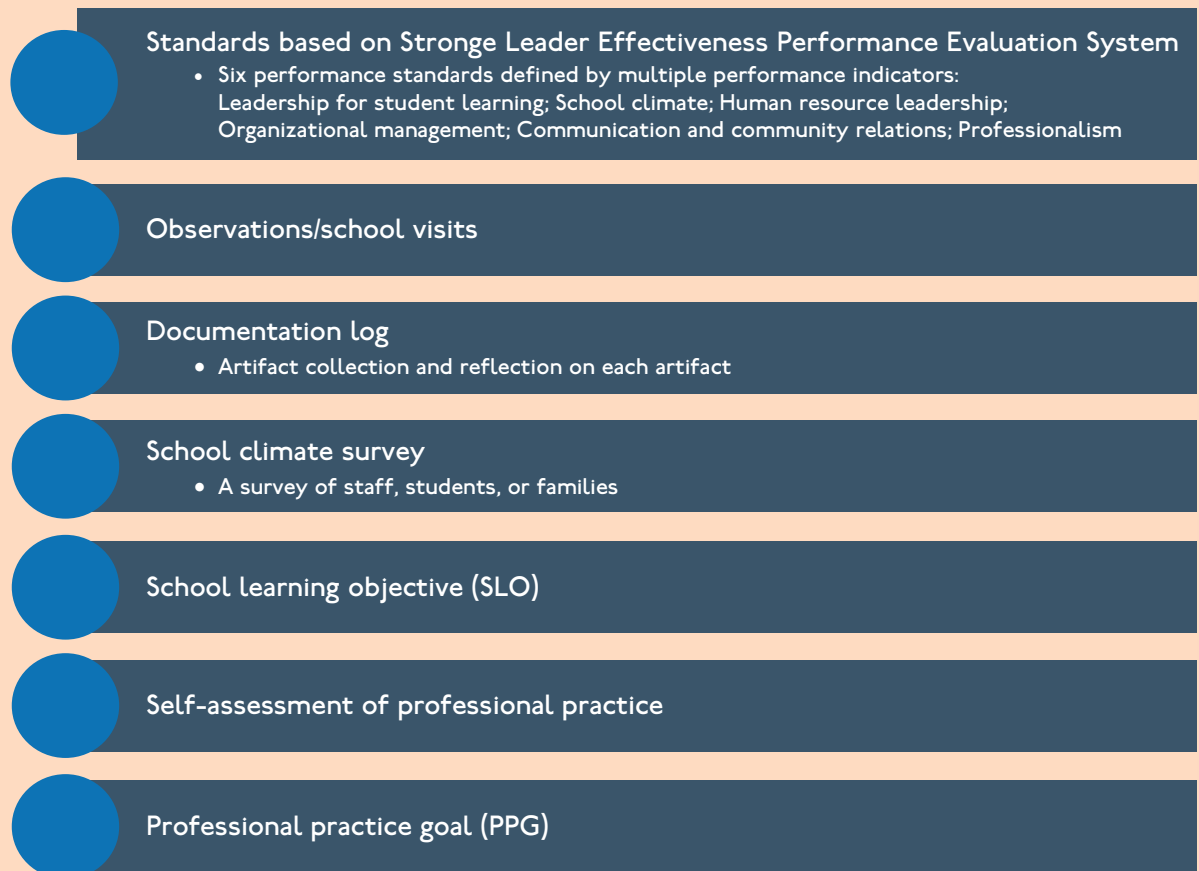
District/School Priorities

At the time of the study, the district and the school priority areas focused on literacy; social, emotional learning and related supports for students and families; and academic achievement as measured by ACT scores. The district is also focusing on curriculum alignment and updating curriculum materials. When asked about equity priorities, we received a mixed assessment; some shared that they felt the district was behind on addressing equity, while others stated that within the literacy area and the curriculum alignment work, they were specifically trying to address and close achievement gaps. The district administrator shared that they "need to deal with equity" and "make sure that all of our kids feel welcome, all of our kids feel a part of our school district." He questioned that if not all students feel welcome, "how can [we] change [the] instructional delivery model in order to make that inclusive for everybody?" District leaders take part in the Dane County Equity Consortium, which has helped them learn with similar districts about ways to think about and address issues with educational inequities.

"Rather than, ok, we've got this equity thing, it's how do we build equity into our instructional program and make it a cultural issue, not necessarily a separate thing? We need to deal with equity. We need to make sure that all of our kids feel welcome, all of our kids feel a part of our school district."
- Administrator

Principal Evaluation Process

The Lodi School District adopted the CESA 6 School Administrator Performance Evaluation System (SAPES) Educator Practice model. The main elements of the model are:[I]

Standards based on Stronge Leader Effectiveness Performance Evaluation System
- Six performance standards defined by multiple performance indicators:
  Leadership for student learning; School climate; Human resource leadership;
  Organizational management; Communication and community relations; Professionalism

Observations/school visits

Documentation log
- Artifact collection and reflection on each artifact

School climate survey
- A survey of staff, students, or families

School learning objective (SLO)

Self-assessment of professional practice

Professional practice goal (PPG)

Principals engage in a three-year evaluation cycle with one summary year and two supporting/formative years. The principal and associate principal evaluation process "[closely] mirrors the teacher process…" However, the teacher evaluation process has a compensation element that is not part of the principal evaluation process.

The district administrator engages principals in the evaluation process; the high school associate principal is evaluated by the principal.

I   2020 School Administration Performance Evaluation System (SAPES) Guidebook

Goal setting begins with a yearly retreat with the Board of Education and the administrative staff. From the district goals, principals develop their school goals. This process has been going on for more than 20 years in the district, prior to the statewide Educator Effectiveness System. Educator Effectiveness "gave it a structure and gave [them] a tool in order to record it."

Principals are advised to set a maximum of three goals with at least one school learning objective and one personal professional practice goal (with the option to create an additional SLO or practice goal). In September, the district administrator and each principal meet to review the goals, sometimes modifying them and then recording the goals in the Frontline online management tool. They meet again mid-year, typically in January, to review progress on the goals and again in May or June to discuss final progress. The principals shared that their building level SLO is connected to staff student learning objectives. The district administrator said that there is a "linear kind of direction of tying them all together."

Principals reported that observations are either formal or informal depending on the principal's evaluation stage (summary or supporting year). In most years, the district administrator sets up a schedule to be in each of the buildings and visiting classrooms twice a year:

> I would be at the high school for a full day first semester, and at the high school for a full day second semester, same with the elementary, same with the primary, same with the middle school, and basically visiting classrooms, spending time with kids in the commons area, just getting a feel for the building, and having a conversation with the principal about our visit.

He expressed his frustration that during the past year, he spent more time "tied to [his] desk" as a result of district referendum efforts and preparing for hiring and onboarding the new district administrator.

"I clearly let staff know that we are picking this SLO because it matches a district objective and it also reflects an area that we need to grow."
- Principal

According to the principals, feedback and coaching commonly related to school goals and principal evaluation support for teachers. Formal feedback was typically given during summary years. In emphasizing the focus of feedback on teacher evaluation and support, a principal said that "it's not even him evaluating me, it's us having discussions about how we can both do better [with our evaluation and feedback to teachers] and finding the time to make sure we make it a priority."

The district administrator shared that the administrative team completed the Five Voices Assessment[2], an assessment that helps to identify individuals' different leadership styles. He further shared that he used that information to guide his feedback and coaching, specifically "tailoring what you're going to say to help that person grow in their role as a leader." He also indicated that helping people grow and improve through coaching was one of his primary roles. He stated that, "sometimes it may lead to uncomfortable conversations about certain things, but you try to tailor it so that it's not seen as a negative. It's more, have you thought about doing such and such with your staff?" He concluded his thoughts about feedback and coaching by saying, "...it isn't all part of just the educator effectiveness, it's an ongoing process."

Each principal talked about the surveys they administer to help with their goal setting. They have discretion over who to collect survey feedback from (students, staff or parents) and how to structure the survey. The survey responses are not shared with the district administrator. Instead, principals summarize what they learned from the survey and then discuss it with the district administrator in follow-up conversations. Each of the principals reported that they found the surveys to be a useful component of the system. As one principal explained, "we try to do it every year and I like to do ones for different stakeholder groups. To be honest the student one is the one that I like the most because they are the ones who see me on a daily basis. I have strategies I've developed my own based on some key indicators." Another principal developed his own surveys and creates questions linked to different leadership standards. As he shared, "they are tweaked a little based on the population, what I ask staff is not quite the same as what I would ask students or parents."

"I think the biggest part is kind of that reflection piece and the survey piece. I think those are the strongest indicators." - Principal

2   https://5voices.com/leadership-voices/different-types-of-leadership/

Connection between Educator Effectiveness and School/District Priorities

SLOs, both school and student/classroom, were reported as the element of the educator effectiveness system that supports school and district priorities. A district leader shared that the "…school learning objective is what's aligned with the board goal." He gave the following example:

> One of the board goals is writing, so we're going to look at our writing data, we're going to figure out what are our next steps for our goals. So, they have a reading/language arts team that meets, looks at that data, and then establishes the goal based on data they collect in their building, so it's based on existing information that we collect, or maybe it's something new that we create depending on the tools.

The principals reinforced the idea that the SLO supports the district priorities. One principal said, "I clearly let staff know that we are picking this SLO because it matches a district objective and it also reflects an area that we need to grow." Another expressed the alignment between teacher SLO, principal SLO, and the district goals: "Teacher learning objectives need to relate to building goals; building goals need to relate to district goals. So, I think certainly everything is connected or impacted by the other."

"Teacher learning objectives need to relate to building goals; building goals need to relate to district goals. So, I think certainly everything is connected or impacted by the other."
- Principal

The district administrator stated that the alignment was purposeful:

> We plan what are we going to do next year, relative to professional development, and how does that tie with district goals, plus your goals, plus the needs of your building, so that it's not one shoe fits all, but how do we make this work so that we get accomplished what we need. So, it's taking that structure and saying how do we make this structure work for us?

Professional practice goals and the use of instructional rounds represented another leadership tool supporting alignment to district priorities. District and school leaders developed four areas that teachers could choose from for their professional practice goals. The four areas reflected district priorities for technology use, writing/literacy, social emotional learning, and formative assessment. These areas served to focus an instructional rounds process that involved teachers, a teacher leader, and principals. The rounds occur on six days during the school year. As one principal described:

> We are not looking necessarily for same thing in each room, so we have tried to focus it more to meet a teacher need as well. If a teacher wants to work more on integrating technology, we might bring them into a peer's classroom that is focusing on that on a given day. I've brought some in to see other classrooms with very good management, or very good instructional strategies. It depends on that.

Connection between Educator Effectiveness and Professional Learning

Professional learning is reported to be focused on district and school goals, which are supported through educator effectiveness processes, including feedback and use of surveys. As one principal described, "I think the biggest part is kind of that reflection piece and the survey piece. I think those are the strongest indicators. Also, I think in a summative year, those discussions with my direct supervisor on areas where he feels I can grow. To me that's what matters the most, is areas I can grow. It's not all sunshine and roses. It's nice to hear the positive things but, we all have areas that we can focus on."

Although educator effectiveness does not appear to directly inform what professional learning opportunities are sought, the principals stated that there were multiple internal professional learning options and the district supported opportunities outside of the district as well. For example, principals accessed learning from the Solution Tree PLC training, Lucy Calkins Units of Study workshops, and AWSA conventions. The administrative team also engages in book studies. Some examples of books include, *The Energy Bus: 10 Rules to Fuel Your Life, Work, and Team with Positive Energy and Blind Spot: Hidden Biases of Good People.*[3]

Principal Supports During COVID-19 Pandemic

When we spoke to the new district administrator in the fall of 2020, the district was implementing a "virtual plus" instructional model. The virtual plus model allows for special education and ELL students to attend in-person school. The district administrator reported that at the time roughly 5% of students at each level were able to attend in-person through virtual plus. The Lodi school district, as mentioned above, is located in both Dane and Columbia Counties. Each of the counties had different metrics for re-opening schools and as a result, the school district had come up with its own metrics. In the end, it followed the guidance outlined in the "Harvard Plan"[4] and engaged weekly with the Dane County superintendents, as well as attending Cooperative Educational Service Agency and Wisconsin Association of School District Administrator COVID-19 informational meetings. In January of 2021, the district switched from a virtual plus model to a hybrid model while continuing to offering an all-virtual path.

Prior to the 2020-21 school year, the district administrator reported that the administrative team met once per month. This year, in order to provide more supports to the principals, they have been meeting weekly. When the district administrator asked the principals about the increased frequency of the meetings, he was told that they "appreciate the meetings and regular discussions." He also shared that over the summer in preparation for the school year they met more than ever before.

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3   Gordon, J. (2007). The Energy Bus: 10 Rules to Fuel Your Life, Work, and Team with Positive Energy. John Wiley & Sons.

4   https://schools.forhealth.org/risk-reduction-strategies-for-reopening-schools/

In addition to more frequent meetings, the district administrator said that he is trying to "be flexible with the principals." And he hopes that flexibility is "trickling down to staff." That flexibility includes a waiver of educator effectiveness for the 2020-21 school year. In attempt to "take something off their plate" the district has removed the SLO for the year. One of the new principals still developed an SLO for the year and the new principals still completed a self-reflection. The district administrator shared that the administration team is still goal setting and having conversations. He also reported that he will "have formal conversations [with them] a couple of times this year."

At the school level, staff have been given extra time to meet in professional learning communities (PLCs), every Wednesday, to ensure consistency across grade levels, and extra time for professional learning on Wednesday afternoons. The principals have been attending the PLCs. Staff have also been participating in ongoing "tech academies" to improve their use of Google Classroom and their virtual instruction.

Key Findings and Questions to Consider

In the past year the Lodi school district had changes in district and school leadership. Leadership transitions along with instructional and support changes resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic gave the district an opportunity to build in more frequent and regular meetings as well as strengthen PLC structures in each of the buildings. As a result of these changes, there are several questions to consider:

- How can these changes be embraced as a means to build trust between the new leaders and between the leaders and staff?

- How can the frequent collaborative administrative meetings be sustained in order to create a more collaborative working environment?

- How can the new Director of Instruction be an additional support person for the school administrators?

Administrators described an aligned goal setting process that focuses efforts on school and district priorities and is used to align the work of teachers. The district set aside collaborative time for goal setting in the summer. **Can collaborative time also be set aside during the school year for goal monitoring and review? Could PLCs be used for this purpose?** Under the previous district administrator, feedback to the principals appears to have been limited to their summary year. **How can feedback and coaching be built in more frequently across all years?**

Principals value use of surveys as part of their goal setting process and to help inform school priorities. Creating their own surveys helps to generate context specific feedback. A consistent survey across the district could help provide consistent information across schools. **Has the district also leveraged the Wisconsin Educator Development, Support and Retention Survey to inform school and district priorities?**

The principal framework (CESA 6 SAPES standards) does not appear to be a heavily-used tool within or outside of the evaluation context. Because several of the principals are new to their positions, **how can the framework be incorporated and used to bring coherence to leadership practice, help guide their development, and inform professional learning decisions?**

Reflecting on these questions could help Lodi build on their leadership foundation and enhance their administrators' goal setting, professional development, and leadership practices in the future.

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Principal Learning–Centered Study:

Wautoma Area School District Case Study

Jessica Arrigoni & Steve Kimball

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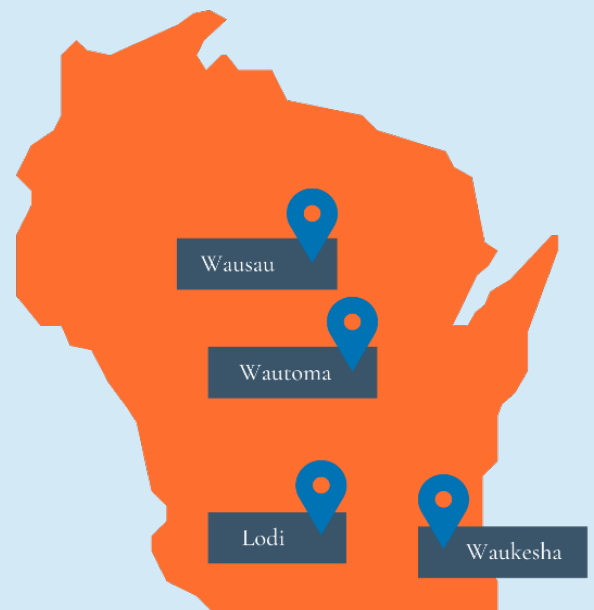## About the Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative

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Wausau

Wautoma

Lodi

Waukesha

District Context

Wautoma Area School District is a small K4-12 school district located in central Wisconsin. The district includes 11 municipalities. The district's four schools (high, middle, and two elementary) serve 11 municipalities. Three of the principals are within their first three years of leading their respective schools. The most senior principal has been with the district for seven years.

District Overview

Location
Central Wisconsin, Cooperative Educational Service Agency (CESA) 5

Student Enrollment
1,358 (2019-20)

Number of Schools
1 high school, 1 middle school, 2 elementary schools

Educator Effectiveness Model
CESA 6 EP model

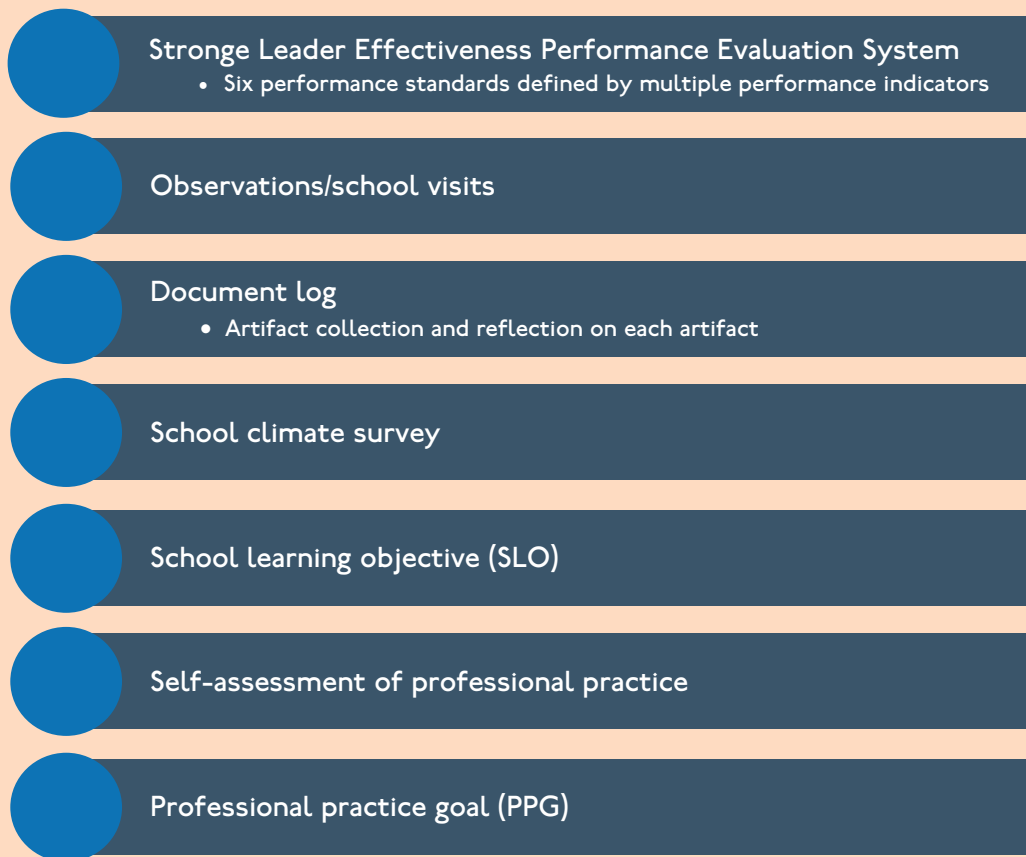### District Report Card (2018-19)
Meets Expectations

The district's main goal, as shared by the district administrator, is having students leave the district as "resilient learners." The district works to achieve that goal by addressing culture, climate, and safety, and emphasizing universal instruction. The instructional approach includes response to intervention, with sound tier 2 and 3 instruction, and standards-based grading. District leaders also reflect on their annual school report cards and uses those data to address student growth and close achievement gaps..

Student Demographics

RACE/ETHNICITY	PERCENT
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0.1%
Asian	0.4%
Black or African American	1.5%
Hispanic/Latino	19.3%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0.1%
White	75.2%
Two or More Races	3.3%
STUDENT GROUPS	
Students with Disabilities	11.7%
Economically Disadvantaged	58.1%
English Learners	7.7%

Principal Evaluation Process

The Wautoma School District adopted the CESA 6 School Administrator Performance Evaluation System (SAPES) Educator Practice model. The main elements of the SAPES model are:[I]

Stronge Leader Effectiveness Performance Evaluation System
- Six performance standards defined by multiple performance indicators

Observations/school visits

Document log
- Artifact collection and reflection on each artifact

School climate survey

School learning objective (SLO)

Self-assessment of professional practice

Professional practice goal (PPG)

Principals in Wautoma are on a three-year evaluation cycle with one summary year and two supporting/formative years. In each of the years, principals complete an SLO, a PPG, and administer a staff survey, which provides input for their goal setting and progress monitoring. The district administrator engages principals in the evaluation process.

District and school administrators reported that they come together as a team in August to create their strategic plan and from that process develop their school learning objectives. The district administrator encourages principals to "take risks" and "not be afraid to put something out there to try." He said that it is his job to communicate that the purpose of the process is to "grow and stretch and move forward." He said that he wants his principals to be "risk takers" and that he shares with them that "if [they] fail, [they] will learn more from that failure and the next time [they] do it [they're] going to be much better."

I   2020 School Administration Performance Evaluation System (SAPES) Guidebook

In terms of observations and school visits, all school administrators and the district administrator said that they were in constant conversation, and that the evaluation model encouraged a "team approach." One principal stated that they work "side by side" on many things and that the observation process is pretty informal. Another principal said that the district administrator is in the building "almost daily" and that he does not say "I'm observing you today;" instead, there is a "level of respect that when he's around he's monitoring me and then he's going to reflect and respond as part of my observation." This principal agreed that the observation process was informal and concluded by saying that the district administrator is a "constant observer." A third principal shared that "he's always in the school and he knows what's going on." Principals also reported that they are comfortable when the district administrator is in the buildings because he is there so frequently.

Related to observations, principals were asked about the coaching and feedback they received. Each principal reported that they receive coaching from the district administrator. In doing so, he "listens" and "asks questions to understand the situation" and then "help[s] work through it rather than simply saying this is what you should do." Additionally, he "gives advice but doesn't tell [us] how to do it." The district administrator shared that he intentionally coaches and guides school leaders. He further explained that he has not had specific coaching training, but that his coursework on servant leadership reinforced his professional philosophy that they all grow as leaders.

Each principal said that they often reach out to the district administrator for feedback on issues that come up in their schools and that they view him as a "mentor."

In terms of feedback, principals shared that they receive feedback that is specific to a situation and that it is often accompanied by a conversation to identify different ways to handle the situation.. Each principal said that they often reach out to the district administrator for feedback on issues that come up in their schools and that they view him as a "mentor." One principal also shared that, because their local evaluation processes include reflection as a built-in step, they regularly reflect on the feedback and the staff survey results. The principal said, "because I have to put things in there [evaluation data collection system], it definitely makes me actually think about what I want to do and what's important versus just hoping it'll get fixed."

Artifacts are shared through the district documentation log. Administrators are highly encouraged to submit "the bare minimum to get your point across." Similar to guidance given from CESA 6, that artifacts should provide evidence for more than one standard and that the emphasis should be on the quality not the quantity of artifacts. "There are six standards in the SAPES model, so ideally administrators submit 12 artifacts." Along with the artifacts, principals describe how the artifact provides evidence for the standard, how it impacted professional practice and knowledge, and the impact on student learning demonstrated by the artifact. Representative of how close the principals and district administrator work together, one principal felt that the documentation log was "unnecessary" because the district administrator was aware of what they were doing.

He explained that "everything is interwoven," that "whatever we're doing it should really all be tied together. If our strategic plan is school culture and certain components of the accountability report card then that's where [principals'] SLOs should be driven, same with teachers." One of the principals shared a similar sentiment, that "everyone has ownership in the goals."

Principals reported that the use of the evaluation framework, the Stronge Principal Standards, was limited to the evaluation process. It was specifically cited as a tool for reflection and as a guide for improvement.

In relation to artifact collection, observations, coaching, and feedback, the principals expressed that the level of ongoing conversation and the nature of their close working relationship with their district administrator was unique to him and that they would not describe their relationship with previous administrators in the same way.

Connection between Educator Effectiveness and School and District Priorities

Goal setting through student and school learning objectives represents the element of the district evaluation process that best supports school and district priorities. The district and school administrators described a process of collaboratively reviewing data in the summer, developing their strategic plan for the year, and then setting aligned SLOs. School administrators reported that often their PPGs, because they supported their SLOs, in turn also supported the larger school and district goals. Teachers are also encouraged to set aligned SLOs.

The district administrator shared an example of aligned goals from the middle school. He said that math scores in the middle school were low, so the principal and the teachers set SLOs around math. Then, they created their professional learning plan for the middle school, which focused on strengthening their "knowledge and their connections" on areas related to improving math scores. He explained that "everything is interwoven," that "whatever we're doing it should really all be tied together. If our strategic plan is school culture and certain components of the accountability report card then that's where [principals'] SLOs should be driven, same with teachers." One of the principals shared a similar sentiment, that "everyone has ownership in the goals."

Connection between Educator Effectiveness and Professional Learning

Principals reported that they are "always" offered professional learning opportunities and encouraged to participate in those they identify or that are made available by the district. One principal stated that if an area of need was identified, the district administrator would not hesitate to specify appropriate professional development. Further, the district administrator shared an example of how he connected his coaching of administrators to professional learning: one principal's culture and climate survey results were low, so the two of them worked through the survey responses to identify areas the principal could work on, and then the district administrator supported and coached the principal as the issues were addressed. However, principals shared that the suggested professional learning is typically connected to district initiatives more so than areas of weakness identified through their evaluation system.

Principals and the district administrator often attend professional learning together. Some examples included training on standards-based grading, Professional Learning Communities, and social emotional learning. They also referenced attending learning opportunities provided by CESA 6 and through the Association of Wisconsin School Administrators, as well as viewing webinars and reading books together.

The district administrator stressed that it was this collaborative planning and ongoing communication between himself and the principals that was the biggest support to principals during this school year.

Principal Supports During COVID-19 Pandemic

Principal supports during the COVID-19 pandemic can be described in a similar way as the principal supports prior to the pandemic. The collaborative working nature between the district administrator and school administrators carried through the pandemic, and professional learning opportunities were aligned with district and school priorities as well as identified individual principal needs.

In a follow-up call in the fall of 2020, the district administrator shared that, in April 2020, he and the school leaders began planning for what school might look like in the fall. They knew that school would not look the same and spent the summer working together to create plans for in-person, hybrid, and virtual learning. They found the biggest room in the district and met for four hours every week. The district administrator and the principals were the constant figures in those meetings and representatives from transportation, food services, and custodial services attended the meetings as necessary.

Wautoma began the school year full-time and in-person, but even with the best laid plans, found that they needed to switch to hybrid. Roughly 75% of their student population had elected to return to full-time, in-person, and 25% selected all-virtual. Teachers were teaching to the students in the two models as well as those that were switching between in-person and virtual because of their need to quarantine. At one point, the number of students and staff quarantined was almost 300. At this point, the district made the decision to switch to a hybrid model so that they could slow down the transmission of the virus and help ensure that they did not have to switch to an all-virtual model. The district administrator shared that "mentally, physically, emotionally, academically [they] need to see [their] kids" and so their planning was always focused on not having to implement an all-virtual model. The hybrid model continues to be in place, with a transition back to five days a week in-person beginning on March 8th.

The district administrator stressed that it was this collaborative planning and ongoing communication between himself and the principals that was the biggest support to principals during this school year. He also said that his role as principal supervisor became much more about "reassurance" to the principals and being on the front line of managing COVID-19.

He also shared that they did not apply for a waiver from the Educator Effectiveness System for the 2020-21 school year. They did not want to "minimize the importance of being good at what [they] do." Instead, they have continued to implement Educator Effectiveness but with more flexibility. The key focus was the goal planning, SLOs, and PPGs; they developed building level SLOs and aligned teacher SLOs.

Professional learning during the 2020-21 academic year for principals and educators focused entirely on skills needed to respond to the shifts in instructional models in schools due to COVID-19. Professional learning opportunities focused on learning the virtual platform and improved and diversified communications with families.

Key Findings and Questions to Consider

The close, collaborative working environment between the district administrator and the school administrators highly influences the (informal) structure of the evaluation system, the ongoing coaching and feedback, and the common professional learning opportunities that are pursued – even during a global pandemic.

Comments from the school administrators indicate that they have a trusting relationship with the district administrator and seek his guidance and feedback. Coaching and feedback is embedded within and outside of the evaluation process, and principals seek out guidance when issues arise. One question to consider is **who else in the district can support principals in addition to the district administrator?** When answering this question, decision-makers should keep in mind the "unique" relationship between the principals and the current district administrator.

Administrators described goal setting as a process that focuses efforts on school and district priorities and is used to align the work of teachers. They used collaborative data reviews to identify school and district priorities and targeted professional learning opportunities that support the priorities and the related goals. As the district set aside collaborative time for data review and goal setting in the summer, **can collaborative time also be set aside for goal monitoring and review throughout the school year?**

The principal framework (CESA 6 SAPES standards) does not appear to be a heavily- used tool within or outside of the evaluation context. Principals shared that it was mainly used for self-reflection. Because several of the principals are new to their positions, **how can the framework be incorporated and used to bring coherence to leadership practice, help guide their development, and inform professional learning decisions?**

Reflecting on these questions could help Wautoma build on their strong leadership foundation, which has been stable throughout the pandemic, and enhance their administrators' goal-setting, professional development, and leadership practices in the future.

Principal Learning-Centered Study:
Waukesha School District Case Study

Steve Kimball, Ph.D

Report Information

About the Authors

Steve Kimball

Steve Kimball is co-Director of the Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative and the Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness Research Partnership. He is also Principal Investigator for the Wisconsin - Minnesota Comprehensive Center for Region I0. Steve holds a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

About the Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative

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Introduction

This case study brief is part of a larger study conducted by the Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative (WEC) and the Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness Research Partnership (WEERP) examining how Wisconsin school districts support principal leadership development within and outside of the context of the Educator Effectiveness (EE) System.

This brief includes six sections:

1. district context and local priorities;
2. principal evaluation process and perceived impacts;
3. principal professional learning;
4. suggested EE system changes;
5. identification of future leaders; and
6. a summary of key findings and questions.

District Context and Priorities

The School District of Waukesha (SDW) is an urban-suburban school district in the Milwaukee Metropolitan Area of Southeast Wisconsin. As the seventh largest district in the state, the SDW serves 11,234 students in 25 schools. There are 13 elementary, 4 middle, and 3 high schools. The district also includes 5 charter options: the Waukesha STEM Academy (K-8 at two campuses), eAchieve (4k-grade 12 virtual), East Alternative School, and academies at two of the high schools. Tables 1 and 2 provide additional school and student descriptive data.

Table 1: District Overview

Location	CESA 1
Student enrollment	11,234
Number of Schools	25: 13 elementary, 4 middle, 3 high and 5 charter options
District Report Card	Exceeds Expectations

Table 2: Student Demographics

RACE/ETHNICITY	PERCENT
African American	5.4
Asian	3.9
American Indian	0.1
Caucasian	62.4
Pacific Islander	0.2
Hispanic/Latino/a	24
2 or more	4
STUDENT GROUPS	
Students with Disabilities	15
Economically Disadvantaged	37.5
English Learners	8.8

2020-21 DPI district report card

Priorities

Before delving into principal evaluation and professional learning processes, we first asked participants to describe school and district priorities. At the time of the study, the overarching district goal was to be the top achieving large district in Wisconsin. The SDW was currently in the third spot. To reach the goal, they targeted key performance indicators teaching and learning, student engagement and parent satisfaction, employee satisfaction and engagement, and operations and finance (see Appendix A). Several respondents also spoke of an overarching emphasis on literacy, equity, and closing learning opportunity gaps. These priorities were addressed in different ways; for example, secondary schools may emphasize AVID instructional strategies, with elementary schools also focusing on Avid and using literacy instructional strategies such as thoughtful logs and guided groups.

The district has developed building benchmarks that annually frame expectations for leadership that include five areas: Focusing Direction; Cultivating Collaborative Cultures; Deepening Learning and High Leverage Practice; Securing Accountability and Ensuring Excellence; and Data and Key Results-Coherence (see appendix B). The five areas identify key activities with data sources, target dates, change stages (i.e., initiation, implementation, and institutionalization), and related leadership practices from the Wisconsin Framework for Principal Leadership (WFPL). The benchmark document helps principals identify relevant evidence sources and includes reflection and dialog prompts for principal-supervisor discussions.

At each school level and districtwide, Waukesha leverages the School Administrator Institute for Transformational Leadership (SAIL), as the primary way to support improvement planning and implementation around priority areas. District leaders and school teams annually engage in improvement planning and leadership team development through the SAIL process [include link to SAIL cross-case report], which the district adopted in 2015. The use of SAIL represents a common strategic planning and implementation process, which is anchored in school data and allows for school leadership flexibility that also promotes distributed leadership. As one principal commented, given their long-term experience with SAIL and use across schools, "… I think the (district) leadership now trusts us to follow the process, and know that we're all kind of doing the work that our schools need…" The perception of trust extended to and influenced the way the district has implemented principal evaluation.

Principal Evaluation Process and Impacts

Waukesha School District adopted the state model for principal educator effectiveness. The main elements of the model are:[1]

- Standards based on the Wisconsin Framework for Principal Leadership identified using two domains, 5 subdomains, and 19 components articulated through a four-level rubric

- Observations, school visits and other evidence collection

- School learning objective (SLO)

- Self-assessment of professional practice

- Professional practice goal (PPG)

- Periodic conferences: beginning of year, middle of year, end of year

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[1] See user guide: https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/ee/pdf/principalprocessmanual.pdf

Principals engage in a three-year evaluation cycle with one Summary/Summative Year and two Supporting/Formative Years. Principals new to the profession go through the Summary process each of their first three years. During the Summary year, principals self-assess using the WFPL to identify their professional practice goal, set the SLO, and engage in regular informal feedback process with supervisors in addition to the three periodic conferences. The district has attempted to ease burdens on principals and take advantage of EE System flexibility.

The district initially strictly adhered to all aspects of the principal evaluation process, but over time has adapted their approach to take advantage of evidence collection and scoring flexibility. The SDW does not formally score performance or require evidence collection on all components from the WFPL. The district sought to alleviate school leadership burdens once supervisors and principals became comfortable with the evaluation process and principals demonstrated proficiency. They narrowed the focus on leadership competencies based on identified needs and leadership actions important for success with SAIL and stressed that evidence collection is something they do through the SAIL process. As one district leader described:

> We, I would say frankly, got into a place where we were seeing confident leadership behaviors from our principals. And we had feedback from our principals that the collecting of artifacts for all the components was completely taxing and annoying. And so the past three years, we have not had them do their own artifacts, what we have tried to do is in our own accountability and reporting mechanisms locally, for example, twice a year, they report out to us on several leadership indicators. Including school data, including their SAIL process, we have tried to connect the principal components to those areas. And show them like, basically, this is your artifact.

Rather than completing an artifact folder, with principals regularly logging documents or other evidence sources and indicating which components from the WFPL the sources relate to, supervisors apply a more informal approach to evidence collection. The approach is "…more casual around the components, but it's still tight around the formal observation, [and] pre and post conferencing, it is [also] tight around the SLO." Leaders still engage with principals in beginning of year, mid-year, and end of year conversations as part of the process.

Those who need added support engage in the full evaluation process and all components from the WFPL. For principals on assistance plans, "we wanted clear and concise indicators on how to be successful that are not made up by [the supervisor]." Those with more experience have informal interactions that focus on leadership coaching, support and a subset of WFPL components.

To build collaborative opportunities, principals may be paired together on common professional practice goals. Supervisors met with their Summary Year principals as a group at the beginning of the year to review the evaluation process and to allow for connections to be made around similar leadership learning goals.

Observations are frequent, with informal visits "all the time." Principal supervisors conduct regular monthly visits that include a "rounding meeting" with basic questions about what's working, what's a barrier to the work, what can support you as principal, and who in your school should we recognize and why? The questions help district leaders stay informed of building issues, directly support principals, and acknowledges successes among staff. The latter both demonstrates appreciation of staff efforts and affirms to staff that the principal recognizes their work and shares it with district leadership.

Support for principals is available as needed through ongoing dialog, regular meetings, and access to district leaders. As a principal supervisor mentioned:

> I've tried to make myself available to everyone when they need me… If we have that relationship established, available on weekends and at night, that's foundational. The relationship piece we have established. Then when we give them feedback, that is enabled by trust. We see [the feedback] in action through conversations and regular visits.

Principals confirmed the evaluation process described by their supervisors. They spoke about the careful approach taken to introduce the evaluation process during the initial implementation years (2014-15). This included a focus on understanding the criteria (WFPL rubric for principals and the teacher model represented by the Danielson Framework for Teaching), and their corresponding multiple levels of practice, along with goal setting, check-in meetings and evidence collection. Those beyond their initial three years as school leaders also noted the emphasis on formative feedback.

During Summary years, principals develop their PPG and SLOs and engage in dialog with their evaluators around their goals and the building benchmarks identified by the indicators. During Supporting years of the evaluation cycle, principals also complete student learning and professional practice goals. Then, instead of engaging in conversations with their evaluator, through the SAIL process, they receive coaching and feedback from the assigned SAIL coach.

Principals described the process involving supervisors working with the principal through periodic school visits and dialog around leadership priorities, collecting evidence, and providing feedback. Supervisors would, "get into the building, talk with staff, and you know, really taking our self-reflection as kind of the baseline for a conversation and then coming in and observing our leadership styles…"

Process adaptations during pandemic

Taking advantage of waiver availability, district leaders allowed teachers to opt out of the EE process during the 2020-21 school year. However, principals still engaged in goal setting and dialog with supervisors as part of their own EE process. Observations occurred both in-person and during virtual meetings. Regarding the EE waiver, one principal asserted that, "I don't believe I was given that option and I wouldn't have taken it because … you do have to have [an outcome] goal and you have to have a personal professional goal." Further, while teachers had the waiver option, in this principal's school, 15 decided to stay on their EE cycle and 2 decided to defer for the year.

Connection between Educator Effectiveness and School/District Priorities

There are two primary ways Educator Effectiveness supports school and SDW priorities. The first relates to the benchmark document that includes building performance and leadership indicators. As referenced earlier, the benchmark document spells out district priorities along with relevant data, timelines, and references to the WFPL component that can inform leadership practice and dialog about progress.

The second involves the SAIL process, which is the primary process the district leverages to support district and school continuous improvement. SAIL engages leaders across the district and teachers within school teams around a common improvement process.

Several study participants referenced the use of SAIL artifacts, as well as SAIL meeting observations, as providing evidence for principal evaluation. Good leadership facilitating the SAIL process (e.g., developing distributed leadership; data-informed decision making; continuous improvement) are all reflected in components of the WFPL. Several principals shared examples of alignment between SAIL and principal evaluation.

When asked whether principal and teacher evaluation process and SAIL process are related, a teacher leader responded that:

> I wouldn't be able to speak to all schools, but here at our school, I feel like we've been very transparent with saying, we get a bigger bang for our buck… the more that we focus in on just a few important goals. …the more we can actually try to connect our personal goal, our classroom goal, to our school goal, and that school goal is connected to the district goal, the more that we really can hopefully see student achievement and student growth improved. I've seen very few teacher goals that are not connected to our school goal.

As one principal commented, "… the work is so aligned from like, the district level and the SAIL process. I kind of feel like it all fits, they kind of mirror each other … and there's opportunity for collaboration on different things."

Describing the connection between SAIL and evaluation, another stated that "… my announced observation I had this year was actually a SAIL meeting. I had [supervisor] come in to observe that. So, I think, the one nice thing with that is all the schools are doing it and we're using similar terminology, vocabulary and talking about 100-day plans… and quarterly reviews."

Use of Principal Framework

Several principals mentioned that the principal competency model (the WFPL) serves as a guide for self-reflection aspects of evaluation as well as dialog, but is not typically referenced outside of the evaluation process. As one described, "I think you just use it as a guide, especially when we're doing the self-review. I think it's a good reflective tool. Just to see, like, right now I'm looking at recruiting and selecting [WFPL component I.I.I]. It's a good piece of like, 'okay, where do I need to go next?" This principal went on to say that some of the descriptors are not clear cut between proficient and distinguished, but that he starts at the proficient level and considers what is entailed to get to the next level. Compared to the prior principal evaluation approach used by the district, which was more open-ended and loosely connected to leadership standards, the WFPL has "helped provide some clarity."

Principal supervisors also mentioned limited use of the WFPL outside of the evaluation process, although there was reference to components within the benchmark indicators document. One supervisor stated that, while not used extensively, "… I still think there's validity in the rubric indicators that help obviously any leader to push for those look-fors."Another supervisor did not see much value in the framework components and rubrics and saw their use in evaluation as a "check box" exercise. This supervisor expressed that the leadership components were missing dispositional elements and that principals could show the leadership behaviors but may struggle with the dispositions needed to be strong district employees. The supervisor still observes regularly and provides feedback and wants to observe staff as they work, not only in a facilitated meeting. As this supervisor stated, "A principal can fake a good meeting, but you can't fake the staff behavior."

Impact of Principal EE process

Principals noted several ways the principal evaluation process influences leadership practice, including through alignment with the SAIL continuous improvement process, goal setting, reflection, and dialog with and feedback from principal supervisors.

SAIL alignment

As described above, the alignment of the SAIL process and district approach to principal evaluation was noted by principals and supervisors as positively guiding and influencing leadership practice.

Given the common use of SAIL as a continuous improvement process across the district, with its ongoing professional learning and coaching, some participants mentioned that the addition of SAIL process may have more impact on professional practice than through the principal evaluation process alone.

Goal setting, reflection, dialog and feedback

Several principals mentioned that engaging in self-reflection, goal setting, and evaluation dialog and feedback had some impact on their leadership practice. For example, when asked how, if at all, the evaluation process informed their leadership practice, one principal responded:

> I think refreshing my understanding of what high quality looks like in leadership, and then having a conversation about artifacts, like what would I need to show this? So I rely heavily on my supervisor to be able to tell me precisely what would be evidence of this. And so they have to be very, to me, very knowledgeable. And I am a person who will question like, 'What do you mean, I got a three?' and I'm not going to say I'm an overachiever, but like, 'what do I need so that I can grow and get better?' And they have to have a true knowledge of that.

As another principal described:

> ...I've gotten feedback on how to build a positive school culture. So, I think that feedback really helped me reflect on how I'm building a positive adult school climate and culture in the midst of challenges and everything. So, that's helped me take a step back.

A third stated:

> I think the power in the evaluation process is twofold: one as a principal you get to look at the work you're doing and you get to self-reflect; [second,] when you start to put our artifacts out there for what you're doing, and then to be able to meet with them to have them see what we're doing and then talk through some of those artifacts, a little more in depth aabout what they mean. [It] was definitely a benefit for them to have a clear understanding of what we're trying to accomplish.

Principal supervisors also described feedback as ongoing, both within and outside the evaluation process. As one commented, " I feel like coaching conversations I just have with my principals all the time about everything from something like [instructional leadership] to working with another administrator colleague, to how they handle a parent situation or a complaint…" Another explained that they base feedback on what they are seeing or not seeing during school visits: are teachers collaborating together; are they asking good questions of the principal; how is the principal preparing teacher leadership opportunities; how are they participating with teachers as learners.

Principal supervisors indicated the evaluation process alone likely does not contribute to substantial changes in principal practice. Instead, as noted by principals, the impact occurs with alignment between complementing aspects of leadership benchmarks, SAIL, and the evaluation process. As one supervisor commented, "I believe the [evaluation] components in conjunction with our local accountability measures, is providing more impact. And I think our local direction around our clarity with principal accountability is what they would point to as stretching them as a leader."

Supervisors also stated that the principal EE process provides needed structure and support that is more relevant to new principals than for experienced principals. As one district leader noted, "When we work with new principals, that's when we lean on principal evaluation more. It helps to get them inducted in the district, with financial management, policy management, etc. But we rely on SAIL for leadership professional learning."

Principal Professional Learning

As indicated above, district and school leaders that the SAIL process, as a central feature of district and school improvement, has more of an impact on professional learning than the principal evaluation process. SAIL professional learning has supported district and school teams through a common continuous improvement process.

Leadership professional learning also occurs through two-hour administrative meetings each month. During the monthly administrative professional learning times in 2020-2021 the district engaged with Dr. Sharroky Hollie on equity leadership training and on culturally and linguistically relevant teaching. A principal shared example of meeting focus: "some of it is more of like logistical things, but some is like, 'okay, well, how are you going to lead a conversation around helping a teacher get to the next level… how are you going to move a teacher in the development of their Blackboard course, for example?" The principal went on to describe in-basket exercises, as well as a focus on aspects of the SAIL progress.

Participants discussed a number of other leadership professional learning experiences as well. These included AVID training at the secondary level and AVID as well as literacy and mathematics frameworks training at the elementary level. Professional learning also included a focus on mental health and trauma informed care to provide supports during the pandemic. There was also support provided on legal issues relating to section 504 changes and other special education issues.

Finally, the district encourages school and district leaders to pursue learning opportunities provided through conferences and academies sponsored by the Association of Wisconsin School Administrators.

Ways to improve the local EE system

Although perceived burdens with the evaluation process frustrate principals and principal supervisors, several indicated the benefits of the process. As one principal commented, "I don't like the work involved with it, but I love the thoroughness of it, and the conversations that exist… they're rich and they're meaningful. I'm not somebody to shy away from honest conversation…and it also gets away from assumptions."

Suggestions for changes included streamlining the WFPL rubric and/or removing components that can be addressed in other ways. For example, one principal referenced budgeting as an area that may not be necessary for each principal's evaluation. "If you are not spending well, there are checks and balances that can help." They commented, "What truly matters, that should be the focus."

District leaders also echoed the call to streamline the system and that "less is more" with a focus on a small number of high leverage areas, rather than inadvertently encouraging leaders look outside of the evaluation process and consider DPI requirements more generally in terms of the impact on schools and districts. Related, there was encouragement for DPI "to reach out to districts around the state and come together in a collaborative manner" to address common to just go through the hoops of a large accountability system. There was also encouragement to challenges rather than defer to "a strong metro Madison approach that doesn't work across the state" and "COVID has really put a spot light on that."

Future Principal Identification

Finally, we asked district and school leaders how future principals were identified and developed for the role. Future leaders are identified in a number of ways, including demonstrating leadership capacity during SAIL participation, through formal leadership roles, such as department leads and instructional coaches, and from partnerships with area higher education programs.

A principal commented that several principals were cultivated through the instructional coaching ranks and received training that is "almost equivalent to principals and that helps" set them up for school leadership positions. Similarly, a district leader shared that:

> We encourage teachers to become teacher leaders and to pursue their [administrator] license. We have coaching coordinator role and encourage those folks to pursue leadership license. That's been the big push. In student services, when I arrived, there was only one other person who had a pupil services license. We changed our approach and now we have 4 others with that license in the district and six teachers with the license. Going from one to have eleven is big.

District and school leaders also mentioned relationships with area leadership training programs, including Carroll University, UW-Milwaukee and Cardinal Stritch that have helped to develop future principals.

Key Findings and Questions to Consider

Based on the discussions and document reviews, we next summarize key findings and pose reflective questions for district and school leaders to consider regarding principal evaluation and leadership development.

District leaders have adapted the principal evaluation process to streamline aspects for principals. Additionally, supervisors and SAIL coaches offer extensive opportunities for leadership feedback and coaching. Principal participants noted and appreciated these efforts.

SAIL represents the primary improvement and professional learning vehicle in the district. There are some important connections between SAIL goals and goals identified through Student/School Learning Objectives. The building benchmark document also includes references to leadership competencies from the Wisconsin Framework for Principal Leadership.

- What additional ways might the principal EE process reinforce the improvement processes and strategies from leaders and teacher engaging in their SAIL activities?

- Clear connections exist between SAIL and related professional learning. How is equity leadership training being reinforced through SAIL and the principal evaluation process?

Although principals expressed appreciation for the ability to reflect and see a path to leadership improvement using the WFPL framework, it does is not applied outside of the evaluation context. Additionally, participants perceived the tools and process of principal evaluation provide as more of a key support for novice principals. There may be opportunities to strengthen the pipeline approach and leverage the WFPL as a guide for future leadership development.

- How might the evaluation process further support coherence between leadership practice, leadership development, and professional learning decisions?

- If there is interest in a more formalized leadership pipeline process, how could the process build both leadership competencies (relevant to SAIL and WFPL) as well as key dispositions?

The district has taken steps to leverage existing flexibility within the system to ease burdens on administrators while also meeting district priorities and goals. Leaders also expressed interest in making sure that state requirements in general (not just related to EE) better fit local contexts and support district innovation.

- In addition to participating in the current Elevating Success pilot process, what other ways might the district inform future directions of the state Educator Effectiveness System?

Reflecting on these questions could help the School District of Waukesha build on their leadership foundation and enhance their administrators' goal setting, professional development, and leadership practices in the future.

WEC
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Principal Learning-Centered Study:
Wausau School District Case Study

Prepared by Steve Kimball

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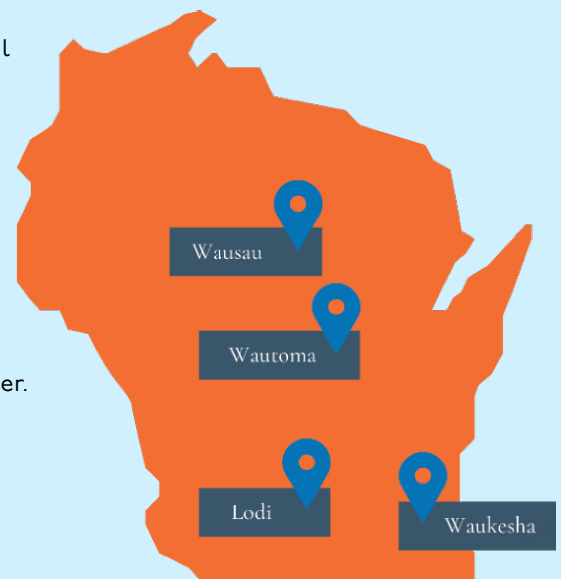## About the Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative

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Introduction

This case study brief is part of a larger study conducted by the Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative (WEC) and the Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness Research Partnership (WEERP) examining how Wisconsin school districts support principal leadership development within and outside of the context of the Educator Effectiveness (EE) System.

This brief includes five sections:

1. district context;

2. an overview of the principal evaluation process;

3. principal professional learning;

4. supports during the COVID-19 pandemic; and

5. a summary of key findings and questions district leaders may wish to consider.

District Context

The Wausau School District is located in north-central Wisconsin. The district serves the city of Wausau and communities primarily to the north of Wausau and is bisected by the Wisconsin River into east and west attendance areas. According to the district website, the Wausau School District serves about 7,760 students in twenty schools, including two high schools, two middle schools, thirteen elementary schools, two charter schools and a virtual school. The district has experienced declining enrollment in recent years, with 426 less students in the 2020 school year than the prior year. The following table summarizes the district's context.

District Overview

Location

Cooperative Educational Service Agency (CESA) 9

Student Enrollment

7,760

Number of Schools

20

Educator Effectiveness Model

State model

District Report Card (2018-19)

Exceeds Expectations

Student Demographics*

RACE/ETHNICITY	PERCENT
American Indian or Alaskan Native	1%
Asian	20%
Black or African American	2%
Hispanic/Latino	7%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0%
White	64%
Two or More Races	6%

STUDENT GROUPS	
Students with Disabilities	14%
Economically Disadvantaged	45%
English Learners	12%

* Data obtained from district demographic report
** Data collected from 2018-19 DPI district report card

"We are the solution. We are the adults in the buildings. When we are not getting results, we have to be open to self-reflective thinking and work." - District Leader

At the time of the interviews, like districts across the state and nation, Wausau was adjusting to the COVID-19 pandemic. District leaders and educators were addressing community concerns, staff stress, and student learning needs all during a time of ongoing uncertainty and adjustments due to the ongoing pandemic. The district also had recent key leadership changes. The high school principal was hired just prior to schools shutting down in March 2020 and the Director of Secondary Education started with the district during that summer. These realities necessarily lead to a focus on building relationships, basic district or school functioning, and managing the complexity of a remote learning start to the school year followed by a transition to a hybrid instructional approach in the late fall. School leaders prioritized safety plans, communication, and staffing and technology availability.

District/School Priorities

Wausau completed a district strategic plan in the Fall of 2019 that focuses on goals in five main areas: Achievement, Resources, People, Service and Wellness (see Appendix A). Each area includes 2-3 subgoals targeting completion by 2022-2023 that are led by a district-level team (e.g., Achievement is led by the education team, People is led by the human resources team). Each team developed goals and action steps to implement the priority area. Notably, the achievement area, which focuses on literacy and mathematics, references specific components (2a, 2b, 3e) from the Danielson Framework for Teaching and targets proficient or distinguished instructional practice. These components involve creating a respectful classroom environment, establishing a culture for learning, and demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness in instruction.

"...we still need to have a focus on those strategic plan goals..." - Principal

The district is also pursuing an emphasis on equity within the goal areas and was planning to pilot test a new classroom walkthrough tool in the spring of 2021. The tool, presented in Appendix B, was designed to fill a void for the district by having a specific focus on equity-centered adult practices. As a district leader explained, "I believe strongly that [focusing on equity is] the right work and the calvary is not coming. There is no silver bullet solution. We are the solution. We are the adults in the buildings. When we are not getting results, we have to be open to self-reflective thinking and work." Although the tool is intended to address the three Framework for Teaching Components from the Achievement area of the strategic plan, these and other relevant FfT components are not specifically highlighted. Initially slotted for the 2019-20 school year, the pilot was delayed because it would not have been suitable due to the pandemic and varied learning structures.

Additionally, the district engaged external support for equity-focused leadership training from Integrated Comprehensive Systems for Equity and was continuing that learning experience during the summer. District and school leaders also participate in an on-line webinar series devoted to leadership for equity.

School priorities were adapted to meet needs during the pandemic. For example, one school had a prior focus on relationships with students, to make sure each student had a relationship with at least one adult in the building through multiple school community events and one-to-one or small group relationship building activities. Through multiple efforts, they strove for stronger connections with students and their families. They were in the third year of this sustained priority when the pandemic forced changes to virtual and hybrid learning. The principal asserted that the initiative was still important during the pandemic, and maybe even more so, but has been a challenge due to stress, unpredictability with classroom and school closures due to close-contact or quarantines, etc. However, the school staff still reached out to families through emails, sending gifts during the holidays, and conducting home visits for students who had not attended school (virtually or in-person) for months. The efforts have had success and as the principal stated, "There are still kids who don't engage, but that number is smaller. We are still trying to get out to those families that are struggling in many different ways and conducted about 30 home visits, for those kids who are struggling, trying to get them back in the classroom. Last week we had 4-5 kids coming to school after 8 months."

Principal Evaluation Process & Impacts

Wausau School District adopted the state model for principal educator effectiveness. The main elements of the model are:[1]

- Standards based on the Wisconsin Framework for Principal Leadership

- Two domains, 5 subdomains, 19 components articulated through a four-level rubric

- Observations/school visits

- School learning objective (SLO)

- Self-assessment of professional practice

- Professional practice goal (PPG)

Principals engage in a three-year evaluation cycle with one Summary Year and two Supporting/Formative Years. Principals and district leaders described the process as closely mirroring the teacher EE process, with goal setting in October, and mid-year discussions in both Supporting and Summary Years. The Summary Year represents a more formal process with data and artifacts collected and logged into the Frontline management system. During Summary Years, supervisors encourage principals to focus on five or six components to concentrate their efforts and maximize opportunities for feedback and growth.

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[1] See user guide: https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/ee/pdf/principalprocessmanual.pdf

New principals are on summary for the first two years, but that can extend to three years if more intensive and ongoing support is needed. In Supporting Years, principals are encouraged to engage in self-identified professional practice goals, in addition to the annual School Learning Objective. This lighter touch is intended to free up principals, but still encourage reflection and growth, and allows supervisors to spend more time with principals in their Summary Year.

One principal supervisor described her approach as anchored in support and coaching. The supervisor supports principals with goal setting, connecting in several fall planning meetings and using guiding questions. As they set their own goals, principals also work with teachers on their goals and typically encourage them to use classroom and school data so goals can meet classroom as well as school needs. Throughout the year, the supervisor meets with principals individually or in groups to check on progress, problem solve, examine data, and adjust goals as needed. In the spring they discuss how the year went and what to focus on going forward.

Another principal supervisor started with principal goal setting conferences. She put together a Google document for the goal setting meeting and gave principals some prompts. As part of the strategic plan, there was emphasis on the three components from the district strategic plan: 2a) respect and rapport, 2b) culture of learning, and 3e) flexibility and responsiveness. Principals were asked to think about those in relation to their goals and given the uncertainties surrounding schooling during the pandemic. Also using questions to prompt goal setting, she asked her principals to talk about what they are seeing in fall administrations of formative student assessments.

"...[the WFPL] is a guiding piece that you think about in terms of leadership." - Principal

Evidence collection is based on individual principal professional goals and school improvement plans and includes artifacts and observations. One supervisor described her observation approach as follows:

> … I intentionally am in the buildings. I always like to attend at least one faculty meeting within the year. It depends, if a principal is focused on improvement in the area of facilitation of professional learning, then my goal might be to be at three faculty meetings. We'll space them out throughout the year, so that I can give feedback or provide them resources or support. So, it's, you know, attending faculty meetings, professional learning days, LC meetings, on site meetings, again, based around data.

Referencing the observation process, a principal mentioned that they are related to goals and areas where the principal wants to highlight work or receive feedback:

> A meeting we have, like an administrative meeting, a staff meeting, something where I am showing leadership then I invite them in. Very flexible. I haven't had, for evaluation, I have not had them when I am doing an evaluation or one-on-one with a teacher, but I have thought about it. I did it once through some professional development.

Process Adaptations during Pandemic

Although district leaders decided to apply for a DPI waiver on EE requirements during the spring of 2020 when the pandemic hit, leaders planned to resume typical implementation of the local EE process during the 2020-21 school year, allowing principals and teachers to pick up where they left off in the spring. Instead, the district decided to pursue another waiver for the year due to concerns expressed from the teacher's association, educators, and the school board about workload and demands related to the pandemic.

Some district and school leaders were discouraged by the change because the district has taken strides to be transparent about their use of EE results and that the process emphasizes a formative approach based on goal setting and feedback. However, principals also felt a second waiver would ease pressure on teachers, whose primary concern involved documentation. Principal supervisors still engaged with their principals in discussions about goal setting and supporting teachers around the three components from the strategic plan, but there was less perceived pressure to complete all aspects of the EE process.

Artifact collection, uploading, and tagging represented the main complaints about the EE system. Feedback and goal setting were still valued, as one leader expressed, "I have communicated with my principal team that even though we don't utilize maybe this year the actual system, being Frontline, and the collecting of some of the hard evidence, we're still held accountable for student academic growth and learning." This supervisor asked principals to set their own practice goals and develop SLOs, "…because we still need to have a focus on those strategic plan goals… [and] I'm treading lightly trying to find the balance to model it for the principals." Some principals still went ahead with using the Frontline management system to log their goals and related activities. As one principal explained, "We are still doing documents in MLP. [Since] we are going to set up professional practice goal, might was well put it in. So, I will be setting a school learning objective and professional practice goal in next couple of weeks."

"Sometimes we make assumptions about data, but the process can help shed light and it helps to focus." – Principal

The connection between district priorities and the principal EE process is also evident through professional practice and SLO goal setting and monitoring. As described by one principal,:

> One thing to mention, throughout the whole process, as we think about this, what helped me create goals for this school is that our district does have a focus for five or six years, our shared key interest. Right on my board over there, my poster, the walls in buildings, it's what we believe in. Student achievement, number one, drives our instruction. During the last few years, we have had a document we talk about the whole child, the whole Wausau initiative, around 5 different areas that helps, achievement is also a part of that as well.

Alignment also occurs between schoolwide goals and teacher goals even though teachers have flexibility to select their own goals. This natural alignment was described by one principal in the following way, "I leave EE somewhat up to teachers; I want them to own it and feel comfortable. But 80% of time there is alignment. They have gotten better at looking at individual kids and their needs. We have those discussions in data meetings in the start of the year and they build on that. Most align, but some years teachers may be more subject-focused." This natural alignment may be in part due to the long use of the EE system in the district for formative purposes and intentionality on the part of district and school leaders to engage teachers in improvement planning.

Impact of Principal Educator Effectiveness Process

Principals described the local EE process as affecting their practice mainly through goal setting, conversations with their supervisors, and self-reflection.

When asked how the process impacts their leadership practice, one principal commented that it, "...makes me reflect on it. I don't know how much it changes, but in that reflection, I guess it helps me realize that I am doing the right things, making differences. So, there is that self-reflection piece and in the end evaluation piece, to reiterate that I am doing a great job."

Another stated, "I think it makes me clarify it. I think we internally know where we need to go. Also helps ground me. Sometimes we make assumptions about data, but the process can help shed light and it helps to focus. There are a lot of areas to gain attention. Could look at improvement in every area. And the SLO."

Another indicated more growth comes from staff feedback rather than supervisor feedback:

> But at the end of the day, I think it's just based on a lot of your interactions and feedback from staff. So as a principal or associate principal, my evaluation for myself really comes from the feedback that I received from staff and the questions that I received from staff. Yes, I know that I have been in evaluation with [my supervisor], but I think that more of my learning comes from questions that come from staff that if I don't know then I'm searching for answers.

District leaders also identified self-reflection as influencing practice, as illustrated here:

> I think, probably biggest that I see or observe in principal practice is just a more self-reflective approach to the role. I think the evaluation process really shines the light on need for principals to make time and space to really reflect on their SLO goals and their professional goals and steps to take to reach them. So often, it's so easy to get caught in day-to-day, because there are host of those managerial pieces to the role. I think the evaluation process really forces principals to reflect on their roles as leaders and instructional leaders. Those components and processes force you to slow down and think about those.

Use of Principal Framework outside of the Educator Effectivess Process

There were limited formal references to the WFPL outside of the evaluation process. During planning meetings with principals, district leaders may reference components and how they overlap. For example, one supervisor indicated that components within the human resources sub-domain are very applicable to school leadership since they involve building educator capacity, interpersonal skills, and growing relationships.

One principal said, "It's used in self-reflection and the summary, so like I said before, [it] helps with PPG if there are areas where I see I need improvement, it does help in the summary evaluation and the meeting I usually have at the end of the school year with the evaluator. It helps highlight those things I am doing well, which is important, for many leaders."

Another stated that the WFPL serves as a guide but is not something explicitly referenced outside of the evaluation context. As he explained, "…well, I guess we don't reference necessarily specifics to the rubric… but it is a guiding piece that you think about in terms of leadership. We just had that conversation last week, just looking at climate and culture within our building and having those discussions [which are reflected in the rubric]."

Principal Professional Learning

As noted previously, the main way the EE process informs principal professional learning is through goal setting, formative feedback and principal self-reflection. There is limited use of principal evaluation results to inform individual or group professional development for principals. As one district leader explained, during monthly conversations with principals,

> our professional learning has been very much universal. When we are thinking about the equity piece, we've worked on the equity [walkthrough] tool, but we have not developed systems or processes at this point to individualize or personalize professional learning for principals based on their evaluation. We don't have a formalized process. Right now, professional learning for principals [stems from] [the principal supervisors] sharing what they think of a need for a group of principals.

Other Professional Learning

Although there were limited specific connections between the EE process and principal professional learning planning, the district does emphasize principal professional development in general and supports different learning opportunities. District leaders strongly endorse AWSA professional learning opportunities, for example, and occasionally draw together teams of leaders to attend AWSA academies based on common identified needs (e.g., coaching; leadership for equity). Attendance is also encouraged at AWSA conferences, national conferences, and options available within the district's professional learning catalog.

One principal commented about the AWSA learning experience with the Analyzing Teaching for Student Results Academy (which has since been changing to the Impactful Coaching Academy). According to the principal,

> The yearlong [ATSR academy] really affected me, made me a better evaluator of teachers. One, finding the time, and then really that's the thing that can affect instruction. How to have those conversations, ask those questions. There were things I knew, but the specific examples we went through in that PD for myself as a principal helped make me what I am today when evaluating teachers.

In addition, the district administration team, which includes district and school administrators, holds meetings one morning each month and elementary and secondary principals meet on those days in the afternoons. The principal supervisors also have additional meetings with groups of first and second-year principals. Further, principals may reach out for support from the district academic and behavior specialists as well as the professional learning director.

Complicating district principal professional development planning is the need to craft opportunities within limited time and already high leadership demands. One district leader explained that a challenge with their role is pulling together pieces to create coherence and not add more to leaders' plates. They also recognized that professional learning can take many forms and ideally it is job-embedded, meaningful, and relevant to addressing leaders' priorities.

Book studies are also part of the district approach to leader professional learning. They are focusing on Leader in Me on district-wide bases. There's also a group focusing on 7 Habits of Highly Successful People. There will be a new book set for the fall, which may focus on building universal knowledge around equity, perhaps using the book, White Fragility.

Supports During COVID-19 Pandemic

As mentioned above, the district received a waiver from EE System requirements during the 2020-21 school year. Goal setting was still encouraged and principal supervisors met individually with their assigned principals to provide feedback and support. In addition, the district tried to be flexible with hybrid learning and build in one day a week for planning and preparation. The monthly district leadership team meetings also served as an opportunity to regularly share experiences, problem solve and provide support. As one principal indicated, support goes both ways between principals and their supervisors and among principals: "we support each other

in conversations… [and with] bouncing ideas off each other… We had a conversation about that, and I saw as part of [supervisor's] agenda and she wanted to continue that conversation, so I thought that's a spot where I needed to support her and show what we have done over the past 10 years…"

Ways to Improve the Local Educator Effectivess System

Several leaders mentioned that they would like to see the EE system simplified, with reduced paperwork and an increase in feedback and coaching. As one commented,

> I think it should be streamlined for principal and teacher evaluation. Unfortunately, [it's] seen as a task to be completed and the intent has been lost. Increasing conversation focus and discussion with one another [would help]. I have shared with teachers, I'd be a better instructor if went back in classroom because I learned from them as an administrator. Same applies, want to get teachers talking with and supporting each other. Would be good for principals too. To have a network to share.

Another mentioned that principal evaluation could improve with district leaders spending more time in buildings. One stated that, "there was more [visibility] last year…I think they are working on it… but I think that's something that needs to continue."

Finally, one principal mentioned an opportunity to create more recognition:

> I think it's got a really strong foundation, very focused. One thing I would love to see is commitment to celebration of when we achieve goals, or the things we are doing well. Always great to think about improvement, but also think about strengths and highlights in the rubric. Growth is great, but recognition is important too.

Future Principal Identification

Finally, we also asked district and school leaders how future principals were identified and developed for the role. Principal pipeline development appears informal and based on relationships, everyday interactions, and talent identification through teaching leadership opportunities. As one district leader said,

> That is an excellent question of which we maybe are not as intentional as we should be. I'll speak for, just from myself, when I was a campus principal, I would look for staff in my building, whether they saw it within themselves or not, that had leadership potential, and I would engage in conversations and encourage them to explore those opportunities. I do that somewhat informally, I think now in my position, because I don't interact so directly with teachers, however, I typically am asked to have a voice at the table when we identify content leadership teams. And my lens for that is I'm thinking about people that I've either seen and I feel might have the potential and or would have the insights to continue to kind of encourage them in that leadership capacity to speak for other peers.

A teacher-in-charge role at the elementary level presents another opportunity for principals to tap teacher leaders for some job-relevant experience and to "test the waters" when principals are out of the building. At the secondary level, there may be additional opportunities for teachers to engage in leadership opportunities, such as deans of students, and department chair roles.

Key Findings & Questions to Consider

Based on the discussions and document reviews, we next summarize key findings and pose reflective questions for district and school leaders to consider regarding principal evaluation and leadership development.

In the past year, the Wausau School district had several changes in district and school leadership and more have occurred since the data were collected. Leadership transitions along with instructional and support changes resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic presents challenges to the district, but also opportunities to rethink professional learning and support structures. Along with the leadership transitions is the return to a full year of in-person schooling, and the re-engagement in the local EE process.

- How can these changes be embraced while continuing to build trust among the new leaders and between the leaders and staff?
- Are there additional ways for school and district leaders to increase visibility while re-engaging with school and district communities?

There are clear connections between the district strategic plan and the elements of the local Educator Effectiveness process, especially goal setting. Administrators described an aligned goal setting process that focuses efforts on school and district priorities and that also supports teachers' goal setting. The district set aside collaborative time for planning (e.g., 1 day a week for schools) in response to the pandemic.

- How can the time built in for administrative and school level planning meetings be sustained in order to continue a collaborative and productive working environment?
- Are there potential protocols or strategic planning guides to support more intentionally district, school and classroom goal alignment?

Principals and district leaders referenced the importance of principal goal setting, reflection and coaching conversations in support of leadership growth. However, the connection between the evaluation process and formal professional learning opportunities was less evident. Additionally, feedback opportunities are greater during summative years than during supporting years of the EE process.

- Are there ways to strengthen the connection between principal evaluation and both individual and group professional learning planning?

- How can feedback and coaching be built in more frequently across all years?

The principal framework (WFPL) does not appear to be consistently applied to support leadership policies and practice outside of the evaluation context. There are also opportunities (e.g., the equity walkthrough tool) to make more explicit connections to the teaching framework. Doing so can reinforce the common model of leadership and teaching practice represented by the two frameworks and support coherence in relation to teaching and leadership initiatives.

- How can the teacher (FFT) and leader (WFPL) frameworks be further incorporated and used to bring coherence to teaching and leadership practice, help guide their development, and inform professional learning decisions?

Future leader development appears to be more ad hoc in nature than based on an ongoing, comprehensive leadership identification and development approach.

- How might the district strategically plan for principal turnover and develop the future school leadership pipeline?

Reflecting on these questions could help the School District of Wausau build on their leadership foundation and enhance their administrators' goal setting, professional development, and leadership practices in the future.

Appendix A | Wausau Whole Child

Wausau School District Strategic Plan ■ 2019-2023

Whole Child - Whole Wausau

Our Mission . . . To advance student learning, achievement, and success.

People ■ Resources ■ Service ■ Wellness ■ Achievement

WAUSAU SCHOOL DISTRICT
"ONE CHILD AT A TIME."
EDUCATING FOR THE FUTURE.

Achievement

Increase student learning by ensuring equity for all students, inspiring them to achieve at their full potential.

A1. By the end of the 2022-23 school year, Wausau School District staff will demonstrate the awareness, flexibility, and commitment to use instructional strategies to increase equity for all students in their classrooms as evidenced by an increase of 5% per year of teachers District wide scoring proficient or distinguished in components 2a, 2b, and 3e in the Danielson Framework for Teaching.

A2. By the end of the 2022-23 school year, all schools and teachers will consistently incorporate collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, and communication (4Cs) in all content areas PK-12 as evidenced by a score of at least 1100 in Brightbytes in the classroom area survey, and having at least 90% of schools with a proficient level score in teacher use of the 4Cs in Brightbytes.

A3. By the end of the 2022-23 school year, all students in sub-groups including students of color, economically disadvantaged, and students with disabilities identified through the ESSA Accountability Report will be in attendance at least

92% of all school days as evidenced by school/District attendance documentation.

Achievement Short Cycle
Report to Board - December 2019

A4. By the spring of 2023, there will be a 30% increase in the number of students meeting or exceeding proficiency in reading, writing, and mathematics as evidenced by scores on state and local assessments.

Achievement Short Cycle
Report to Board - February 2020

Resources
(Optimization of Resources)

Align available resources with strategic priorities.

OR1. Through optimizing staffing and building efficiencies, by 2023 all schools will have comprehensive pupil services teams, unique to each school, to best support the whole child's social, emotional, behavioral, academic, and safety needs.

OR2. Identify $100,000 in recurring cost reduction opportunities for each of the next four budget years starting with 2020-21 through more efficient systems and processes.

Resources Short Cycle
Report to Board - October 2019

Resources Short Cycle
Report to Board - April 2020

People

Position the Wausau School District to be an Employer of Choice.

P1. ATTRACT a diverse workforce of talented leaders; increasing the number of applicants by 5% each year. Using effective recruitment strategies and a competitive compensation package.

P2. RETAIN staff by fostering a work environment that increases employee engagement. Establish a baseline for employee turnover in all groups and decrease by 3%.

P3. BALANCE
Provide a healthy balance between work and personal life.

People Short Cycle
Report to Board - November 2019

Service

Promote a culture of excellent service.

S1. MARKETING
Increase awareness and positive perceptions of the District as measured by annual increases of 5% in Facebook fans and followers and an annual increase of 5% in positive media stories.

S2. PROGRAMS AND OFFERINGS
Increase awareness of District programs and offerings and optimize experiences for students, families, staff, and the community as measured by a brief feedback tool with a baseline determined by June 2020.

S3. PARTNERSHIPS
Attract and strengthen partnerships and optimize their mutual value as measured by quantitative and qualitative feedback at the conclusion of the partnership or at least on an annual basis.

Service Short Cycle
Report to Board - September 2019

Service Short Cycle
Report to Board - June 2020

Wellness

Advance the emotional and physical well-being of the Wausau School District Community.

W1. By the end of the 2022-2023 school year, increase student engagement through an expanded and strategic use of a developmentally appropriate continuum of services as evidenced by a 3% decrease per year of in school and out of school suspensions.

Wellness Short Cycle
Report to Board - August 2019

Wellness Short Cycle
Report to Board - January 2020

W2. By the end of the 2022-2023 school year, improve staff wellness and relationships within the Wausau School District Community as evidenced by an increase of 6% yearly in a climate and culture staff survey.

Wellness Short Cycle
Report to Board - November 2019

Wellness Short Cycle
Report to Board - March 2020

Wausau School District Strategic Plan ■ 2019-2023

Whole Child–Whole Wausau

R Maximize Building Resources

Complete Encore Teams

A Equity for all Students

R Complete Pupil Services Teams

W Comprehensive Behavior Support

A More Innovative Instruction

Improved Student Behavior

Improved Working Conditions

W Improved Social-Emotional Learning Skills

Improved Staff Engagement

S Enhanced Service Culture

P Retention

W Staff Wellness

Improved Student Success in Academics and Social-Emotional Learning

S Partnerships

S Optimize Experiences

Increased Family Confidence

S Positive Perceptions

Our Mission . . . To advance student learning, achievement, and success.

Appendix B | Equity Walkthrough Tool/Protocols

The purpose of the equity tool/rubric is to sharpen and focus the inclusion efforts and instructional leadership lens through gathering observational data to confirm or challenge assumptions regarding school improvement and equity in our buildings. All four goals in the achievement strand of our strategic plan are focused on improving equity and inclusive practices to advance student achievement and success for all students. This tool provides staff and administrators with the opportunity to discuss how inviting our schools appear, feel, and reflects a commitment to inclusion. In addition to creating time and space for these conversations to occur, we will create a culture focused on effective adult practice and how its' direct alignment to closing achievement gaps for all students.

Walkthrough Guidelines:

→ Principal/Associate Principal will identify classrooms/staff that will be visited during the walkthrough observation and share a copy of the rubric. Staff should be made aware of the purpose of the visit outlined above.

→ The walkthrough team should consist of a principal or AP, one or two department or grade level representatives and a student representative if applicable (MS/HS).

→ Each observation should be scheduled for approximately 10-15 minutes with a 10-15 minute break between each observation for the team to document thoughts and/or questions.

→ Each team member can complete the walkthrough rubric separately. Following the walkthrough, teams should gather notes and prepare comments/questions for the staff member. Group review/dialogue is another opportunity to identify themes or patterns that emerged during the walk.

→ After the group debrief, the team meets with the classroom teacher to discuss the observation, highlight areas of success and/or opportunities for improvement.

Equity Climate & Practices

	DISTINGUISHED	PROFICIENT	DEVELOPING	NO EVIDENCE	NOTES
Supportive climate Learning environments are supportive, culturally responsive, and focused on building relationships and community.					
Community building Look for/Learn about: ♣ There are opportunities for students to connect personally (team talk, circles, morning meetings). ♣ Shared agreements reflect student input ♣ Physical space is set up in a way that fosters community (whole-group meeting spot, desks arranged for collaboration).	Adults effectively use strategies and activities to help students get to know one another, cultivate a sense of interdependence, and practice using their social and emotional competencies. Students take an active role in supporting their peers and there is a strong sense of inclusivity.	Adults effectively use strategies and activities to help students get to know one another, cultivate a sense of interdependence, and practice using their social and emotional competencies. Students are respectful and friendly to each other.	Adults try, with uneven results, to use strategies and activities to help students get to know one another, cultivate a sense of interdependence, or practice using their social and emotional competencies.	There is not yet evidence that adults use strategies to help students get to know one another, cultivate a sense of interdependence, or practice using their social and emotional competencies.	
Adult-student relationships Look for/Learn about: ♣ Students share their perspectives and needs. ♣ Adults use strategies to engage and learn about all students	Adults effectively use strategies to build a trusting relationship with each student and are highly responsive to students' needs. Students regularly share their perspectives and concerns.	Adults effectively use strategies to build a trusting relationship with each student and respond to student's needs.	Adults try, with uneven results, to build a positive relationship with each student.	There is not yet evidence that adults use strategies to build positive relationships with all students.	

Cultural responsiveness Look for/Learn about: ♠ Classroom or program materials are diverse and inclusive. ♠ –Adults use strategies to learn about a student's cultures, backgrounds, talents and interests	Adults affirm student's diverse identities, cultures, and life experiences throughout their interactions, materials, curriculum, programming and instruction. Students regularly share about their lives and backgrounds.	Classroom or program materials, curriculum, programming and instruction mostly represent student's diverse identities, cultures, and life experiences.	Classroom or program materials, curriculum, programming and instruction occasionally references diversity within and across cultures.	Classroom or program materials, curriculum, programming and instruction are not reflective of a student's diverse identities, cultures, and life experience.

Appendix B: Interview Protocols

Principal

Individual/School Context

6. How long have you been a principal? In your current position?

7. What are your school's main improvement priorities?

    a. Do any of your priorities focus on equity? (e.g., opportunity gaps). Please explain.

Principal Evaluation Process and Impact

8. Please provide an overview of the principal evaluation process in your district:

    a. Goal-setting (SLO/PPG)?

    b. How do you track progress on your goals throughout the year?

    c. Observations and other evidence?

    d. Evaluation discussions?

9. How does the principal evaluation process inform your leadership practice?

    a. Goal setting and engagement in the SLO process?

    b. Goal setting and engagement in the PPG process?

10. I now have a couple of questions about the principal professional practice rubric. [confirm use of the WI Framework for Principal Leadership or the CESA 6 principal practice]

    a. How do you use the principal professional practice rubric in the context of your evaluation activities? (Self-assessment, goal-setting, feedback from evaluator)

    b. How do you use the principal professional practice rubric outside of your evaluation activities? (probe, leadership professional learning, coaching, mentoring)

11. Can you share an example of typical feedback you receive through the evaluation process?

12. Can you share an example of feedback that had an impact on your practice? Probe:

    a. What was it about?

    b. How did it help?

    c. Was there follow up?

13. How does your supervisor use coaching strategies when supporting you?

14. I have a couple of questions about how the evaluation process influences what you seek for your professional learning.

    a. Does your evaluator recommend specific learning opportunities based on the evaluation process? Probe for example.

    b. Can you describe an example of an opportunity you chose or requested based on your evaluation experience?

Integration/Slignment

15. How does the evaluation process align with or support your school improvement priorities?

    a. Probe for examples

16. To what extent do your teachers' goals align with the goals you've developed in the evaluation process?

    a. Probe for examples of SLO and PPGs.

17. What other professional learning experiences do you engage in outside of the principal evaluation process?

18. What suggestions do you have to improve principal evaluation and principal professional learning in your district?

19. Is there anything else you would like to add about your evaluation and professional learning?

Assistant Principal

Individual/School Context:

1. How long have you been an assistant/associate principal? In your current position?

2. What are your school's main improvement priorities?

    a. Do any of your priorities focus on equity? (e.g., opportunity gaps). Please explain.

Principal Evaluation Process and Impact:

3. Please provide an overview of the principal evaluation process in your district:

    a. Goal-setting (SLO/PPG)?

    b. How do you track progress on your goals throughout the year?

    c. Observations and other evidence?

    d. Evaluation discussions?

4. How does the principal evaluation process inform your leadership practice?

    a. Goal setting and engagement in the SLO process?

    b. Goal setting and engagement in the PPG process?

5. I now have a couple of questions about the principal professional practice rubric. [confirm use of the WI Framework for Principal Leadership or the CESA 6 principal practice]

    a. How do you use the principal professional practice rubric in the context of your evaluation activities? (Self-assessment, goal-setting, feedback from evaluator)

    b. How do you use the principal professional practice rubric outside of your evaluation activities? (probe, leadership professional learning, coaching, mentoring)

6. Can you share an example of typical feedback you receive through the evaluation process?

7. Can you share an example of feedback that had an impact on your practice? Probe:

    a. What was it about?

    b. What suggestions?

    c. What follow up?

8. How does your supervisor use coaching strategies when supporting you?

Integration/alignment

9. How does the evaluation process align with or support your school improvement priorities?

    a. Probe for examples

10. To what extent your teachers' goals align with the goals you've developed in the evaluation process?

    a. Probe for examples of SLO and PPGs.

11. How does the principal evaluation process or its results inform your professional learning plans?

12. What other professional learning experiences do you engage in outside of the principal evaluation process?

13. What suggestions do you have to improve the principal evaluation process and principal professional learning in your district?

14. Is there anything else you would like to add about your evaluation and professional learning?

Principal Supervisor

District Context

1. How long have you been a superintendent [or role if different]? In your current position?

2. What are your district's main improvement priorities?

    a. How, if at all, do the priorities address equity issues? (e.g., opportunity gaps)

Principal Evaluation Process and Impact

3. Please describe your role as principal supervisor in the evaluation process? (probe: goal support, progress checking, evidence collection, feedback, ratings)

4. What evidence do you use to judge how well a principal is doing? Probe: observations, artifacts, other?

5. Can you share an example of the feedback you provide your principals as part of the evaluation process?

    a. How do you know if principals are utilizing the feedback they receive?

6. How do you use coaching in your work with your school leaders?

7. Have you pursued training in coaching techniques? If yes, from what sources?

8. How do you apply the Wisconsin Framework for Principal Leadership (DPI professional practice rubric) or the CESA 6 SAPES principal leadership standards as part of the evaluation process? [confirm which principal framework they use]

    a. Do you ever reference the principal framework outside of the evaluation context? (probe example)

9. What changes in principals' leadership practices have you observed that could be attributed to the evaluation process?

Integration/Alignment:

10. How does the evaluation process align with or support your district improvement priorities (instructional priorities and equity concerns)?

    a. Probe for examples

11. How does the principal evaluation process or its results inform principal professional learning plans?

12. In addition to professional learning encouraged as part of the evaluation, what additional professional learning opportunities does your district provide to principals? (probe within or outside of district)

13. How does your district identify and develop future principals?

Superintendent Support:

14. In general, are there any additional supports that would help you better support principals through the evaluation? Probe for examples.

15. Is there anything else you would like to add about your principal evaluation process or professional learning system?

District Staff

1. I'd like to begin by learning a bit about your role. What is your role in the district?

    a. How do you support schools and principals?

    b. Do you have a role in your district's principal evaluation process? Please describe.

2. What are your district's main improvement priorities? How, if at all, do the priorities address equity issues (e.g., opportunity gaps)?

3. Can you please describe your district's principal evaluation process?

4. How does your district's principal evaluation process support your district's improvement priorities and equity concerns?

5. How does the principal evaluation process and its results inform principal professional learning?

6. What professional learning opportunities outside of the evaluation process does your district provide to principals?

    a. Probe within or outside of district

7. What other supports do principals receive in order to help them improve their leadership?

    a. Probe for mentoring, coaching, other leadership support

    b. How are these helpful?

8. What changes in principal leadership practices have you observed that could be attributed to the evaluation process?

9. Are there any additional supports that would help the district better implement principal evaluations?

    a. Probe for examples.

10. Are there any additional supports that would help the district better support principal professional learning?

    a. Probe for examples.

11. How does your district identify and develop future principals?

12. Is there anything else you would like to add about principal evaluation and professional learning?

Teacher Leader

1. Can you please begin by describing your role as a teacher leader?

2. What are your school's main improvement priorities?

    a. Do any of your priorities focus on equity? (e.g., opportunity gaps)

3. What do you know about the principal evaluation process in your district?

4. Does your principal share what he/she is working on in their evaluation?

5. Does the principal encourage teachers to set Student Learning Objectives that align to the School Learning Objective?

    a. Please explain.

6. Does the principal encourage teachers to set professional practice goals that relate to school programs or initiatives? If so, what are some examples?

7. How would you describe the working environment or culture in your school as it relates to the evaluation system?

   a. How does the principal foster or influence that culture?

8. How does the principal use coaching strategies when supporting you?

9. We are also interested in learning about the impact of principal engagement in the principal evaluation process. Have you observed changes in the principal's leadership practice that relate to their School Learning Objective, practice goal or feedback through the evaluation process? Please describe.

10. How does the district or school identify teachers that have the potential to be teacher leaders?

11. How does the district or school develop these teachers to be teacher leaders?

12. What does the district do to develop teacher leaders to be assistant principals and principals? (probe: formal or informal pathway to principalship)

13. Is there anything else you would like to add about evaluation and professional learning in your school and district?

Appendix C: Wausau Equity Walkthrough Tool

The purpose of the equity tool/rubric is to sharpen and focus the inclusion efforts and instructional leadership lens through gathering observational data to confirm or challenge assumptions regarding school improvement and equity in our buildings. All four goals in the achievement strand of our strategic plan are focused on improving equity and inclusive practices to advance student achievement and success for all students. This tool provides staff and administrators with the opportunity to discuss how inviting our schools appear, feel, and reflects a commitment to inclusion. In addition to creating time and space for these conversations to occur, we will create a culture focused on effective adult practice and how its' direct alignment to closing achievement gaps for all students.

Walkthrough Guidelines:

→ Principal/Associate Principal will identify classrooms/staff that will be visited during the walkthrough observation and share a copy of the rubric. Staff should be made aware of the purpose of the visit outlined above.

→ The walkthrough team should consist of a principal or AP, one or two department or grade level representatives and a student representative if applicable (MS/HS).

→ Each observation should be scheduled for approximately 10-15 minutes with a 10-15 minute break between each observation for the team to document thoughts and/or questions.

→ Each team member can complete the walkthrough rubric separately. Following the walkthrough, teams should gather notes and prepare comments/questions for the staff member. Group review/dialogue is another opportunity to identify themes or patterns that emerged during the walk.

→ After the group debrief, the team meets with the classroom teacher to discuss the observation, highlight areas of success and/or opportunities for improvement.

Equity Climate & Practices

	DISTINGUISHED	PROFICIENT	DEVELOPING	NO EVIDENCE	NOTES
Supportive climate Learning environments are supportive, culturally responsive, and focused on building relationships and community.					
Community building Look for/Learn about: • There are opportunities for students to connect personally (team talk, circles, morning meetings). • Shared agreements reflect student input • Physical space is set up in a way that fosters community (whole-group meeting spot, desks arranged for collaboration).	Adults effectively use strategies and activities to help students get to know one another, cultivate a sense of interdependence, and practice using their social and emotional competencies. Students take an active role in supporting their peers and there is a strong sense of inclusivity.	Adults effectively use strategies and activities to help students get to know one another, cultivate a sense of interdependence, and practice using their social and emotional competencies. Students are respectful and friendly to each other.	Adults try, with uneven results, to use strategies and activities to help students get to know one another, cultivate a sense of interdependence, or practice using their social and emotional competencies.	There is not yet evidence that adults use strategies to help students get to know one another, cultivate a sense of interdependence, or practice using their social and emotional competencies.	
Adult-student relationships Look for/Learn about: • Students share their perspectives and needs. • Adults use strategies to engage and learn about all students	Adults effectively use strategies to build a trusting relationship with each student and are highly responsive to students' needs. Students regularly share their perspectives and concerns.	Adults effectively use strategies to build a trusting relationship with each student and respond to student's needs.	Adults try, with uneven results, to build a positive relationship with each student.	There is not yet evidence that adults use strategies to build positive relationships with all students.	

Cultural responsiveness

Look for/Learn about:

- ◆ Classroom or program materials are diverse and inclusive.

- ◆ -Adults use strategies to learn about a student's cultures, backgrounds, talents and interests

Adults affirm student's diverse identities, cultures, and life experiences throughout their interactions, materials, curriculum, programming and instruction. Students regularly share about their lives and backgrounds.	Classroom or program materials, curriculum, programming and instruction mostly represent student's diverse identities, cultures, and life experiences.	Classroom or program materials, curriculum, programming and instruction occasionally references diversity within and across cultures.	Classroom or program materials, curriculum, programming and instruction are not reflective of a student's diverse identities, cultures, and life experience.

WEC