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To what extent is the accountability issue of evaluating building administrators being practical by school superintendents?

# Superintendent Evaluation Practices of Building Administrators in Kansas

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To what extent is the accountability issue of evaluating building administrators being practiced by school superintendents? A partial answer to this question was supplied by 43 new-to-the-job Kansas superintendents in a 1987 survey. Information was collected on nine aspects of building administrator evaluation practices: contract expectations, frequency of evaluation, data collection methods, format of data collection, sources of data, evaluation conferencing, skill improvement areas, perceived role portrayal, and outcomes of building administrator assessment.

## Contract Expectations

Only one (2.3%) school superintendent reported that there was no written position guide for district building administrators. The other 42 (97.7%) respondents said that the principals had written expectations for their positions. Fourteen (32.6%) said that these written expectations were in specific behavioral terms with major and minor priority designation. The other 28 (65.1%) superintendents said the position guide responsibilities were stated in general, broad terms and often led to personal interpretations by both the superintendent and building administrators.

From this data one can deduce that the building administrator's role was minimally defined in two-thirds of these Kansas school districts. In school districts with vague descriptions, any definitive measurement of principal behaviors would be highly suspect.

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## Frequency of Evaluation

The frequency of formal evaluations of each principalship was quite revealing. Over half (55.8%) reported one formal evaluation of each principal, with another 16 (37.2%) evaluating their building administrators twice. Of the remaining three superintendents, one did not evaluate the building principal(s), another reported a formal evaluation conducted on a monthly basis for each building administrator, and the third followed a district evaluation schedule of each administrator similar to classroom teachers.

Kansas Laws (K.S.A. 72.9003 and 72.5453) state all certified school personnel are to be evaluated by the formal and procedures filed with the Kansas State Department of Education. The generally accepted interpretation of the laws is that all personnel who are not tenured are to be evaluated each year by some format and schedule. This interpretation allows some school districts with administrators who have been satisfactorily employed for six or more years to evaluate principals once every three years.

For those 24 school districts which evaluated the building administrators once a year the majority (16) did so in January or February. Three superintendents evaluated their principals in December with another two completing it in November. The remaining three superintendents formally evaluated their principals in October, April, or May.

For those 16 superintendents conducting building principal assessments twice a year, the months of November/February has three practitioners, and two superintendents each selected the monthly combinations of October/February, October/March, October/April, and November/March. The other four monthly combinations which had single practitioners were October/January, November/January, November/April, and December/March.

Evaluation patterns suggest that superintendents evaluated their buildings principals at about the same time or slightly later than the building principals were conducting evaluations of their teaching staff members.

## Data Collection

There was no unanimous means of data collection. At least four different methods were mentioned by the survey superintendents. The most common method was through direct observation of principals; 35 (81.4%) superintendents said they used this format. Seventeen (39.5%) said that they used the performance objectives method which the building principals had designed. Eleven (25.6%) superintendents said that they gathered data from teachers, staff members, and students from each attendance center for which the principal had responsibility. Another eight (18.6%) superintendents shared that they had used specific outcomes from building records as their means of data collection. They reviewed student grades, student scores on standardized tests, and fiscal management records.

At least seven (16.3%) superintendents used district goals and expectations, informal polling of students and staff members, support data from the principals, self-evaluation forms, or building principal responses to forms from the central office.

In general, superintendents used a variety of data collection means with which they evaluated their building administrators. First-hand observation was the means used by almost all of the new-to-the-site superintendents and none of these means carried more weight in data comparison.

## Data Format

Four separate formats of collecting data plus a combination of two or more formats were identified. Twenty-three (53.5%) superintendents said that they utilized a checklist/

rating scale with comments as their major format in the evaluation of their building principals. Another 18 (41.9%) employed the performance (work) objective approach format of data collection; three (7.0%) specifically used the management by objective (MBO) format. Seventeen (39.5%) labeled their data collection format as being a combination of two or more of the previously identified formats. Interestingly enough there were nine (20.9%) who used the essay/open ended format of data collection.

#### **Sources of Data Used**

The superintendents gathered information from four separate groups: teachers/staff/students in an attendance center, central office personnel, parents who had children in that attendance center, and board of education members. A combination was also given to the superintendents and most of them marked two more data groups. This resulted in 69 responses being distributed among these five options.

A slight majority (51%) indicated they used information supplied by central office personnel. The next option was that of a combination of sources with 17 responses. This was followed closely by 14 tallies for board members who supplied information. Eleven superintendents indicated that they gathered information from teachers, staff, and students. And four superintendents said that they used information from parents.

#### **Feedback to Evaluated Administrators**

The building principals received evaluation information and results by four identified practices. One was a conference session with only the superintendent present, 35 superintendents (81.4%). A second practice 12 superintendents (28%) respondents was an executive session with the board of education and the superintendent. The third practice mentioned (four superintendents, 9.3%) was an executive session conducted by the board of education without the superintendent present. The fourth practice mentioned (two superintendents, 4.7%) was a conference session held with central office personnel. Obviously some districts used a combination of methods of feedback.

The basis of this data on evaluation sessions to principals feedback was given primarily by the superintendent. However, in some districts when the superintendent was not present, board members or the central office personnel would assume the evaluation function.

#### **Improvement Needs/Skills of Building Administrators**

One of the major evaluation purposes espoused by experts is to provide some rationale and data for an individual to examine what s/he thinks is being demonstrated compared to what is expected of that position-holder. If this feedback is provided to the evaluatee in a constructive atmosphere, it should contribute to a more positive change in the behavior of the person being evaluated. Fourteen improvement areas were suggested by the survey form; the superintendents were asked to identify those areas that their building administrators had need to improve.

Two of these need areas were working with staff to solve issues/problems and communicating by oral/written means within the building and to the public and parents. Twenty-five superintendents (58%) marked the improvement need of joint working relationships to better solve the issues and problems facing the attendance center. Twenty-two superintendents (51%) felt that their principals could do a better job of communicating to staff, parents, and school patrons.

Three closely related need areas dealt with classroom observation data. One suggested that principals could do a

better job of collecting verifiable data from the classroom observation and received support from 19 (44%) respondents. The second skill need inferred that principals weren't classifying and analyzing the observation data sufficiently and had support from 15 (35%) chief administrators. The third identified need was that the conferencing ability of the principals regarding observed classroom data was ineffective and received support from 16 (37%) superintendents.

These need areas associated with classroom observation data were cited in a 1987 Research Roundup publication of the Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory. The researchers, Gottfredson and Hybl, reported that principals "consider staff direction, observation and feedback on teacher performance, and planning for school improvement the most important functions of their jobs." They also said that this perception was held by principals in all levels and types of school nationwide.

Four other need areas seemed to cluster around the behavior that an administrator would exhibit while making a decision. One of these called for the translation of school board policy into a rule, regulation, or procedure. Seventeen superintendents (40%) wished that their principals were able to do a better job of presenting the intent of board policy with a stated rule, regulation, or procedure. A second need expressed the desire for better handling of stress/conflict situations (10 superintendents, 23%). The other two reflected a desire that building administrators treat staff members as professional colleagues with positive mannerisms (four superintendents, 9%) and to display behavior of fairness/justice with staff and students (six superintendents, 14%).

An additional four need areas were job/image of their building principals: building principals should be more proactive versus reactive in building affairs or concerns (14 superintendents, 33%), building administrators should be assertive in their autonomy and commitment toward building level successes (eight superintendents, 19%), building administrators should be more creative and individualistic in their behaviors while carrying out their contract duties, and take steps to create this kind of image to their students, staff, and school patrons (seven superintendents, 16%) and principals should be more active in promoting school activities that would assure more student successes (four superintendents, 9%).

The current theme of instructional leadership by the building principal is found in most educational publications as being one of the critical elements of effective schools. These new-to-the-site superintendents rated their total building principal staff as being primarily instructional leaders, school-based managers, or one of two positions between these extremes. Nineteen superintendents (42.2%) ranked their evaluated principals as being instructionally oriented with eight (18.6%) who perceived their principals as being true instructional leaders. The other eleven (25.6%) superintendents identified the principals as working toward the goal of being instructional leaders. This left the remaining 25 superintendents (58%) as classifying their building administrators as being school-based managers or perceived as being more managerially than instructionally oriented. Eleven superintendents (25%) labeled their principals as being pure school-based managers with 14 others (33%) casting their principals as being more managerially oriented than instructionally focused.

#### **Evaluation Outcomes**

Superintendents identified five action outcomes that resulted from their evaluation practices with their build-

ing principals; some superintendents listed more than one outcome.

The outcome that had support from 24 (55.8%) superintendents stated that the evaluation session(s) caused the building principal(s) to identify areas of improvement. Another outcome (21 superintendents, 48.8%) said that the evaluation(s) resulted in specific directions/suggestions given by the superintendent and board of education. Three (7%) superintendents shared that their board of education was the primary source of giving specific directions/suggestions to the building principal(s) without any input by the superintendent.

Two other outcomes mentioned by the respondents were that the evaluation results encouraged a change in the personal/professional goals of the principal(s) (eight superintendents, 18.6%), and that some principals were forced to seek a change in their employment (seven superintendents, 16.3%).

### Respondents

Just how representative were these 43 new-to-the site superintendents on personal factors to the 304 superintendents in the state of Kansas? Lifting data from survey results of the Kansas School Board Association (KASB) and Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE), the comparable categories of age, superintendency experience, school district enrollment, number of administrators/supervisors evaluated, formal education, and gender were used.

Twenty-two (48.8%) of the new superintendents were in the 41-50 year old category with 11 and 9 others being in the 10 year brackets preceeding and following this classification. The two remaining superintendents were 61+ years old. The 1986 KASB survey revealed the average age of the 304 superintendents of schools was 50 years. The average age for superintendents when they first became superintendent of schools was 38 years.

Over half 23 (53.5%) of these neophytes were completing their first year as a superintendent of schools. Seven (16.3%) others were completing 2-7 years as superintendent and seven more had 8-10 years experience as the head administrator of a school district. Another six had 11-25 years in chief administrative jobs. The 1986 KASB survey revealed that the average length of superintendent service in his/her district was seven years, with 122 superintendents reporting administrative experience other than the superintendency for an average of seven years in the same district.

Twenty (46.5%) of the respondents were directing school district enrollments of 400 or fewer students. Another 16 (37.2%) superintendents were heading up school districts with student enrollments of 401-1,899 students. This left five (11.6%) others charged with the school programming for 2,000-9,999 students plus two others supervising school districts with 10,000+ students. In the 1987 KSDE report there were 108, 160, 30, and five school districts in these enrollment categories. This meant that these new superintendent respondents represented the following percentages of 19, 10, 17, and 40 respectively.

The number of administrators/supervisors being directly evaluated by these new superintendents fell into two categories, the first being 1-5 with 34 respondents reporting this statistic. The second one had seven (16.8%) superintendents registering that they directly evaluated 6-15 administrators. Two superintendents did not answer this section of the survey. Both of these categories fall within the recommended number (1-15) for the span of control

concept found in basic educational administration texts on line/staff relationships within organizational charts.

The formal education statistics reported as being the last achieved was divided into the doctorate, specialist, and masters degrees. Fifteen superintendents possessed the doctorate, 17 declared the specialist, and 32 listed the masters degrees as having been earned. The 1986 KASB report listed 77, 64, and 162 superintendents with doctorate, specialist, and masters degrees.

In Kansas there were three women who were superintendents of schools during the 1986-87 school year. Only one (2.3%) of these women was new to the position in 1986-87.

The 1986 KASB survey characterized the Kansas superintendent as being a 50-year old male who has been a school superintendent since he was 38 and has worked in his current district for seven years. He earns \$45,000 per year in salary and has a fringe benefit package including health/medical insurance worth \$2,400. He works on a 12 month contract with 20 vacation days and has signed a two-year contract with the district. He has a masters degree plus 40 additional hours of college credit and his travel expenses are fully reimbursed by the district.

The average superintendent profile of the new-to-site respondents was a 41-50 year old male who was completing his first superintendency. He has had 3-8 years building level/central office administrative experiences. He is directing a school district of 400 or less students and evaluating 1-5 building administrators. He possesses a formal education degree, doctorate or specialist, 10-20% respectively above the state proportion of 304 practicing superintendents.

### Conclusions

The 1986-87 evaluation practices of building principals by the 43 new-to-site superintendents in Kansas support the following conclusions.

1. The majority of school districts employ some form of building administrator evaluation. The practices varied from very strong accountability by written position guides to generalizations of responsibility in writing or implied in conversational exchanges between principals and superintendents. Kansas law regarding evaluation of certified personnel was interpreted differently in these school districts because administrators do not have tenure provisions as do teachers.
2. Data collection for administrative evaluations was primarily by first-hand observation. Superintendents gathered data by observing their principals in action with staff members, students, patrons, administrative colleagues, and then applying it to the district administrative evaluation form. Some indicated that other means of data such as forms, records, polls, and second-hand reports of individuals were also considered as they marked the checklists/rating scales. Whether or not this data was representative of each administrator's behavior was not queried.
3. Evaluation feedback to the building principals was almost always given by the superintendent of schools in private sessions. Nearly a fourth of the school districts also had administrative evaluation feedback with the board of education in executive sessions.
4. The five improvement need areas that building principals shared in common, according to superintendents' comments were: better working relations with staff to solve issues/problems, better means of oral/written communications with staff and community patrons, gathering/

analyzing/conferencing aspects of teacher evaluation data, administrative decision-making behavior, and leadership image factors.

5. The building principals in these school districts were mainly described being more managerially oriented than instructionally focused. Forty-two percent were classified by the superintendents as leaning toward or becoming instructional leaders. This left fifty-eight percent of the superintendents who regarded their building principals as being school managers and not investing major portions of their time with instructional concerns. The inference being that these principals delegated this responsibility to their staff members or that instructional leadership was not a priority concern to the principals.
6. These superintendents felt that the evaluation practices were causing their building principals to examine their past behaviors with expectations of change. At least half of the superintendents said their building principals had identified improvement areas in their principalship.

Most of the targeted areas were in response to specific inputs from the superintendent and board members. Seven superintendents said one or more of their principals were encouraged to seek employment outside their school district.

7. These superintendent respondents were considered a fairly representative sample of the total 304 chief administrators in the state but did reflect significant differences in attainment of formal education degrees.

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