

## **MPPR Research Forum January 29, 2014**

The second research forum around the implementation of the MPPR was held on January 29 at Gates Chili School District in Rochester, NY. Participants included five administrators from two school districts, namely a principal evaluator and two principals from a medium sized suburban district and two principal evaluators from a Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES). The forum was facilitated by Giselle O. Martin-Kniep, president and founder of Learner-Centered Initiatives, Ltd., and Communities for Learning. Also in attendance were two Board members from Communities for Learning, and an independent consultant who functioned as recorders of the conversation.

The two districts are located in the greater Rochester area. The suburban district (District 1) is a K-12 district that includes four elementary schools, a middle and a high school. The BOCES (District 2) provides curriculum and professional development services for eight member districts and houses CTE and special education services.

The focus of this forum was an exploration of the relationship between principals and principal evaluators around the evaluation process itself, and more specifically, around the capture, annotation and use of evidence.

The questions explored during the forum included:

- What is the nature of the relationship between principals and principal evaluators in the evaluation process?
- What are principal evaluators and principals using as evidence?
- How are principals and principal evaluators discriminating between effective and highly effective principals?
- How is the evaluation processes impacting the learning and work of principals?

What follows is a narrative of each of the district's characterizations of these different questions followed by some preliminary conclusions.

### **Nature of the relationship between principals and principal evaluators in the evaluation process**

#### *District 1*

This year, the principal evaluator has gone to each of the schools and met with the principal. This meeting in the principal's office is valued by the principal, since it has allowed the principal to pull artifacts out during the meeting, since they are naturally from around their offices. In the goal setting process, principals and principal evaluators discuss what is going to be evidence of working towards the principals' goals.

There are key differences in the evaluation process from last year to this one. Last year, the Superintendent was disconnected from what was happening in the buildings, and the monthly meetings were fragmented. Whereas in the first year the principal and principal evaluator worked to manage the more technical aspects of the MPPR, such as assigning points and making sure the process was fulfilled as required, the MPPR (as a process and a tool) is being adapted by participants so that they can use the MPPR for improving leadership and practice. “At the end last year, we were ‘going through the motions’ in many ways, to get the “points” down and scoring done.” This year, the interim superintendent is working closely with each principal, “leading to a better connection.” One principal has set up meetings with the principal evaluator at different times in the year, so that walkthroughs can be in different classrooms. “What is different this year is the more focused approach towards goal setting. As a result, monthly meetings are better.”

Last year principals had discrepancies with respect to the actual scoring (debating if a rubric domain is worth 10 points, how are points for each row allocated). Such discrepancies have been worked out this year. The district has agreed that the focus is growth over the year. “We aren’t assigning points during the year.” In addition, this year there has been clarity of purpose between the goal and the supports provided by the district. Finally, supervisors have been able to provide positive as well as critical feedback on the process.

### *District 2*

Because of the MPPR falls under the umbrella of the APPR, principals see the MPPR as something “done to you”. The district developed a nuts and bolts handbook that describes the process between evaluators and principals. District evaluators have worked to have the use of the MPPR be as collaborative as possible. In the setting of goals and priorities, principal evaluators are helping principals align their goals with their practices. They ask principals to think about the priorities within the district’s strategic plan in the Fall and to assess their progress in the Spring.

The way that their “contract” is written, there is a formal process (goals), an observation, and a meeting with the sharing of artifacts. Principals are “expected” to be prepared for each component of the process – to be reflective, and to have artifacts. Both evaluators characterized the process as an ongoing process rather than several separate events and hold monthly meetings with principals.

The goals are set collaboratively, and the principal evaluator determines scores. In some cases the principal evaluator suggests, pulls together, or develops the artifacts; whereas in other instances, the principals develop or bring them. The principal evaluators use the artifacts and the rubric to facilitate a conversation.

As administrators, principal evaluators have tried to make connections between the goals, the MPPR, and other colleagues that were focusing on similar goals, so that principals can work on things together. “Transparency and honesty are key – there should be no surprises. Being direct and honest is important.” To increase the trust in the process, principal evaluators have asked principals and principal supervisors for feedback on the process.

Principal evaluators in both districts commented that they saw fidelity to an ethos of growth in all areas of the evaluator's communication, interactions, decisions etc., which transcended specific interactions around the MPPR. They expressed having a commitment to an overall culture that nurtures growth. To that end, these evaluators have developed improvement plans when necessary if the growth areas are not at a level of acceptable performance.

### **Use of evidence**

In both districts, the primary evidence is drawn from the discourse between the principal and principal evaluator, rather than from annotated artifacts. There are monthly meetings in which the principals bring artifacts to the table and where both principal and evaluator discuss the artifacts in the rubric. In some cases, the principal selects and brings the artifacts, but in others, the principal evaluator requests specific artifacts as well. In most cases, the principal evaluator jot down notes on the artifacts as he/she see connection to the rubric. These notes are not usually shared with the principal.

Artifacts from both districts include:

- an email describing an upcoming PD effort, vision and purpose;
- memos around goal setting that the principal has used with teachers followed by a verbal explanation of those memos;
- documents related to the school focus on grit that explain the principal's role in that effort;
- a teacher observation document, on a specific teacher, which is supplemented with some measure of what the principal did to support the teacher in terms of integrating the CCSS (principal's goal);
- a meeting agenda and notes for a community meeting, followed by a description of the artifact "in concentric circles" in which the principal evaluator asks the principal about the organization or culture that he is supporting;
- chart paper of team agendas generated over the course of the year. The agendas and notes record action steps; this set of artifacts illustrates growth over time;
- grade level meetings agendas that show some evidence of growth;
- the use of charts and graphs that bring data to life and show how they are used;
- participation in a parent meeting- and discussion of the principal's role;
- records in MyLearningPlan that show principal's role in supporting PBIS

In District 1, the review and analysis of the artifacts is confidential and not every artifact is annotated. However, all artifacts are grounded in a team goal that principals established with the principal evaluator at the beginning of the year. The district also engages in a formal face-to-face mid-year review of goals.

One principal mentioned that he sees similarities between the MPPR and the rubric he is using with teachers. He expressed the need to know the MPPR as well as he knows the teacher rubric since that would assist him in his using that rubric more effectively when having conversations around artifacts.

In District 2, the meeting lasts about 15 minutes and artifacts are always connected to the places in the rubric that are illustrated by the artifact.

In both districts, participants acknowledged the importance of linking the rubric with the goals, but one participant also mentioned that the exclusive focus on goals leads to a lack of attention to rubric components that are not directly associated with the goal.

One supervisor mentioned that getting a “binder” of evidence makes it hard for the evaluator to judge the evidence. Another principal stated that she could judge her performance by looking at the rubric descriptors, while another principal stated that he still lacks a deep enough understanding of that rubric to make such a determination. He has found the professional development that has been provided about the use of the rubrics very beneficial and sees a need for this to continue for his peers and himself.

### **Discrimination between effective and highly effective principals**

Participants in both districts use the intentionality of behavior and discourse as a key discriminator. In walkthroughs, the principal evaluator asks the principals to discuss the teachers’ and students’ work. Of specific interest to principal evaluators is the extent to which the principal (a) diagnoses issues/challenges in what is happening in the school or a classroom; (b) proposes or discusses actions/solutions taken by the principal; and, (c) identifies strategic moves.

One indicator of “highly effective” would be evidenced by a leap between the principal in center stage and the principal as part of a culture that grows staff and in which everyone has a voice (i.e., team meetings - teachers take part of the agenda behind the scenes - more of a community meeting).

One principal evaluator stated that she also pays attention to the principal’s characterization of PBIS and other school-wide interventions to look for evidence of understanding and use to impact the overall school culture.

When asked to discuss what the principal would do if he/she does not trust the expertise of the evaluator, one principal stated that she would use the language from the rubric in describing her work.

### **Impact of the evaluation process and the use of the MPPR**

#### District 1

One principal stated that in her first year using the rubric, she kept a journal to internalize it and reflect upon it. During that year, she lost her focus on her professional goal. This year, she is focusing on a goal and using the rubric for depth. “Looking at breadth (the full rubric) allowed for appreciation of best practices across the domains. This year, looking at depth, my school and teachers are more focused because I have focused on a particular goal.”

Another principal stated that since all principals used the rubric to develop a collaborative goal, there has been a greater focus on goals, but less focus on the rubric.

The principal evaluator stated that she would like to increase the amount of time that principals and principal evaluators spend on the evaluation process by substituting monthly meetings with longer meetings every other month so that she can have deeper conversations with each principal.

## District 2

The use of the rubric has caused principal evaluators to be more focused on the mission and vision of the organization and more thorough in their language. It has helped supervisors to be more precise in their own thinking and language. “It has led us to push in some certain areas that I wouldn’t have otherwise. Folks that are using the rubric say that they are more focused on mission and vision.”

For one evaluator who asserts she is a systems thinker, there is both more focus but also more attention to how different pieces of the district may impact principals. She expressed being more effective in her use of data including suspension and other progress monitoring data. She also indicated that because she is a systems thinker, details and organization can be a challenge. These areas are ones she is going to address for herself to make sure everything gets done and she has data to support recommendations etc.

Participants in both districts stated that frequent exposure to the rubric in a non-evaluative setting would be helpful. One participant stated that the initial training (“which was like deer in headlights”) would make more sense now that we’ve had experience actually using the rubric.

They also expressed a need for anchors and exemplars which could help them better understand and use the rubric, and more specifically exemplars with explanations that indicate **why** they match the higher levels of competency. This is very needed especially for principals who do not have a strong instructional background or way of talking about instruction.

## **Preliminary conclusions**

Based on the conversations with representatives from these two districts, the districts are using the rubric to guide and support discourse and work related to professional growth and not just to evaluate principals. Much of the evidence discussed stems from:

- The actual physical artifact (that may or not be understandable without context)
- The conversation between evaluator and principal, linking artifact to goals/rubric
- The evaluators knowledge of the school
- The relationship between the evaluator and the principal

There appear to be some key differences in terms of how these two districts negotiate goals and the rubric. In one district, the goals drive the conversation, and attention is more focused on the goals and less on the rubric at large. In the other district, the rubric is the driver for the

conversations between the principals and the principal evaluators, and there is slightly less attention to the goals and more discussion of the artifacts relative to the rubric. Regardless, in both districts there is defined space for the principal and principal evaluator to discuss specific artifacts, and for the principals to have significant input/direction into what is brought to the table.

Each district made explicit the fact that they modified how they used the MPPR process and tool based on their own expertise and knowledge of the situation. Principal evaluators and principals mediated the space between the MPPR as policy and MPPR in use as a tool for evaluation, by actively figuring out how to use the rubric to guide professional growth. Two ideas stem from this observation: (1) that the perspective that the evaluator brings to the table has a significant impact on the overall effectiveness of the tool and (2) it is crucial that the principal and principal evaluator each have a working, if not a deep, understanding of the MPPR. The extent to which the evaluator sees his/her role in relation to the growth of the entire organization is evidence of their “highly effective”, which in turn is a model for a principal sharing in this big picture view and seeing their own growth contributing to the whole.