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## Leadership and Policy in Schools

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713734379>

### Assessing Learning-Centered Leadership: Connections to Research, Professional Standards, and Current Practices

Ellen Goldring <sup>a</sup>; Andrew Porter <sup>b</sup>; Joseph Murphy <sup>a</sup>; Stephen N. Elliott <sup>a</sup>; Xiu Cravens <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, USA <sup>b</sup> University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

**To cite this Article** Goldring, Ellen, Porter, Andrew, Murphy, Joseph, Elliott, Stephen N. and Cravens, Xiu 'Assessing Learning-Centered Leadership: Connections to Research, Professional Standards, and Current Practices', *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 8: 1, 1 – 36

**To link to this Article:** DOI: 10.1080/15700760802014951

**URL:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15700760802014951>

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# **Assessing Learning-Centered Leadership: Connections to Research, Professional Standards, and Current Practices**

ELLEN GOLDRING

*Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, USA*

ANDREW PORTER

*University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA*

JOSEPH MURPHY, STEPHEN N. ELLIOTT, and XIU CRAVENS

*Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, USA*

*Effective school leadership is key to students' academic success. But the development of effective school leadership has been seriously hampered by the lack of technically sound tools to assess and monitor leaders' performance. This article presents the research base and conceptual framework for a leadership assessment instrument under development.*

## INTRODUCTION

The core challenge facing many schools, especially urban schools, is improving student achievement and decreasing the achievement gap. Such improvement ultimately depends on improving teaching practice. The available evidence suggests that schools that cultivate particular in-school processes and conditions such as rigorous academic standards, high-quality instruction, and a culture of collective responsibility for students' academic success are best able to meet the needs of all students (Bryk & Driscoll, 1985; Newmann & Wehlage,

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This article was developed to provide the rationale for the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (VAL-Ed) project—an initiative to develop a national evaluation for school principals and school leadership teams. The project is being funded by a generous grant from the Wallace Foundation. This support is gratefully acknowledged by the authors.

Address correspondence to Dr. Ellen Goldring, Peabody College at Vanderbilt University, GPC 414, 203 Appleton Place, Nashville, TN 37203-5721, USA. E-mail: ellen.goldring@vanderbilt.edu

1995; Purkey & Smith, 1983). School leadership, especially principal instructional and transformational leadership, is widely recognized as important in promoting these in-school processes and conditions (Lieberman, Falk, & Alexander, 1994; Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996; Rosenholtz, 1989; Sheppard, 1996). Hence, meeting the excellence and equity challenge in urban schools depends on school leaders who effectively guide instructional improvement (Barth, 1986; Leithwood, 1994).

There is a dearth of research literature about evaluation of principals in the United States and internationally. Because of the complexity of the principal's role, the main difficulty in the field of school principal leadership assessment is identifying the leadership dimensions that should be assessed (Glasman & Heck, 1992; Hart, 1992; Marcoulides, Larsen, & Heck, 1995; Oyinlade, 2006). Debates in countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand highlight the attempts made by policymakers and education administrators alike in identifying the most appropriate framework to use to assess school leaders. Outcome-oriented evaluation is favored as an assessment method for school principals by some countries. For example, in the state of Victoria, Australia, principals are evaluated by their supervisors and receive bonuses in percentage points depending on the extent to which they have achieved objectives mutually agreed upon at the start of the school year (Zbar & Australian Principals Associations Professional Development Council, 1994). In the United Kingdom, outcome-oriented accountability measures are carried out by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED), where schools are inspected regularly and these inspections "increasingly introduced regimes of measurement and surveillance with a particular concentration on individual teachers and headteachers in their bid to raise educational standards in the U.K." (Broadbent, Jacobs, & Laughlin, 1999, p. 346). To help school leaders prepare their schools to meet the legislative mandates and to improve school performance, tools have also been developed for school principals to link a system of self-review to the external standards, for example, the school self-evaluation guide by the National College of School Leadership (NCSL, 2007).

Beyond the difficulties related to "what to assess" is the challenge of determining appropriate methods to establish the assessment process and to make valid inferences regarding principal performance. Several studies have provided snapshots of principal evaluation procedures (see Lashway, 2003). For example, from a survey of 800 principals in Ontario, Canada, Leithwood and Montgomery (1986) identified problems in appraisal practices such as that there were no specific detailed policies for the process, the standards of performance were not always well publicized, and the practices outlined in policies were not followed. Another study examined policies and practices involved in the evaluation of school principals in the province of Alberta, Canada (Thomas, Holdaway, & Ward, 2000). The study found that the roles of principals were modified as a result of changing societal expectations,

amalgamation of school systems, increased responsibilities of schools for decisions, and increased emphasis on the responsibility of principals for evaluating teachers. Consequently, the ways in which principals were evaluated were largely determined by each school district, and substantial variability of district procedures was present.

Aside from developed countries, there is considerable interest in finding ways to set professional standards and assess principal effectiveness from countries that for various historical and political reasons are at the beginning stages of establishing a knowledge base for school leadership development. Research and practices in principal leadership assessment in these countries suffer from two deficiencies: first, there are limited sound theoretical frameworks for principal leadership that link the objectives of education with leadership standards; second, there are no assessment systems that have been developed with empirical research evidence, and that are valid and reliable (Chu, 2003). For example, a movement of principal professionalization that aims at developing newer and stronger leadership is gaining momentum in the People's Republic of China. However, among the limited number of published research articles on the principalship or school headship in mainland China since 1994, a majority of them limit their topics to introducing theories and practices of other countries and stop at recounting the needs and issues in school leadership development. A review of existing national and local policies and practices in China highlights inadequacies in both the standards for principal effectiveness and how such standards could be operationalized by districts and schools to develop assessment tools (Zhao & Wang, 2007).

In many districts in the United States, the primary purpose of leadership assessment is to meet contractual obligations as part of an initial appointment review or documentation for tenure or contract renewals. Formative assessments are also used by some districts to identify areas of needed improvement of leadership practice. Whatever the purpose, summative or formative, there is general agreement that the current state of leadership assessment is lacking. In their comprehensive review of principal evaluation, Ginsberg and Berry concluded that "the policymaker seeking assistance in choosing a principal evaluation system is offered little sound guidance from these sources" (1990, p. 212).

The identification and development of effective school leaders, both individuals and teams, however, has been significantly hampered by the paucity of technically sound tools for assessing and monitoring leadership performance. Finding practical ways to thoughtfully and appropriately assess and develop leaders can have an important impact on the quality of leadership, and through that, on the quality of education in our schools (Glasman & Heck, 1992; Thomas, Holdaway, & Ward, 2000). Leadership evaluation holds great promise in providing educators with much-needed information that can be used both to improve leadership practices and to provide information for accountability purposes (Reeves, 2005; Waters & Grubb, 2004).

It is against this backdrop that we present a conceptual framework for a leadership assessment system in the United States. With funding from the Wallace Foundation, we began a three-year project to develop a set of instruments to assess the effectiveness of educational leadership (both individual and team). The purpose of this article is to present the rationale for the invention of our conceptual framework. This conception is the blueprint for the development of our assessment instrumentation. The focus is on the assessment of leadership job performance—that is, leadership behaviors and practices. The core of our assessment system is a set of instruments that measure leadership behaviors and measures of valued-added student achievement. Our conception is aligned with a research-based definition of educational leadership that is rooted in school improvement. We call this learning-centered leadership (Murphy et al., 2006). In our work, leadership is the individual or collective (team) “process of influencing others to achieve mutually agreed upon purposes for the organization” (Patterson, 1993, p. 3).

Our conceptual framework and its corresponding leadership assessment instrumentation, the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (VAL-Ed), has the following characteristics: (a) the dimensions we propose to evaluate are grounded in the research literature, (b) the framework is standards based, and (c) it is markedly different from current leadership evaluation and assessment frameworks employed by states and districts throughout the United States. Our conceptual framework and the corresponding assessment system are anchored and aligned with the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards. Our conception and instrumentation rest upon the same research base as the ISLLC standards (Murphy, 2005).

In this article, we first present the conceptual framework, and we then discuss the supporting literature. We then relate our framework to the ISLLC standards and lastly, we highlight how our framework is different from prevailing leadership evaluation and assessment currently employed in states and districts.

## THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework that drives our leadership assessment instrument focuses on two key dimensions of leadership behaviors. We refer to these two dimensions as *core components* and *key processes*. Our framework states that school leadership assessment should include measures of the intersection of these dimensions. We propose to assess the intersection of *what* principals or leadership teams must accomplish to improve academic and social learning for all students (the core components), and *how* they create those core components (the key processes). (See Figure 1, but for now ignore the numbers in the body of the figure). In our framework, core components refer to characteristics of schools that support the learning of

Key Processes						
Core Components	Planning	Implementing	Supporting	Advocating	Communicating	Monitoring
High Standards for Student Learning	←		ISLLC Standard 1	→		
Rigorous Curriculum (content)	2	2	2	2	2	2
Quality Instruction (pedagogy)	2	2	2	2	2	2
Culture of Learning & Professional Behavior	2, 3	2, 3	2, 3	2, 3, 5	2, 3, 5	2, 3
Connections to External Communities	4	4	4	4, 6	4, 6	4
Systemic Performance Accountability				5	5	

Note: The numbers in the body of the figure refer to ISLLC standards.

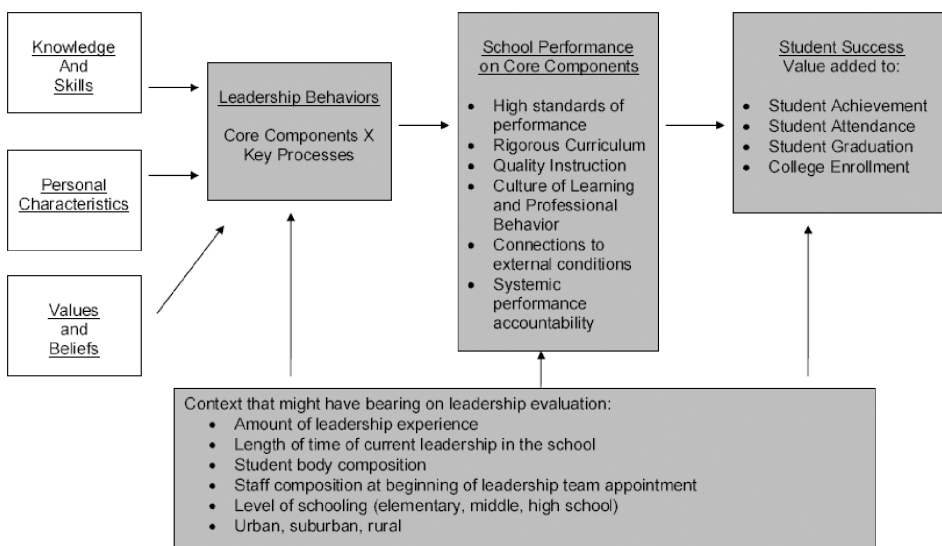
**FIGURE 1** Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education: Core Components & Key Processes Intersecting with the ISLLC Standards.

students and enhance the ability of teachers to teach (Marks & Printy, 2003; Sebring & Bryk, 2000). Key processes are leadership behaviors, most notably aspects of transformational leadership traditionally associated with processes of leadership that raise organizational members' levels of commitment and shape organizational culture (Burns, 1978; Conley & Goldman, 1994; Leithwood, 1994).

Thus, the theory of action underlying the conceptual framework driving our assessment system is that effective leadership, both individual and team, requires core components created through key processes. For example, one of the bedrocks of instructional leadership is creating a positive school culture (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). In our framework, we refer to this as the core component Culture of Learning & Professional Behavior. We claim that to understand and measure leadership, it is not enough to assess the extent to which school leadership—the principal or teams of leaders—ensures that there is a culture of learning and professional behavior in the school. In assessing the school leader, it is also important to evaluate the leadership processes involved in establishing and nurturing a culture of learning and professional behavior. In other words, how is the leadership enacted around each core component? Does the leadership in the school support teachers to develop a culture of learning and professional behavior? Does the leadership implement programs to ensure there is a culture of learning and professional behavior? Does the leadership (individual leaders or teams

of leaders) communicate effectively about the culture of learning? Thus, our conceptual framework calls for the assessment of leadership at the intersection of two dimensions: what leaders create and how they create it.

Consistent with the best empirical work on this issue (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Heck & Hallinger, 1999), our conceptual framework fits within a more general model of a leadership assessment system (see Figure 2). This model attempts to capture in broad strokes how education leadership should be assessed. We show most, if not all, of the major constructs that might be the focus of leadership assessment, and position our focus on leadership behaviors—that is, the intersection of core components and key processes—in that larger context. (We do not attempt to diagram a full explanation for how school leadership leads to instructional improvement and subsequent student success; for such a review, see Murphy et al., 2006). The model shows leadership knowledge and skills, personal characteristics, and values and beliefs as precursors to leadership behaviors exhibited by individuals or teams in performing their leadership responsibilities. These leadership behaviors then lead to school performance on core components such as providing a rigorous curriculum and high-quality instruction. These school performances, in turn, lead to student success. Here we focus on value added, for example, improvements in student achievement, student attendance, student graduation rates, and college enrollment. Thus, in assessing a leader or leadership team, some might focus on knowledge and skills, personal characteristics, and beliefs, but that is not our focus. In contrast, our assessment of education leadership focuses on leadership behaviors defined by the intersection



**FIGURE 2** Model for Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education.

of six core components of school performance and six key processes, which together make up our conception of principal and team school leadership. Our assessment model does not envision direct effects of leadership behaviors on student success. Rather, the leadership behaviors lead to changes in school performance, which in turn lead to student success.

Our model posits that there are aspects of the context within which leadership and schooling takes place that bear on leadership evaluation (Goldring et al., 2006; Manasee, 1985). For example, everything else being equal, the evaluation of leadership quality might appropriately take into account the amount of experience of the leadership. For example, are we assessing a first-year principal or a seasoned principal? A newly established leadership team or a seasoned team? One might expect and demand higher-quality leadership from an experienced leader or leadership team. Similarly, length of time in the school might appropriately be taken into account. A leader or leadership team new to a school may not have been able yet to establish patterns of behavior in his/her early work that he/she will establish over the longer haul. Even more likely, the effects of leadership may not be seen immediately in school performance or student success. Rather, good leadership should lead to increasing quality of school performance over time, and only after improved school performance has been in place for a while can one expect to see it reflected in improved student success. Thus, context must be taken into account in interpreting leadership accomplishment, and to a lesser extent, even when interpreting leadership behaviors.

Student body composition, staff composition, level of schooling, and geographic setting of the school can all have bearing on the challenges to providing high-quality education leadership. For example, Lortie, Crow, and Prolman (1983) found that principals in lower socioeconomic status schools were more focused on issues of student discipline and difficult staff relationships, and Hallinger and Murphy (1986) found that principals took a much more direct role in curricular and instructional issues and tended to be much more task-oriented in lower socioeconomic status schools. Martinko and Gardner (1983) found that principals' behaviors varied significantly with grade level and the school's degree of urbanization.

Taking these contextual features into account in evaluating leadership, however, has its dangers. On the one hand, evaluation of education leadership should undoubtedly take into account the challenges presented to providing high-quality leadership, high-quality school performance, and high-quality student success. For example, in the early days of taking over a troubled school, even the most effective of educational leadership cannot be expected to have immediate effects on school performance and student success. At the same time, these contextual factors should not be used as an excuse for poor-quality leadership.

Our intention is to focus our assessments of education leadership on leader behaviors. These assessments give weight to school performance and

student success, and take into account additional contextual factors such as a leader's experience and length of time in the current school, as well as the challenges to high-quality leadership presented by the school. Here, our assessment employs rubrics for scoring a body of evidence (e.g., work samples, student test scores, and other outcomes measures, such as graduation rates). The shaded portions of our assessment model reflect these complexities.

## GROUNDING IN THE RESEARCH LITERATURE

In this section we present the research base that supports the core components and key processes in our conceptual framework.

### Core Components

First we present the six core components. As noted above, the core components represent the focus of effective learning-centered instructional school leadership as grounded in the literature. We chose those leadership behaviors that are linked in the research literature to teachers' opportunities to improve their instruction and student learning, and that are aligned with the ISLLC standards.

#### HIGH STANDARDS FOR STUDENT LEARNING

The first core component in our leadership assessment conceptual framework is the extent to which leadership ensures *there are individual, team, and school goals for rigorous student academic and social learning*. There is considerable evidence that a key function of effective school leadership concerns shaping the purpose of the school and articulating the school's mission (Bamburg & Andrews, 1990; Hallinger and Heck, 2002; Murphy et al., 2006). Traditionally, this aspect of leadership focused primarily on the principal's role in ensuring that the school has clear, measurable goals for student learning and academic progress. Setting clear goals for student achievement is central to effective leadership, as it guides the daily practices and decisions of all stakeholders. This may seem obvious today, but as the effective-schools research was emerging in the 1970s, many schools had ill-defined goals that were often nonacademic (Brookover et al., 1979).

In our framework, however, we do not assess the mere presence of goals for student learning, but specifically emphasize the quality of the school goals, namely, the extent to which there are *high* standards and *rigorous* learning goals. The research literature has supported the notion that high expectations for all, including clear and public standards, are key to closing the achievement gap between advantaged and less advantaged students, and for raising the overall academic achievement of all students. Early research on effective

schools in lower socioeconomic communities found that these schools held high expectations for their students (Brookover & Lezotte, 1977; Purkey & Smith, 1983). More recently, Betts and Grogger (2003) found that on average, higher grading standards are associated with higher 12th-grade test scores. High standards for student performance focus on outputs rather than processes or inputs (Porter, 1994). In our framework, high standards mean those that “are intended to be absolute rather than normative. Second, they are expected to be set at high, ‘world-class’ levels . . . Finally they are expected to apply to all, or essentially all, students rather than a selected subset such as college bound students seeking advanced placement” (Linn, 2000, p. 10).

#### RIGOROUS CURRICULUM

Rigorous curriculum refers to the content of instruction (as opposed to the pedagogy of instruction, which is dealt with in the following section). *Rigorous curriculum is defined as ambitious academic content provided to all students in core academic subjects.*

Having a rigorous curriculum provided by teachers and experienced by students is at the core of standards-based reform, including standards-based reform as articulated in the No Child Left Behind legislation. States must have challenging academic content standards that describe what students are to know and be able to do. School leaders, as has already been argued, play a crucial role in setting high standards for student performance in their school. These high standards, however, must be translated into ambitious academic content represented in the curriculum students experience. Murphy and colleagues (2006) argued, in their recent piece on learning-centered leadership, that school leaders in productive schools are knowledgeable about and deeply involved in the school’s curricular program (Carter & Maestas, 1982; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Russell et al., 1985). These leaders work with colleagues to ensure that the school is defined by a rigorous curriculum program in general and that each student’s program, in particular, is of high quality (Newmann, 1997; Ogden, & Germinario, 1995). Learning-centered leaders ensure that each student has an adequate opportunity to learn rigorous content in all academic subjects (Murphy & Hallinger, 1985).

A number of empirical studies demonstrate that teaching focused on ambitious academic content covered in content standards and student assessments leads to increases in student performance (e.g., Brophy & Good, 1986; Knapp, Shields, & Turnbull, 1992; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Teddlie & Stringfield, 1993; Turnbull et al., 1999; Wong et al., 1996). The content is defined not only by the topics that might or might not be taught (e.g., linear equations in mathematics), but also the cognitive demands that might or might not be taught (e.g., memorize, understand the concept, solve problems, conjecture, and generalize) for each topic. Research shows a strong positive

link between student achievement gains and content covered, as defined at the intersection of specific topics with specific cognitive demands (Gamoran et al., 1997). Other research shows that much of the problem with low-achieving students can be addressed by providing them with better content (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; McKnight et al., 1987; Peterson, 1988; Porter et al., 1988; Romberg, 1986).

Effective leaders understand the importance of a rigorous curriculum offered by teachers and experienced by students, and the effects of a rigorous curriculum on gains in student achievement. They are attentive to establishing adequate opportunities for all students to experience a rigorous curriculum in each core academic subject regardless of a student's race, sex, SES background, first language, or disability. Effective instructional leaders work with their teachers to insure that the content of instruction is rigorous and aligned to the school's high standards for student performance.

#### QUALITY INSTRUCTION

A rigorous curriculum (i.e., ambitious academic content) is insufficient to insure substantial gains in student learning; quality instruction (i.e., effective pedagogy) is also required. *Quality instruction is defined as effective instructional practices that maximize student academic and social learning.* Teachers must deliver a rigorous curriculum in ways that actively engage students, are clear, and recognize naive conceptions that students bring to the classroom about the academic content to be learned. Effective teachers are clear about their instructional goals, communicate to their students what is expected of them and why, make expert use of existing instructional materials, are knowledgeable about their students, adapt instruction to their students' needs, and anticipate misconceptions in students' existing knowledge. Particularly at the elementary grades, effective teachers provide the metacognitive strategies students need to comprehend the material. They monitor students' understandings by offering regular appropriate feedback, and they accept appropriate responsibility for student outcomes (Porter & Brophy, 1988). Newmann and Wehlage (1995) defined authentic pedagogy as teaching that requires students to think, to develop in-depth understanding, and to apply academic learning to important realistic problems.

Quality instruction (effective pedagogy) reflects research findings over the course of the past few decades about how people learn (National Research Council, 1999). That work makes clear that teachers' pedagogical practices must draw out and work with the preexisting understandings that students bring with them to the classroom. Quality instruction provides students with many examples in which the same concept is at work and uses ongoing assessments designed to make students' thinking visible to both the teachers and the students.

Effective instructional leaders understand the properties of quality instruction (effective pedagogy) and find ways to ensure that quality instruction is experienced by all students in their school. They spend time on the instructional program, often through providing feedback to teachers (Clark, Lotto, & McCarthy, 1980) and supporting teachers to improve their instruction (Conley, 1991; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990).

#### CULTURE OF LEARNING AND PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOR

Another core component in our assessment framework is *leadership that ensures there are integrated communities of professional practice in the service of student academic and social learning. There is a healthy school environment in which student learning is the central focus*. Research has demonstrated that schools organized as communities, rather than bureaucracies, are more likely to exhibit academic success (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Lee, Smith, & Croninger, 1995; Louis & Miles, 1990). Further research supports the notion that effective professional communities are deeply rooted in the academic and social learning goals of the schools (Little, 1982; Rosenholtz, 1989). In other words, the communities are not for the mere purpose of creating pleasant work environments. In fact, Phillips (1997) found that in schools where teachers are more concerned with affective relations than academic learning, test scores tend to be lower. She cautions that school community must place academic learning at its center. Often termed teacher professional communities, these collaborative cultures are defined by elements such as shared goals and values, focus on student learning, shared work, deprivatized practice, and reflective dialogue (Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996).

Another strand of the literature that supports the importance of this core component is the research on school climate. The early research on effective schools indicated that a safe and orderly environment is associated with academic success (Clark, Lotto, & McCarthy, 1980; Rutter et al., 1979). More recently, Heck, Larsen, and Marcoulides (1990) found that “the principal’s role in establishing a strong school climate . . . strongly predicted school achievement” (p. 117). However, a healthy school environment encompasses more than a “safe and orderly climate.” Research and program development by Crone and Horner (2003) and Charney and Wood (1981) have focused on schoolwide prosocial programs and their effects on both social behavior and academic outcomes. This work with schoolwide positive behavior support and schoolwide social curriculum collectively indicates that schools that are supportive, responsive environments for students have better attendance, fewer office referrals, more academic engagement from students, and greater gain in achievement test results in comparison to schools without such programs (Elliott, 1993, 1997; Gresham, Sugai, Horner, Quinn, & McInerney, 1998). Thus, healthy schools are also supportive of students’ social and academic needs.

School leadership plays a central role in the extent to which a school exhibits a culture of learning and professional behavior and whether there are integrated professional communities. Louis, Marks, and Kruse (1996) found that schools with supportive principals tended to have higher levels of professional community. Similarly, Bryk, Camburn, and Louis's (1999) research in the Chicago public schools indicated that principal leadership is an important facilitating factor in determining the level of professional community. Leaders play a central role in promoting a climate of respect and support for students and teachers (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988).

#### CONNECTIONS TO EXTERNAL COMMUNITIES

Leading a school with high expectations and academic achievement for all students requires robust connections to the external community. These connections include *linkages to family and/or other people and institutions in the community that advance academic and social learning*. There is a substantial research base that has reported positive relationships between family involvement and social and academic benefits for students (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). A study of standards-based reform practices, for instance, found that teacher outreach to parents of low-performing students, such as meetings, sending materials home, and communicating with parents when their child was having problems, was related to improved student achievement (Westat & Policy Studies Associates, 2001). Similarly, schools with well-defined parent partnership programs show achievement gains over schools with less robust partnerships (Shaver & Walls, 1998). Communitywide involvement, such as school-linked social services, parent education programs, and community organizing initiatives, aim to change the underlying conditions associated with low student achievement (Mediratta & Fruchter, 2001).

Learning-centered leaders play a key role in both establishing and supporting parental involvement and community partnerships. These leaders model the importance of collaborating with parents and others in the extended school community (Corcoran & Wilson, 1985; Goldring & Sullivan, 1996; Russell et al., 1985). External collaboration is part of the strategic vision of the school; this collaboration is closely linked to the academic and social learning goals of the school. Learning-centered leaders focus collaboration and engagement with the external community on learning goals; they do not engage the external community for public relations as an end in itself. Learning-centered leaders “model community collaboration for staff, establish norms about the importance of parent connections, and provide opportunities for staff to develop the collaborative skills needed to work effectively with parents” (Murphy et al., 2006, p. 34).

The relationship between schools and communities is not just one way, from the school outward to the community. Effective leadership also ensures that expectations, information, and interests from the community are part of

the school's goals, culture, and decisions (Murphy et al., 2006; Rowe, 1995). To achieve these school-community partnerships, school leaders develop working relationships with religious, business, and political leaders in the school community (Goldring & Hausman, 2001). Leaders "invest time, energy and resources in community and family work because they know that they and their schools cannot be successful without them . . . They choose their involvement strategically with an eye toward building supports for children and schools" (Lawson, 1999, p. 12).

#### SYSTEMIC PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY

*There is individual and collective responsibility among leadership, faculty, and students for achieving the rigorous student academic and social learning goals.* Accountability stems from both external and internal accountability systems (Adams & Kirst, 1999). External accountability refers to performance expectations that emerge from outside the school and the local community. Recent research reported a positive relationship between the strength of a state's accountability system and student achievement (Carnoy & Loeb, 2002; Hanushek & Raymond, 2004). Simultaneously, schools and districts have internal accountability systems with local expectations and individual responsibilities.

If external policies help to set some of the broader targets for schools, then internal goals comprise the practical steps that schools must take to reach those targets. Schools with higher levels of internal accountability are more successful within external accountability systems, and they are more skillful in areas such as curricular decision making, addressing instructional issues, and responding to various performance measures (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Elmore, 2005).

School leaders must integrate internal and external accountability systems by holding their staff accountable for implementing strategies that align teaching and learning with achievement goals and targets set by policy. As noted by Murphy and colleagues (2006), school leaders play an integral role in focusing their staff and students on the particular criteria for success embodied in performance standards and school goals. They do so through frequent reference to and use of these criteria in meetings, performance reviews, classroom observations, discussions of curriculum and instructional strategies, and other interactions with staff. Effective leaders enhance accountability by offering individualized support to staff, challenging teachers to think critically about their teaching, and promoting an atmosphere of collaboration in the school.

Assessment systems are central to systemic performance accountability, and in schools with learning-centered leaders, these systems are characterized by a variety of distinguishing elements. First, they are comprehensive. They address classroom and school-based activity. They feature the use of a wide

variety of monitoring and data collection strategies, both formal and informal. They insist on multiple and complementary indicators of student learning. For example, comprehensive designs often include teacher record-keeping systems, end-of-level or end-of-unit reports, student work products, criterion-referenced tests, and standardized measures of student performance. They also use information gleaned from direct observations in classrooms. Second, they disaggregate information on the important conditions and outcomes of schooling (e.g., program placement of students, test results) by relevant characteristics of students (e.g., gender, race, social class). Third, they are constructed in ways that foster the triangulation of data from multiple sources in order to arrive at judgments about the effectiveness of curricular and instructional programs and organizational operations. Lastly, as noted above, these systems implement tight alignment between local school-based and external assessments.

### Key Processes

Key leadership processes refer to the ways in which leadership, individually and collectively, influences organizations and their constituencies to move toward achieving the core components of High Standards of Student Performance, Rigorous Curriculum (content), Quality Instruction (pedagogy), Culture of Learning & Professional Behavior, Connections to External Communities, and Systemic Performance Accountability. As noted by Fullan (1982), “change is a process, not an event” (p. 41).

There is agreement regarding many of the key processes of leadership. Adair (1983) suggests that leadership involves juggling three key overlapping domains in an organization: group maintenance needs, task needs, and individual needs. He goes on to suggest elements (or “processes,” in our words) in each of these leadership domains, including defining the task, planning, briefing (communicating), controlling, evaluating, motivating, organizing, and setting an example. Clark, Lotto, and Astuto (1989) highlight the importance of planning, implementing, and evaluating in the change and school improvement process. Others have compiled similar lists of leadership processes.

Our conceptual framework features six key processes, based upon the literature on effective leadership and the research on school improvement: planning, implementing, supporting, advocating, communicating, and monitoring. Following a systems view of organizations, we acknowledge that the processes are interconnected and recursive, and are highly reactive to one another, although we review each individually. For example, to *monitor* teaching for high-quality instruction, leaders first need to *plan* for the collection of key data; they need to *communicate* both the need for the data and the results. Leaders need to *implement* changes based on the information gleaned from the monitoring, and they need to *support* teachers to help them improve their instruction. In this section, we review the key processes

and provide examples of how each process is enacted in relationship to a few of the core components.

## PLANNING

Planning is an essential process of leadership. *We define planning as articulating shared direction and coherent policies, practices, and procedures for realizing high standards of student performance.* Planning helps leadership focus resources, tasks, and people. Change studies document the importance of planning (Clark et al., 1989). Learning-centered leaders do not see planning as a ritual or as overly bureaucratic. They engage in planning as a mechanism to realize the core components of the school. Effective principals are highly skilled planners and, in fact, they are proactive in their planning work (Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982). Planning is needed in each of the core components; it is an engine of school improvement that builds common purpose and a shared culture. For example, to ensure high-quality instruction, one of the core components in our framework, learning-centered leaders devote considerable time and undertake careful planning to guarantee that the school employs excellent, highly qualified teachers, as well as faculty whose values and instructional frameworks are consistent with the mission and the culture of the school (Levine & Lezotte, 1990; Teddlie, Stringfield, Wimpleberg, & Kirby, 1989).

Another example of the importance of planning for high-quality instruction involves professional development. In order to continue providing high-quality instruction, teachers must participate in ongoing professional development. Effective leaders assume an active role in planning staff learning activities along with the overall professional development system of the school (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978; Clark, Lotto, & McCarthy, 1980). Contrast this planned approach to the more typical scenario where teachers simply choose workshops from a menu of options offered through the district or the state.

Planning is key to other core components as well, for example, effective leaders place a high priority on curriculum planning (Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982). They also actively plan for the collection of data needed to both implement systemic accountability in the school and to monitor the curriculum and instructional quality. Further, effective leaders create systematic plans to engage the larger school community (Goldring & Hausman, 2001).

## IMPLEMENTING

After planning, *leaders implement; they put into practice the activities necessary to realize high standards for student performance.* In a comprehensive review of the research on implementation of curriculum and instruction, Fullan and Pomfret (1977) concluded that “implementation is not simply an extension

of planning . . . it is a phenomenon in its own right" (p. 336). Effective leaders take the initiative to implement and are proactive in pursuing their school goals (Manasse, 1985).

Learning-centered leaders are directly involved in implementing policies and practices that further the core components in their schools. For example, effective leaders implement joint planning time for teachers and other structures as mechanisms to develop a culture of learning and professional behavior (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Hampston, 1998). Similarly, they implement programs that build productive parent and community relations as a way to achieve connections to external communities (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005).

School leadership engages with school staff to implement rigorous curriculum that is aligned with high standards for student performance. They implement high-quality instructional programs (Austin, 1978; Weber, 1971; Wellisch et al., 1978) and, as noted by Murphy and colleagues (2006), they are personally involved with school faculty to implement assessment systems at the classroom and school levels for systemic accountability (Clark & McCarthy, 1983; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Weber, 1971).

#### SUPPORTING

*Leaders create enabling conditions; they secure and use the financial, political, technological, and human resources necessary to promote academic and social learning.* Supporting is a key process that ensures the resources necessary to achieve the core components are available and used well. This notion is closely related to the transformational leadership behaviors associated with helping people be successful (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005).

The literature is clear that learning-centered leaders devote considerable time to supporting teachers in their efforts to strengthen the quality of instruction (Conley, 1991; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990). This support takes varied forms, as noted by Murphy and colleagues (2006). For example, from a financial and technological perspective, leaders make sure that teachers have all the necessary materials and resources required to be highly effective instructors. In terms of social and human capital, leaders provide access to new sources of knowledge and make certain that teachers have high-quality opportunities to expand, enhance, and refine their instructional skills (Cawelti, 1997; Newmann, 1997; Wilson & Corcoran, 1988). Leaders demonstrate personal interest in staff and make themselves available to them (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Leaders also provide support for high-quality instruction by ensuring that teachers have guidance as they work to integrate skills learned during professional development into their instructional behaviors (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978).

Support is also a key process in ensuring a culture of learning and professional behavior. Murphy and colleagues (2006) note that leaders support

integrated communities of practice by providing the infrastructure, such as time and space, that nurtures informal learning throughout the school (Little, 1982; Newmann, 1997; Venezky & Winfield, 1979). Shared decision making and other participatory mechanisms and structures provide a framework of support for cultures of learning and professional behavior (Lezotte, Hathaway, Miller, Passalacqua, & Brookover, 1980; Little, 1982; Rutherford, 1985). Leaders realize that communities of professional practice require resources as well, and they take advantage of their unique position in garnering and allocating resources to bring communities of professional practice to life (Little, 1982; Rutter et al., 1979).

#### ADVOCATING

*Leaders promote the diverse needs of students within and beyond the school.*

Advocating for the best interests and needs of all children is a key process of learning-centered leadership. Learning-centered leaders advocate for a rigorous curriculum for all students. They ensure that policies in the school do not prevent or create barriers for certain students to participate in classes that are deemed gateways to further learning, such as algebra. They ensure that special-needs students receive content-rich instruction. Similarly, effective leadership ensures that all students are exposed to high-quality instruction; they manage the parental pressures that often create favoritism in placing students in particular classes. Both the instruction and content of the school's educational programs honor diversity (e.g., the use of culturally rich educational materials) (Ogden & Germinario, 1995; Roueche, Baker et al., 1986). Through advocacy, learning-centered leadership works with teachers and other professional staff to ensure that the school's culture both models and supports respect for diversity. Learning-centered leaders make their advocacy public. Further, advocacy is central to the systematic accountability processes in the school, as teachers are held accountable for the academic and social learning of the diverse student body.

Learning-centered leaders advocate on behalf of all children in their relationships with the external community. As Murphy and his colleagues (2006, p. 14) note, "learning-centered leaders proactively respond to external policy initiatives (e.g., speak at public forums, address civic organizations) to ensure that public policy advantages the students in their schools—and their families." Effective leaders model their advocacy by developing civic capacity with key institutions and organizations in the school's community (Goldring & Hausman, 2001). They guide service providers, youth development specialists, and private organizations to create opportunities to serve children with multiple and varying needs (Butty, LaPoint, Thomas, & Thompson, 2001). Learning-centered leadership advocates on behalf of parents and their students to the political community and the educational bureaucracy.

## COMMUNICATING

*Leaders develop, utilize, and maintain systems of exchange among members of the school and with its external communities.* In studying school change, Loucks and colleagues found that “principals played major communication roles, both with and among school staff, and with others in the district and in the community” (1982, p. 42).

Learning-centered leaders communicate unambiguously to all the stakeholders and constituencies both in and outside the school about the high standards of student performance. “Effective principals continually communicate their high expectations to students and staff” (Manasse, 1985, p. 447). These communications allow for clear, focused articulations of the goals of the school (Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982; Venezky & Winfield, 1979).

Leaders communicate regularly and through multiple channels with families and community members, including businesses, social service agencies, and faith-based organizations (Edmonds & Frederiksen, 1978; Garibaldi, 1993). Through ongoing communication, schools and the community serve as resources for one another that inform, promote, and link key institutions in support of student academic and social learning.

Communication plays a key role in systemic performance accountability as well. As noted by Murphy and colleagues (2006), learning-centered leaders hold faculty and students accountable by communicating the results of accountability data (Eubanks & Levine, 1983). Effective leaders provide teachers and parents with assessment results on an ongoing basis (Levine & Stark, 1982; Venezky & Winfield, 1979). Information about student progress is communicated regularly to students and parents in an accessible form, at multiple times, across an array of forums, and in multiple formats (Eubanks & Levine, 1983; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982; Wynne, 1980).

Communication is central to developing a culture of learning and professional behavior in the school. Integrated communities of practice cannot emerge, nor can they function, if there is not open and adequate communication among teachers, between teachers and leaders, and among teachers, leaders, and students. Bryk, Camburn, and Louis noted that strong professional communities emerge when the school engages in reflective dialogue, “engaging in extended conversations” (1999, p. 754). Leadership must support and participate in these important conversations.

## MONITORING

*Monitoring refers to systematically collecting and analyzing data to make judgments that guide decisions and actions for continuous improvement.* A key transformational leadership behavior is monitoring school activity (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). Early on, the effective schools literature identified monitoring school progress, in terms of setting goals, assessing the curriculum,

and evaluating instruction, as a key role of instructional leadership (Purkey & Smith, 1983).

In terms of our core components, learning-centered leaders monitor the school's curriculum, assuring alignment between rigorous academic standards and curriculum coverage (Eubanks & Levine, 1983). They monitor students' programs of study to ensure that all students have adequate opportunity to learn rigorous content in all academic subjects (Murphy & Hallinger, 1985).

Learning-centered leadership also undertakes an array of activities to monitor the quality of instruction, such as ongoing classroom observations. Heck (1992) found that ineffective elementary-school principals were less likely than principals in effective elementary schools to monitor classroom instruction through regular classroom visits. Effective leaders also actively monitor the procedures put into place to improve quality instruction, such as the use of cooperative planning time by teachers or professional development. Leadership monitors the effectiveness of professional development by assessing the extent to which staff instructional practices are changing and improving, and ultimately impacting student learning and achievement (Eubanks & Levine, 1983).

Monitoring student achievement is central to maintaining systemic performance accountability. Murphy and colleagues (2006) have noted that learning-centered leaders are knowledgeable about assessment practices and are personally involved with faculty in monitoring assessment systems at the classroom and school levels (Clark & McCarthy, 1983; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Learning-centered principals help teachers use data to identify individual students who need remedial assistance, tailor instruction to individual students' needs, identify and correct gaps in the curriculum, improve or increase the involvement of parents in student learning, and assign or reassign students to classes or groups. Furthermore, effective leaders use data to help teachers identify areas where they need to strengthen content knowledge or teaching skills. In other words, monitoring is used to focus professional development. Heck (1992) found that effective principals use test results to monitor program improvement as a mechanism to focus on systematic accountability. Monitoring through data is also used to engage the external school community by analyzing strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for school improvement.

As noted above, our conception measures leadership at the intersection of core component and key processes. The "how" of leadership, processes, cannot be separated from the "what" of leadership, the core components. In the assessment instrument, the intersection is measured by always anchoring items in both a core component and key process. For example, the core component of connections to the external environment and communicating is measured by an item such as, "The principal ensures the school discusses

the results of student achievement tests with parents,” or “listens to the diverse needs and opinions of all families.”

#### SUMMARY

Although there are certainly congruencies between our conception of learning-centered leadership and existing measures of instructional leadership in the research literature, our conceptual framework is different from existing measures of instructional leadership in the research literature in terms of the range of dimensions measured, its unique focus on the intersection of core components and key processes, and its measurement in terms of effectiveness of leadership behaviors rather than frequency. It is important to note that our instrument is developed to assess leadership performance on the job, rather than to measure instructional leadership writ large.

Perhaps most well-known in the research literature on school leadership is the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale, development by Hallinger and Murphy (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Their framework focused on three broad categories: defining the mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting the school climate. Given that the instrument was developed in the 1980s, the instrument and its corresponding framework did not focus on the rigor or quality of academic goals or standards, but rather measured whether academic goals were framed and communicated. The instrument does not emphasize outcomes of leadership behaviors, namely student academic and social learning. The instrument did not rate the effectiveness of principals' behaviors, but the frequency.

Heck and colleagues have also developed an instrument to measure instructional leadership (see Heck, Larsen, & Marcoulides, 1990; Heck & Marcoulides, 1996). Similar to the Hallinger and Murphy instrument, they do not measure the effectiveness of the principal in performing certain behaviors, but rather the frequency of the behaviors. Their instrument also centered around three dimensions: governance processes, climate and social relations, and monitoring the schools' instruction.

More recently, Alig-Mielcarek and Hoy (2005) developed the Instructional Leadership Inventory. Similar to the previous scales, their scale also asked teachers to measure the frequency of principal behaviors, not effectiveness, and their framework measured three factors: schoolwide professional development, defining and communicating goals, and feedback on teaching and learning. Although this more recent instrument does have items measuring some of the components in our framework, such as setting high standards, none of the instruments in the literature offers a model that encompasses the complexity of implementing processes of leadership at the intersection of core components and key processes. It may be that a leader sets high standards, but does he/she also monitor, communicate, and implement them? In addition, in practice, our leadership assessment system also includes

principals' and supervisors' ratings of the effectiveness of principals, not just teacher responses.

## LINKAGES TO THE ISLLC STANDARDS

Our conceptual framework, with its focus on assessing leadership behaviors, is anchored in and significantly aligned with the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996). The ISLLC standards were developed between 1994 and 1996 under the direction of the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA), a consortium of the ten national organizations associated with school leadership in the United States. They were adopted by the NPBEA in December of 1996 and were reauthorized by the board in December 2007. Currently, they are used as the foundation for school leadership in over forty states. Consequently, they have had a major influence on the shape and texture of school leadership in the United States. They have shaped the type of education that prospective and practicing school leaders receive, the ways in which educators are licensed and relicensed into the profession of school administration, how preparation programs in school leadership are accredited, the hiring criteria employed by school districts, and so forth.

At their core, the ISLLC standards are an empirically anchored and value-based statement about what the profession of school leadership should look like at the dawn of the twenty-first century. They were crafted in an effort to move school leadership from the orbit of management and toward the gravitational pull of learning and school improvement. They are broad statements designed to apply to all school leaders (Murphy, 2005).

We elected to align the VALED to the ISLLC standards for two reasons, one practical and one conceptual. First, the standards provide the leadership scaffolding for forty states, all the members of the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA), and thousands of individual school districts. Therefore, an assessment system of leadership that was not coordinated with them would be largely ignored. Second, and more importantly, the intellectual foundation of the standards is nearly isomorphic with the foundation used to craft the conceptual framework of the assessment. In both cases, the base is the research on schools where all students are effective in meeting ambitious learning targets.

Figure 1 shows the intersection between the conceptual framework and the ISLLC standards (as described in more detail in this section). Here, we present some examples of how our conceptual framework is aligned with the ISLLC standards. One key difference between the ISLLC standards and our conceptual framework is that the standards typically refer to a person in a leadership position (a school administrator), while our framework pertains to both individuals and leadership teams. Another difference is that our

conceptual framework makes finer-grained distinctions than do the ISLLC standards.

ISLCC Standard 1 refers to a vision of learning. Specifically, “a school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.” The components of professional practice that are embedded in this standard include developing, communicating, implementing, and monitoring the vision. In our conceptual framework, the intersection of the core component High Standards for Student Performance and the key processes of planning, implementing, supporting, advocating, communicating, and monitoring are consistent with Standard 1. For example, items that measure the intersection of high standards for student performance and planning and supporting, such as *develops rigorous growth targets in learning for all students* and *allocates school resources primarily toward reaching academic and social learning goals*, are rooted in Standard 1. These items provide evidence of leadership behavior that develops and implements a vision (for student performance).

ISLLC Standard 2 refers to the school culture and teaching and learning. Specifically, Standard 2 states, “A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.” Included in this standard are such leadership behaviors as valuing students and staff, developing and sustaining a culture of learning, ensuring an inclusive culture, and monitoring and evaluating the culture. In our conceptual framework, Standard 2 is covered in a number of areas, but primarily in the intersection of the core components Rigorous Curriculum, Quality Instruction, and Culture of Learning and Professional Behavior with the key processes of planning, implementing, supporting, advocating, communicating, and monitoring. Examples of the types of behaviors in our framework that are aligned with Standard 2 include *provides teachers with time to work on developing and strengthening the curricular program* *observes each teacher’s instructional practices routinely to provide feedback* and *develops a culture of shared responsibility for the social and academic learning of students*.

Standard 3 refers to the management of the school to support learning. Specifically, Standard 3 states, “A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.” This standard is aligned with our core component Culture of Learning and Professional Behavior and its intersection with each of the six key processes. Key items from our framework that match this standard are *secures and allocates resources to build a culture focused on student learning* *implements a learning environment in which all students*

*are known and cared for and secures and allocates resources to build a culture focused on student learning.*

Standard 4 refers to the role of leadership in fostering relationships between the school and its broader external community: “A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.” This standard articulates such leadership behaviors as understanding community needs, involving community members, and understanding and valuing diversity. It is anchored in the intersection between our key processes and the core component Connections to External Communities. Specific items from our framework that are aligned with Standard 4 include *builds relationships with individuals and groups in the community to promote high standards of academic and social learning allocates resources to build family and community partnerships that advance student learning and challenges the community to meet the needs of children at risk.*

Integrity, fairness, and ethics are at the core of Standard 5: “A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.” This aspect of the ISLLC standards is evident in our core components of Culture of Learning and Professional Behavior and Systemic Performance Accountability as they intersect with advocating and communicating. We address these issues with such items as *advocates that leaders are accountable for meeting the needs of diverse students in acquiring academic and social learning advocates a culture of learning that respects diversity of students encourages a culture of respect and fairness for students and discusses standards of professional behavior with faculty.*

Lastly, Standard 6 refers to the political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context of learning: “A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.” This standard reflects professional practices that include communicating to the external community, working within policies and regulations, and advocating on behalf of students and families. This standard is anchored in our framework in the key process of advocating and communicating and the core component of Connections to External Communities. We assess this aspect of leadership in our conceptual framework with such items as *promotes mechanisms for reaching families who are least comfortable at school; communicates goals, needs, and accomplishments with leaders in the community; and advocates for social services needed by students and families.*

There are important differences between our framework and the ISLLC standards as well. Our conceptual framework makes systematic distinctions not captured in the standards; specifically, it distinguishes among rigorous curriculum, quality instruction, and culture of learning and professional

behavior. The ISLLC Standards do not. Further, our framework systematically considers each of the six key processes for each core component; the ISLLC standards do not. Generally, there is quite good correspondence between an ISLLC standard and one of our core components.

## COMPARISONS WITH EXISTING LEADERSHIP ASSESSMENTS

The conceptual framework guiding our assessment system is different from most of the frameworks implied by assessments currently in use across the United States. We systematically reviewed leadership assessment instruments from the districts of the Council of the Great City Schools, the Wallace Foundation LEAD (Leadership for Educational Achievement in Districts) districts, and the SAELP (State Action for Education Leadership Project) states.<sup>1</sup> In all, 66 instruments were collected (89%) from the targeted districts and states (see Goldring et al., in press, for complete details). The main difference between our approach and others is the extent to which our conception focuses on those core components and key processes that are associated with student achievement. Thus, we privilege instructional leadership. Over half of the instruments we reviewed do not provide any information regarding the framework or “grounding” they use to evaluate their leaders. The other half of the instruments we reviewed are based on state standards, ISLLC standards, or locally developed standards. In addition, the assessment instruments we reviewed are solely focused on “administrators” with no mention of teams. Many of the instruments are used to evaluate principals, vice principals, and other system administrators.

To understand the content covered by an assessment, we first coded each of the items on the assessment instruments we reviewed into four broad categories: management (e.g., following policies, supervising staff), external environment (e.g., relations with community, public relations), instructional leadership (e.g., monitoring instruction, teacher professional development), and personal leadership (e.g., communication, political skills). We then calculated the percentage of the items coded into each category as a percent of the total. On average, the focus on instructional leadership outweighs other categories with an average of 52%, as compared with management (15%), relations with the external environment (9%), and personal leadership (22%). There is a range for each category; instructional leadership coverage ranges

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<sup>1</sup>The Wallace LEAD districts are Fairfax County (VA) Public Schools; Fort Wayne (IN) Community Schools; Providence (RI) School District; Springfield (MA) Public Schools; St. Louis (MO) Public Schools; Eugene (OR) School District; Hartford (CT) Board of Education; Atlanta (GA) Public Schools; Springfield (IL) School District; Trenton (NJ) Public Schools; New York City Region One; and Jefferson County (KY) Public Schools. The SAELP states are Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Missouri, Montana, New Jersey, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Virginia.

from 23% to 85% of an evaluation instrument. In contrast, our conception focuses 100% on instructional leadership, or what we term learning-centered leadership.

From the 66 instruments analyzed, we conclude that there is little consensus in the field around what should be assessed, despite the fact that over half of the assessment instruments report relying on the ISLLC standards or some derivation of them. As assessed, the content of leadership assessment is “a mile wide and an inch deep”; many aspects of leadership are assessed, but almost nothing is assessed in depth. For example, our framework privileges accountability, curriculum, instruction, and a culture of learning and professional behavior. Of the 66 instruments, 26 do not evaluate the principal at all regarding his/her engagement with the curriculum. One instrument has 128 items, with not one on curriculum. The largest emphasis on curriculum is an instrument with 16% of its items on curriculum. Not one instrument mentions the quality of the curriculum (rigorous curriculum). Similarly, 25 assessment instruments make no mention of quality instruction, and 22 do not assess a culture of learning and professional behavior. The specific area that is assessed most frequently across all instruments is communicating and implementing a vision. Some of the least assessed topics are coordinating across grade levels (vertical articulation), helping teachers maximize time on task, and closing the achievement gap in terms of learning for *all* children.

The core of our assessment system is a set of evidence-based behavior rating scales that measure the impact of leadership behaviors on academic and social learning in the school and community. Many of the existing instruments, however, evaluate generic, broad categories such as instructional management, school morale, personnel management, or administration and fiscal management. For example, nine assessment instruments we reviewed simply use a list of 15 or fewer general, descriptive categories with numeric ratings. This leaves open to interpretation what the categories mean, as they lack behaviorally oriented definitions.

Our conception assesses the intersection of *what* principals or leadership teams must accomplish to improve academic and social learning for all students (the core components), and *how* they create those core components (the key processes). We evaluate the effectiveness of processes that are specifically linked to learning-centered leadership. In contrast, the instruments we reviewed emphasize management processes that are not linked to any specific aspect of teaching and learning. Most of the focus on management in the existing assessment instruments refers to following procedures and implementing personnel policies. Many existing instruments also assess generic leadership characteristics such as conflict resolution, promoting communication, or recruiting others to participate in decision making. The modal emphasis on these types of leadership characteristics is 31% of the assessment instruments. One instrument has 67% of its items on generic leadership characteristics.

Our framework, in contrast, assesses specific management behaviors associated with core components and key processes, such as implementing curricular programs for students at risk or monitoring instructional practices of new teachers. We also emphasize the allocation and procurement of resources for specific purposes linked to student learning, such as ensuring a rigorous curriculum for all students or providing professional development to help teachers implement a rigorous curriculum.

This analysis of existing leadership assessment instruments has by design focused on the content of the assessment. A subsequent paper (Goldring et al., in press) on these instruments provides a comprehensive examination of their characteristics and uses. Suffice it to say for now that the vast majority of existing leadership assessment instruments being used in education have limited or no published information concerning their reliability or validity. This is an alarming situation that is in conflict with professional testing standards (American Educational Research Association et al., 1999) and should concern all persons involved with the assessment of leadership in our schools.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Since the beginning days of the effective schools literature, one researcher after another has replicated the finding that effective schools have effective leadership. Early on, many people hypothesized that knowing the characteristics of effective schools would be a major step toward being able to create these schools for all children, but that has not proven to be the case. In particular, while we know that effective leadership is essential and while the research literature has provided an increasingly rich and useful description of what effective leaders do, we still have not progressed to a point where as a field we are capable of developing the number of effective school leaders necessary to meet the excellence and equity challenges in urban schools. Leadership evaluation holds great promise for providing educators with much-needed information to improve leadership practices and serve accountability purposes. At the same time, there is general agreement that the current state of leadership assessment is weak. With Wallace Foundation support, we are working to remedy that deficiency.

The purpose of this paper has been to introduce the conceptual framework that drives our leadership assessment development work and to provide the rationale for that framework. We are assessing school leadership behaviors at the intersection of core components (i.e., what principals or leadership teams must accomplish to improve academic and social learning for all students) and key processes (i.e., how principals or leadership teams create those core components). Using this conceptual framework, we are developing a leadership behavior inventory that will provide profiles of performance across each of the core components and across each of the key processes.

Our overall conception of a leadership assessment system is broader than our core components by key processes assessment of leadership behaviors. Our assessment model gives weight to how successful a school is in terms of achieving core components. For example, does the school have a rigorous curriculum or a culture of learning and professional behavior? In assessing the quality of school leadership, we also give weight to evidence of student accomplishment. For example, does the school have a relatively large value added to student achievement? Finally, our assessment model recognizes that context matters when it comes to assessing the quality of education leadership. For example, how long has the principal been at the school? What is the composition of the student body? Are we assessing leadership at a high school or an elementary school?

Our model for assessment of leadership in education hypothesizes that school leadership behaviors defined by our core components and key processes lead over time to a school improving in terms of high standards of performance, rigorous curriculum, quality instruction, the culture of learning, connections to external communities, and systemic performance accountability. A school having these core components in turn leads to the school having improved student achievement, attendance, graduation and the like.

Our model further hypothesizes that context is important, including the amount of leadership experience, the length of time of the leader in the school, the student body and staff composition of the school, the school's location (e.g. urban, suburban, rural, etc.) and level of schooling. The leadership assessment framework presented here focuses on leadership behaviors and so it is one important piece of the puzzle in evaluating school leadership. A principal's supervisor should assess the principal's performance at least annually using results from the assessment instrument, value added to student achievement and, if available, indicators of the school's performance on the core components. Each supervisor should also take into account context variables as the supervisor deems appropriate. We do not specify the weighting of each of these context components in making an overall judgment about a principal's performance, as we believe that the actual summative evaluation is a local option.

In making decisions about the evaluation of the effectiveness of school leadership, we believe that both normative and criterion-referenced data can be useful. As we continue the development of our assessment system, we will be generating norms so that a supervisor can know how the principal they are supervising compares to other principals nationally among all principals or in similar circumstances, such as an elementary school principal. Further, we will set performance standards based on a total assessment score. There will be one set of performance standards regardless of the school's context: distinguished, proficient, basic, and below basic. These standards will be decided upon through a bookmark-like standard-setting process using data from a 300-school field trial. The composition of the standards

setting panel will include both school principals and supervisors of school principals from a variety of contexts. The bookmark procedure convenes a panel of experts who are given behavioral descriptors for each of the performance categories to be set (e.g., distinguished, proficient). They are also given normative data on performance, in this case for principals, on each of the 72 items of the assessment instrument. A book of items together with their “difficulties” ranked in order from lowest mean item response to highest is given to each panelist and they put a bookmark between the two items they think straddle a proficiency cut (e.g., the cut between distinguished and proficient). They operate independently within each round but share their results between rounds, typically for three rounds. The final cuts are taken as the average across panelists (Cizek, 2001).

Our paper documents that each of our core components and each of our key processes is based in research on how leadership behaviors add value to student achievement. Further, we have shown that our conceptual framework, defined by the intersection of our six core components and six key processes, is consistent with the ISLLC standards, though not redundant. For example, our conceptual framework makes systematic distinctions not captured in the ISLLC standards. Our framework distinguishes among rigorous curriculum, quality instruction, and culture of learning and professional behavior. The ISLLC standards do not. Further, for each core component we distinguish among leadership behaviors for each of the six key processes, while the ISLLC standards do not.

Finally, we reported on our review of 66 leadership assessment instruments currently in use in districts that are members of the Council of Great City Schools, Wallace Foundation LEAD districts, and states in the State Action for Education Leadership Project. Our content analyses of these existing leadership assessment instruments further demonstrate the unique strengths of our approach. In contrast to existing instruments, we focus squarely on learning-centered leadership as defined in the research literature.

Collectively, our review of research on leadership, professional standards for school leaders, and instruments currently being used across the country has provided the rationale and content design imperatives for a new assessment instrument, the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education. This new assessment focuses exclusively upon leadership behaviors linked to student learning.

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