

Assessing and Developing Principal Instructional Leadership

To what extent do you ...?

I. FRAME THE SCHOOL GOALS

	ALMOST NEVER			ALMOST ALWAYS	
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Develop a focused set of annual school-wide goals	1	2	3	4	5
2. Frame the school's goals in terms of staff responsibilities for meeting them	1	2	3	4	5
3. Use needs assessment or other systematic methods to secure staff input on goal development	1	2	3	4	5
4. Use data on student academic performance when developing the school's academic goals	1	2	3	4	5
5. Develop goals that are easily translated into classroom objectives by teachers	1	2	3	4	5

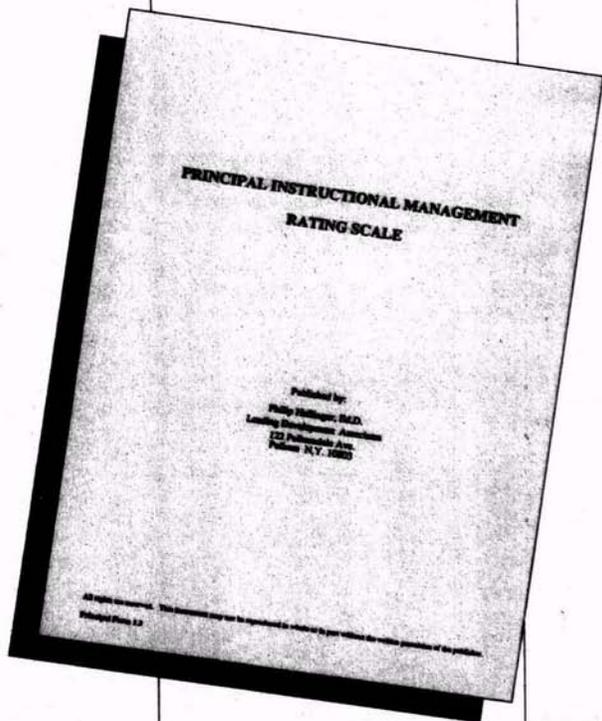
II. COMMUNICATE THE SCHOOL GOALS

6. Communicate the school's mission effectively to members of the school community	1	2	3	4	5
7. Discuss the school's academic goals with teachers at faculty meetings	1	2	3	4	5
8. Refer to the school's academic goals when making curricular decisions with teachers	1	2	3	4	5
9. Ensure that the school's academic goals are reflected in highly visible displays in the school (e.g. posters or bulletin boards emphasizing reading or math)	1	2	3	4	5
10. Refer to the school's goals in student assemblies	1	2	3	4	5

III. SUPERVISE & EVALUATE INSTRUCTION

11. Ensure that the classroom priorities of teachers are consistent with the stated goals of the school	1	2	3	4	5
12. Review student work products when evaluating classroom instruction	1	2	3	4	5

School districts should use appraisal methods that not only serve accountability purposes, but also assist principals in their professional development.



Today more than ever, principals are called upon to be strong educational leaders. Our research (Hallinger and Murphy 1982, 1985; Murphy et al. 1985) and experience suggest that principals are unlikely to do so unless at least three conditions are met. First, district decision makers must reduce the barriers that keep principals from performing their instructional leadership role. Second, instructional leadership must be defined in terms of observable practices and behaviors that principals can implement. Third, assessment methods must generate reliable, valid data on instructional leadership behavior and provide information principals can use in their professional development. As school districts plan development and evaluation programs, they should provide these conditions.

Reducing Barriers

The first step is to remove organizational impediments. Four obstacles seriously constrain principals from exercising strong instructional leadership: lack of knowledge of curriculum and instruction, professional norms, district office expectations, and role diversity.

Knowledge of curriculum and instruction. Educators have long assumed that principals have the tools to provide instructional leadership because they were once teachers themselves. Unfortunately, preparation as a teacher does not ensure that a prospective principal is capable of analyzing another's teaching, helping teachers improve classroom instruction, or developing, coordinating, and implementing curriculum. University-based administrative certification programs generally deemphasize curriculum and instruction, and there is a paucity of skill-oriented staff development programs for principals. Thus, new strategies in the fields of curriculum and instruction often remain outside their repertoires, and the instructional skills most principals possess upon

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entering administration atrophy over time, further weakening their knowledge base for instructional leadership.

Professional norms. Professional norms which state that educational decision making is the teacher’s domain also militate against strong instructional leadership. Principals often informally trade their authority in the areas of curriculum and instruction for compliance by teachers on other issues. This tradeoff is formalized in some districts through collective bargaining agreements negotiated by the school board and the superintendent. Whether formal or informal, these “treaties” result in territorial boundaries that limit the frequency and depth of principals’ classroom visitations as well as their initiative in consulting with teachers about instructional matters.

District expectations. That most districts place a higher priority on mana-

gerial efficiency and political stability than on instructional leadership is reflected in norms implicitly understood by both principals and district office administrators. Principals receive few rewards from the central office for actively involving themselves in curriculum and instruction and suffer few sanctions if they ignore this domain. Conversely, central office supervisors are likely to address community- or management-related problems through quick, firm communications to the principal involved. Consistent with these observations is the finding that promotions into administrative positions are more frequently associated with gender, political clout, and district visibility than with instructional leadership potential. Thus, the administrative norms in most school districts reinforce professional treaties negotiated with teachers, further inhibiting instructional leadership.

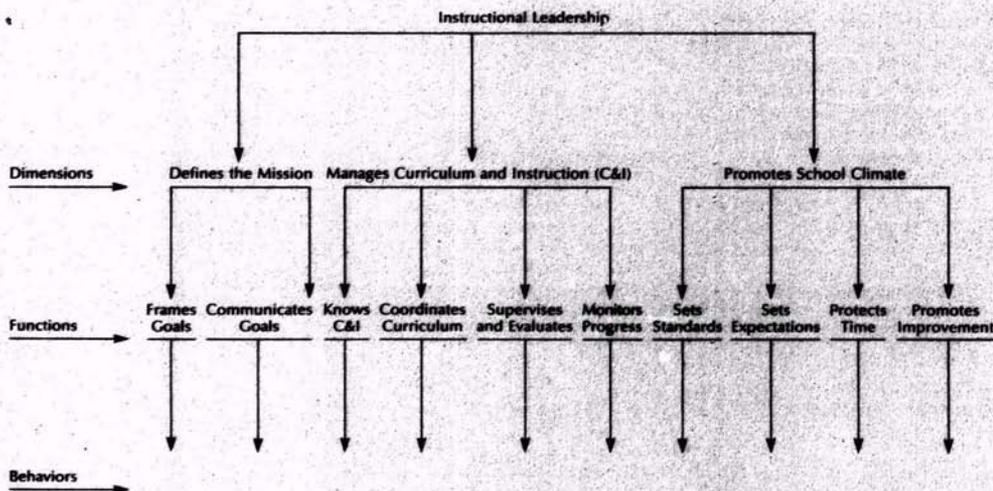


Fig. 1. Instructional Leadership Framework

Role diversity. That the principal's workday comprises many brief, fragmented interactions with different actors is well documented. It is difficult for principals to schedule the uninterrupted blocks of time necessary for planning and assessing curriculum, observing lessons, and conferencing with teachers. In addition, teachers, parents, students, and central office staff hold widely varying expectations of the principal. The multiplicity of roles and expectations tend to fragment whatever vision the principal may be attempting to shape in the school.

Defining Instructional Leadership

The four barriers to instructional leadership just described are further complicated by a fifth obstacle: the lack of a clear definition of the role. It is difficult to assess principals on role behaviors if these behaviors have not been defined. Fortunately, research has made substantial progress in defining the principal's key instructional leadership functions (see, e.g., Bossert et al. 1982, Hallinger and Murphy 1985, Hallinger et al. 1983, Shoemaker and Fraser 1981, Stallings 1982).

From our perspective, the principal's role comprises three dimensions of instructional leadership activity: defining the school mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting the school learning climate. Each dimension contains specific job functions. For example, managing the instructional program consists of supervising and evaluating instruction, coordinating the curriculum, and monitoring student progress (fig. 1). Each job function includes a variety of principal practices and behaviors (see Hallinger and Murphy 1985 and Hallinger et al. 1983 for more detail about this framework).

Defining the school mission. Instructional leaders have a clear vision of what the school is trying to accomplish. Defining that mission entails leading the staff in developing school-wide goals and communicating them to the entire school community. Out of the mission evolves a sense of pur-

To what extent does your principal . . . ?	ALMOST NEVER					ALMOST ALWAYS
1. Meet individually with teachers to discuss student academic progress	1	2	3	4	5	
2. Discuss the item analysis of tests with the faculty to identify strengths and weaknesses in the instructional program	1	2	3	4	5	
3. Use test results to assess progress toward school goals	1	2	3	4	5	
4. Distribute test results in a timely fashion	1	2	3	4	5	
5. Inform teachers of the school's performance results in written form (e.g., in a memo or newsletter)	1	2	3	4	5	
6. Identify students whose test results indicate a need for special instruction such as remediation or enrichment	1	2	3	4	5	
7. Inform students of the school's test results	1	2	3	4	5	

Fig. 2. Monitoring Student Progress

pose shared by the staff, students, and community, which unites all the school's activities. School goals are articulated to promote both accountability and instructional improvement.

Managing the instructional program. The principal works with staff in areas specifically related to the evaluation, development, and implementation of curriculum and instruction. Traditionally, instructional management by principals has been viewed primarily as supervision and evaluation of instruction. Research on effective schools and school improvement indicates, however, that principals should pay equal, if not greater, attention to two other related instructional management functions: coordinating the curriculum and monitoring student progress. Principals coordinate curriculum by ensuring that students receive appropriate instruction in areas identified by the school district. Principal involvement in monitoring student progress both within individual classrooms and across grades is an equally potent, but underemphasized, area of principal activity.

Promoting a positive climate. School learning climate refers to the norms and attitudes of the staff and

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PRINCIPALS' INSTRUCTIONAL MANAGEMENT

Mean Supervisory Ratings

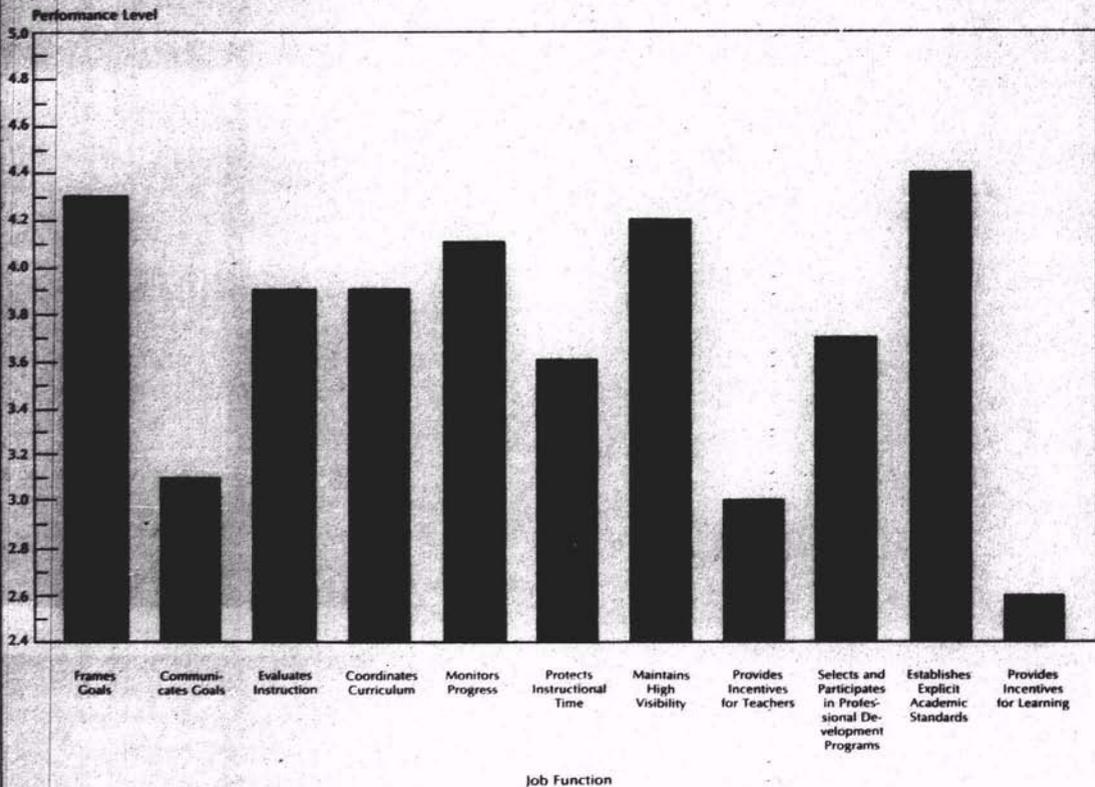


Fig. 3. Ratings of Principals by Role Group

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students that influence learning in the school. Principals shape the learning climate directly and indirectly by:

- maintaining high visibility in order to communicate priorities and model expectations;
- creating a reward system that reinforces academic achievement and productive effort;
- establishing clear, explicit standards that embody the school’s expectations of students;
- protecting instructional time; and
- selecting and participating in

high-quality staff development programs consistent with the school mission.

Assessing Instructional Leadership

The third condition necessary for principals to exercise strong instructional leadership is the availability of reliable, valid, usable methods for assessing their leadership behaviors. According to Duke and Stiggins (1985), the type of evaluation data needed varies with the purpose of the assessment. Where assessments are used for personnel evaluation and other accountability-oriented purposes, the data must meet specific legal and professional standards of reliability and validity (Latham and Wexley 1981). Few principal evaluation systems even approach such standards, and the procedures used seldom meet the criteria administrators must apply to the evaluation of teachers. Where assessments are used only for professional improvement, there can be greater leeway in the nature of the data used.

Methods of assessing instructional leadership. Supervisors can assess principals' skills through direct observation, interviews, document analysis, and questionnaires. Each method has advantages and disadvantages.

Use of direct observation is being pioneered in professional development programs such as Peer-Assisted Leadership (PAL) piloted at the Far West Lab in San Francisco (Barnett and Long 1986), where principals use the results to help one another create individualized professional development programs. It is a highly time-consuming way to generate assessment data, however. Multiple observations are needed to generate valid results. For this reason, we view direct observation as a useful, but supplementary, procedure in the principal evaluation process.

Second, interviews with the principal, staff, and students can help supervisors generate a picture of the principal's instructional leadership. Again, however, interviews are time consuming and of limited validity when used as the sole method of assessment.

An underutilized method of gener-

ating data on principal instructional leadership is the analysis of school documents. Though again inadequate as a single method of assessment, analyzing goal statements, newsletters, memos, bulletins, meeting minutes, and other school documents can provide a revealing picture of the principal's concerns, priorities, and communication style. When combined with other data, the results of document analysis can help principals reflect on their instructional leadership.

Questionnaires may be a "quick and dirty" way to generate assessment data, but they *are* convenient, since it generally takes less time to complete and score them than to conduct a single observation. Although questionnaires rely on the perceptions of staff rather than on concrete observed behavior, numerous studies have found that they can provide reliable, valid data on managerial behavior (Latham and Wexley 1981).

We suggest that supervisors use a combination of the four methods.

Development of the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale. As district office administrators, we were charged with developing a feasible system of principal assessment for both accountability and professional improvement purposes. We used the framework summarized in this article to develop an instrument that would generate the needed assessment information (Hallinger 1983). We defined each job function in terms of specific practices and behaviors. To obtain critical job-related behaviors, we thoroughly reviewed research examining each instructional leadership function. Similarly, in our discussions with school administrators we sought to generate inductively the practices that they felt were critical to performing each function, translating them into behaviorally anchored descriptions (see Hallinger and Murphy 1985, Latham and Wexley 1981). The resulting Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS)¹ is a questionnaire instrument that can be used to assess principal instructional leadership behavior.

The revised instrument contains 50 statements about principal instruction-

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al leadership behaviors. The practices that make up each job function in the PIMRS do not represent the full range of behaviors necessary for principals to provide instructional leadership; rather, each job function contains a representative sample of critical behaviors. Respondents indicate the degree to which they perceive the principal has performed a particular practice over the prior school year (e.g., the extent to which “the principal uses needs assessment or other methods to secure staff input on the development of school goals”). Respondents choose their answers from a five-point Likert scale: “Almost Never” (1) to “Almost Always” (5). Figure 2 displays the items used to assess a principal’s performance on “monitoring student progress,” which is a job function of “managing curriculum and instruction.”

The instrument is scored by calculating the mean for each job function. A high score on a function indicates active leadership in that area. Principals who obtain high ratings across the various job functions are perceived as engaging in instructional leadership behaviors associated with principals in effective schools. The PIMRS ratings do not, however, measure the quality of principal instructional leadership. Such assessments are best generated through supplementary observations and interviews.

The PIMRS can be administered to a principal as a self-assessment instrument as well as to supervisors and teachers to provide a broader picture of the principal’s leadership. The choice of appraisers depends on the purposes of the assessment. When professional improvement is the sole concern, instrument reliability and validity are not critical issues. However, greater care must be exercised when collecting data as part of the evaluation process. At least three studies have found the PIMRS to provide data on principal instructional leadership that meet both legal and professional standards of reliability and validity (Hallinger 1983, Hallinger and Murphy 1985, Krug 1986, O’Day 1984). To maximize the reliability of evaluation

results, we suggest that teachers, the principal, and the supervisor complete the PIMRS.

District administrators can also aggregate instrument results across the district to plan staff development for principals. Figure 3 displays the instructional leadership profile for a group of 10 elementary school principals as assessed by their supervisors. The information contained in this profile was corroborated by the perceptions of teachers and the principals’ self-assessments using the PIMRS. As a group, these principals need to examine their behavior in the areas of communicating school goals, providing incentives for teachers, and providing incentives for learning. The profile also suggests that district staff development efforts in the areas of supervision and evaluation and curricular coordination appear to be paying off in terms of principal attention to these job functions. Thus, the results of this assessment instrument were used to evaluate individual principals

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on their instructional leadership abilities, to develop individual professional improvement plans, and to plan and evaluate district staff development programs.

Strengthening Principals' Instructional Leadership

Traditionally principals have been offered few incentives and have encountered many hazards for venturing into the school leadership domain. A weak knowledge base in curriculum and instruction, fragmented district expectations, territorial treaties negotiated with teachers, and the diverse roles played by the principal keep many site administrators from carrying out this role effectively. Thus, school districts should not view principals' deficits in the instructional leadership domain as a failing but rather as an organizational problem. School districts can help principals become stronger instructional leaders by:

1. addressing the barriers noted above through policies and staff development training;
2. defining the instructional leadership role so that administrators clearly understand what is expected of them; and
3. using an assessment system that

provides data on principal instructional leadership that are both reliable and valid for accountability and useful for professional improvement.

The Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale has a place in this system. When used in conjunction with training, this systematic, research-based tool provides information principals can use to identify areas for their own professional development and to make decisions regarding the school program. Districts can use the instrument as part of their principal evaluation systems and as a basis for planning and evaluating their staff development programs. □

1. Researchers and school districts interested in using the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale should contact Dr. Philip Hallinger, 122 Pelhamdale Ave., Pelham, NY 10803.

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Authors' note: We would like to acknowledge the assistance and cooperation of the administrative staff of the Milpitas, California, Unified School District, Richard P. Mesa, Superintendent, and to Larry Cuban and Edwin M. Bridges, Professors of Education at Stanford University, for their contributions to this work.
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