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Delaware Rolling Out New Evaluations for Principals. By: Maxwell, Lesli A.,
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FOCUS ON: LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT

As school leaders nationwide are increasingly being held responsible for what students learn, Delaware has crafted a method for evaluating its public school administrators that is drawing acclaim for its attention to leadership characteristics connected to student achievement.

The Delaware Performance Appraisal System, or DPAS II, has been pilot-tested in two districts since the 2005-06 school year. Last fall, four more districts and three charter schools also began using it to judge the performance of principals and district-level administrators whose responsibilities relate to instruction. This summer, state education leaders will oversee the system's adoption in every district and charter school in Delaware. Under state law, all public school entities must use the appraisal system.

Delaware's system — specifically, the five components it uses to evaluate a leader's performance — is tied to standards for school leaders that were developed more than a decade ago by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, which is made up of 18 states.

All the criteria are connected to student learning, and include skills and behaviors such as goal-setting that relies on data; management of resources; fostering a professional environment where teachers can teach and students can learn; promoting family and community involvement; and demonstrating improvements in achievement.

"To us, accountability is not just about [the No Child Left Behind Act]," said Robin Taylor, the Delaware Department of Education's associate secretary for assessment and accountability. "Everyone in the system is responsible for student achievement, and this is our way of carrying out that belief."

[Long Time Coming](#)

It has taken Delaware some time to get to this point.

Education officials embarked on overhauling their method for judging school leaders' effectiveness nearly eight years ago, following a mandate that came out of a sweeping package of school accountability legislation passed in 2000. At the time, Delaware was perhaps alone among the states in taking on the development of a comprehensive evaluation system for school leaders that all districts would be required to use, said Joseph F. Murphy, a professor of education and an expert on educational leadership at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn.

"When Delaware started doing this, the issue of evaluations for school leaders and connecting those to student achievement was still pretty much on the sidelines," said Mr. Murphy, who

advised the committee of educators that developed the Delaware system. "Now that the issue has moved from the back pages to center stage, there's a lot more energy out there, and more and more places are working on something similar. But I still think that Delaware's system is at the top of the food chain."

For principals and other administrators, the yearlong DPAS II process (Delaware's previous evaluation system was known as DPAS I) begins with a series of conversations with their immediate supervisors, who function as their evaluators.

Using lots of student and school data, the administrators being reviewed work with their evaluators to set concrete goals for themselves that align with the goals that have already been set by their respective schools and districts. They also discuss with their evaluators the types of data they will use at the end of the year to show whether they made progress.

'Candid Conversations'

For district superintendents, school board members are trained to use the appraisal system and be evaluators.

"Basically, this process follows two major values we have here, and one is the idea of continuous professional development and that even the best can get better," said Ms. Taylor. "The other is that everything we do has got to focus on students and their achievement."

Over the next several months, the evaluators gather information about how the leaders are performing in their jobs, and, at the six-month mark, provide extensive feedback on how things are going.

Toward the end of the review process, online surveys with detailed questions about job performance are completed by each leader, the people he or she supervises, and the evaluator. For principals under review, every teacher they supervise is asked to anonymously fill out a survey to answer questions such as "Does the supervisor include staff in analyzing student-achievement data and developing an instructional plan?" Not all teachers opt to do the surveys; they are voluntary.

"This is just a key part of the whole system because it allows for truly candid conversations about how leaders are doing, and that's the only way to ensure that things are going to get better," said Jackie O. Wilson, the associate director of the Delaware Academy for Student Leadership at the University of Delaware, who was one of five principals to serve on the committee that first developed the appraisal system.

Once those surveys are complete, the evaluators sit down with the administrators undergoing the process to discuss the results and how much progress the school leaders have made toward the goals they set.

"What this does is start a much richer discussion about what the issues are and how to work on improving them," said Marion E. Proffitt, the assistant superintendent of the 8,300-student

Appoquinimink district, one of the two pilot sites for the evaluation system. "When I evaluate a principal, it's a continuous thing. We visit, we walk through the building, we talk about what we need to do, and at the end of the year, you get a whole picture."

At year's end, the evaluators must judge each leader as either satisfactory or unsatisfactory in each of the five core components. Based on those results, the leaders are assigned an overall performance score of "effective," "needs improvement," or "ineffective."

[Not a 'Gotcha Game'](#)

Said Ms. Taylor about the year-long evaluation: "There are no surprises at the end. This is not a gotcha game."

Leaders with three or more years of experience as principals or district administrators are evaluated every two years; those with less experience are reviewed every year. Leaders who receive an unsatisfactory rating on any of the core components, or who are rated overall as needing improvement or ineffective, must, along with their evaluators, craft an improvement plan to address the problem areas.

The state education department has pledged to continuously monitor and evaluate how well the system works, and, to that end, has hired outside consultants to conduct surveys and interviews of school leaders and evaluators. That feedback will be used to tweak and improve the system. The department is also getting feedback from two retired administrators in Delaware who make rounds through the districts where the system is in use to talk with people.

So far, Ms. Taylor said, she knows of no examples of school leaders who have lost their jobs because of their ratings on the DPAS II.

"That's probably because it's too early to tell," she said. At the same time, she said, administrators who do receive ineffective ratings will not necessarily be subject to losing their jobs.

In Delaware, local school boards and superintendents are in charge of contracts for district-level administrators and for principals. Any decision about renewing a contract is up to local leaders.

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Standards for Evaluation

Principals in the state are evaluated in areas based on national standards for school leaders.

• Vision and Goals

Using data.

Implementing, promoting, and communicating a vision and goals for the school.

- **Culture of Learning**

Advocating, monitoring, sustaining, and maintaining a culture of learning.

- **Management**

Solving problems or concerns. Managing resources. Complying with policies. Protecting the welfare and safety of students and staff.

- **Professional Responsibilities**

Maintaining professional relationships. Promoting family and community involvement
Demonstrating fairness. Growing and developing professionally.

- **Student Improvement**

Showing, measuring, and reflecting on student improvement

Implementing strategies for student improvement

SOURCE: Delaware Academy for School Leadership

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By Lesli A. Maxwell