

**Lessons Learned:
Iowa's Process for Developing Leadership Standards,
Creating a Model Principal Evaluation System**

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Iowa's Process for Developing Leadership Standards, Creating a Model Administrator Evaluation System, and Working with Boards to Fulfill Their Evaluation Responsibilities

Context:

Iowa has 360 school districts with an average student population of 600 students. There are 328 superintendents. The eight largest schools have 20% of the total student population. All 360 districts are assigned to one (in a system of ten) intermediate service agencies Iowa calls Area Education Agencies.

All higher education preparation programs both for principals and superintendents were required to revise their preparation programs to reflect consistency with the Iowa Standards for School Leaders. The principal preparation programs were reviewed in 2003. The superintendent preparation programs were reviewed in 2006. Iowa's principals are certified preK-12. Those leaders who aspire to becoming a superintendent or AEA Chief Administrator Districts are required to submit annual Comprehensive School Improvement Plans to the DE. The Department of Education conducts accreditation visits with each LEA every five years on a rotational basis.

The work that is described below has been supported through the generosity of the Wallace Foundation which is now beginning its seventh year of intensive support for the development of a coherent leadership system in Iowa. The scope of the work is included in the attached "mind map" of initiatives.

Timeline:

***Jere Vyverberg was a member/participant/trainer**

Spring of 2001: The Wallace Foundation awards its first three-year leadership grant to Iowa. Iowa adopts teacher standards (8) and criteria (42) that will be used as the basis for evaluating both beginning teachers (with a required two-year mentoring and induction program) and experienced teachers (who participate in two years of formative evaluation and every third year a summative evaluation based on all of the standards).

*Fall of 2001: The School Administrators of Iowa begins a parallel process of (1) establishing standards and criteria for all school leaders and (2) examining the research related to superintendent evaluation in collaboration with the Iowa Association of School Boards. The superintendent evaluation task force begins with 25 superintendents who answered a blanket invitation to participate. Once a draft template is completed, a focus group of school board members is convened to react. A revised template is presented at the annual school board convention. Multiple bodies of research are consulted including research that shows traditional clinical evaluation models do not improve performance.

*January 2002: A task force, composed of principals and superintendents, to develop leadership standards and criteria is established. Their work continues periodically between January 2002 and November 2007.

January of 2003: A model superintendent evaluation instrument is distributed as a voluntary model for districts. *Several schools pilot the original instrument. School board members provide initial feedback that the process is too complicated.

*Spring of 2003: A task force for development of a model evaluation instrument and process for principals is convened. The task force consists of principals and superintendents who volunteer to serve on the task force.

Spring of 2004: The Wallace Foundation awards its second three- year grant to Iowa. A model evaluation instrument for principals that parallels the model superintendent evaluation instrument is disseminated. *The proposed leadership standards are cross-walked to the McREL Balanced Leadership research for inclusion in the instrument.

Spring 2005: Legislation requiring participation in a mentoring and induction program for all beginning administrators is passed by the Iowa legislature. This definition does not include superintendents, so the Wallace Foundation grant subsidizes participation for superintendents.

*Fall of 2005: All superintendents across Iowa are invited to join in a task force designed to crosswalk the current proposed leadership standards to the McREL research on the impact district level leadership has on student achievement. Modifications are made to the proposed leadership standards and criteria. Eighty superintendents participate in the initial session, and 40 continue with the work over the course of the next year. Representatives from Iowa's Area Education Agencies, the higher education preparation programs, the Department of Education and the Board of Educational Examiners also participated.

2004-Present: Wallace Foundation supports Leadership Interest Group (LIG) entitled Assessing Leader Effectiveness and brings together grant awardees from across the country to address this issue. Iowa participates consistently.

*Spring 2006: A task force works on developing descriptors for the 6 leadership standards and 35 criteria to distinguish the work of superintendents from the work of principals. As an outgrowth of that work, not only are descriptors developed for both groups, but suggested artifacts are also proposed as examples and a list of questions school board members could ask of their superintendents is also developed. This work concludes in the spring of 2007.

Spring 2007: SF 277 is passed by the Iowa legislature, requiring that superintendents and principals be evaluated upon the Iowa Standards for School Leaders and linked to each district and/or school's Comprehensive School Improvement Plan and an Individualized Administrator Professional Development Plan.

The Wallace Foundation awards another leadership grant to Iowa for the 2007-08 school year with an option to renew for an additional two years.

Fall 2007: The Iowa Standards for School Leaders are officially "noticed" by the State Board of Education.

*All superintendents begin taking a 30-hour "Evaluator Training Renewal" course, taught by a training cadre of forty superintendents. Development of the curriculum was based on input by superintendents and underwritten by the Wallace Foundation.

November 2007: A daylong awareness session for board members and superintendents is hosted by Iowa Association of School Boards in collaboration with SAI and the DE. Over two hundred people attend.

*September 2008-May 2009: Evaluator Training Renewal completed.

In progress: A DVD will be created that has graduated levels of professional development suggestions for school board members as they learn the process of evaluating administrators. In addition, more PD delivered by personnel from IASB on site working with school boards will also be developed. Regional trainings will also be offered.

Lessons Learned

1. Widespread participation from a large number of superintendents representing different-sized school districts is essential.
2. The development of the Iowa Standards for School Leaders "6 and 35" (standards and criteria) has formed the basis for all of the other work in leadership development. Anchoring those standards to the research proved vital to their viability and credibility.
3. Collaborating with the Iowa Association of School Boards, the Iowa Department of Education, the state board of education, higher education preparation programs, and the Area Education Agencies was essential.
4. Using the latest research and continuing to cross walk current products to new research strengthened the process.
5. It is essential that adult learning theory be built into the meeting agendas so that the process can truly be a practitioner-based one, not one imposed by "the outside."
6. Collaborating across constituencies requires immense time, meetings before the meetings, processing after the meetings and flexibility. Small wins propelled larger ones. The design of the agendas so that activities placed participants in multiple groups and synthesized learnings along the way led to more authenticity. There were many times the "yes but" processing questions surfaced issues that might not otherwise been addressed.
7. The central role that the professional association (School Administrators of Iowa) played in the entire process insured that practitioners' expertise drove the process and the recommendations.
8. Having an outside funding source with the credibility possessed by the Wallace Foundation to support the work gave added impetus, prestige, and access to a national network of expertise.
9. Developing a model process means that school board members will, at least initially; feel overwhelmed by the complexity of the task.
10. The development of sample questions board members can ask of their superintendent to assess progress towards meeting the standards is proving to be very helpful.
11. Developing operating principles that ground the work in best practice for a growth model, not one designed to prove incompetence, helped to dampen initial resistance to a more comprehensive evaluation process.
12. Boards and superintendents both have mixed feelings about having just two designations, "meets standard" or "does not meet standard."