

Stories From the Field

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THE POWER OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISORS

HOW TWO DISTRICTS ARE REMAKING AN OLD ROLE

Amy Saltzman

ABOUT THE WALLACE FOUNDATION AND ITS WORK IN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

In 2011, The Wallace Foundation launched a \$75 million initiative to help six urban school districts develop a much-increased corps of effective school principals and to determine whether this improves student achievement, especially in the highest-needs schools.

Based on 10 years of research and work in the field, Wallace identified four key elements of a successful “principal pipeline” that produces a large number of high-quality principals: rigorous job requirements, high-quality training, selective hiring, and on-the-job evaluation and support.

During the course of the initiative, Wallace learned that principals often did not receive the help they needed to strengthen teaching and learning. “We began to suspect that gains in schools might not be sustainable without support from another position – the principal’s supervisor in the central office,” said Jody Spiro, the foundation’s director of education leadership.

In response, Wallace launched the \$30 million Principal Supervisor Initiative in 2014 to help school districts step up support for principals’ supervisors, allowing them to focus more deliberately on helping principals improve instruction in schools. The five-year effort funds additional training and support for principal supervisors in 14 large urban school districts serving low-income children, including Tulsa, Okla., and Washington, D.C. Wallace is also supporting an independent evaluation of the initiative to help determine whether and how boosting the supervisor post leads to more effective principals.

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Written by Amy Saltzman

Photos: Michael Kostel

Cover photo: D.C. Principal Supervisor Janice Harris visits with third graders at Hyde-Addison Elementary School.

Word cloud (p. 2): Courtesy of the Council of the Great City Schools. From p. 3 of *Evaluations and the Principal Supervisor: Survey Results from the Great City Schools*. Available at: <http://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/Domain/87/Principal%20evaluation%20report.pdf>

Design by José Moreno



The Power of Principal Supervisors

How Two Districts Are Remaking an Old Role

Principal Elizabeth Namba (L) of Hyde-Addison Elementary School in Washington, D.C., and instructional coach Rachel Cerlen meet with Principal Supervisor Janice Harris after a classroom visit.

There were dark moments that first year. In 2014, Principal Elizabeth Namba inherited a school that faced multiple challenges, including a troubling achievement gap, drastically decreased enrollment and a growing suspension rate. But when she found herself awake at 3 a.m. desperately trying to figure out what to do next, she knew she could shoot off an email to her supervisor, Janice Harris, and find encouraging words in her inbox the next morning. During those difficult times, Harris was her mentor, her coach, her sounding board, her evaluator – her rock. “I can’t imagine doing this without her,” says Namba, who heads Hyde-Addison Elementary School in Washington, D.C.

More than 1,000 miles across the country in Tulsa, Okla., Katy Jimenez faced similar obstacles. On a crisp and sunny November day in 2015, the young principal of McClure Elementary School agonized over a decision she had made that morning to suspend a pre-K student for hitting and scratching a teacher twice in one week.

But she didn’t need to wrestle with that difficult choice alone. Kayla Robinson, her supervisor, was there to offer guidance and support as Jimenez considered how best to help the boy, engage his mother and reassure a teacher who had been reduced to tears by the latest incident. “Many times when I have issues that are really wearing me down, things that make my heart heavy, having someone to talk to is really beneficial. Someone who’s been there and someone who can offer solutions that maybe I can’t see in the moment,” says Jimenez of the support Robinson provides.

The job of principal has always been a lonely one. But do principals need to feel quite so alone? That is the question school districts across the country are grappling with during a time when the expectations on these school leaders to improve student performance have never been higher. Many districts have responded by taking a fresh look at how best to support principals and reduce principal turnover, particularly in the most troubled schools. For a small but growing number of school districts, one answer is to remake the job of the principal supervisor.



The principal supervisor job goes by many different names.

A BIG SHIFT FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS

The idea – to shape a job focused squarely on helping principals improve teaching and learning in their schools – represents a dramatic break with convention. In the typical large school district today, principal supervisors oversee an average of 24 schools – and often more than 40 – and devote their time to handling regulatory compliance and fixing building problems.¹ In districts such as Washington, D.C., and Tulsa, whose efforts are supported by The Wallace Foundation, that old approach has been turned on its head. Supervisors in both districts now concentrate on bolstering their principals’ work to improve instruction. The number of schools that supervisors oversee has also been lowered, which allows them the time necessary to provide principals with the coaching and supervision they have often lacked in the past.

Under the old system, supervisors rarely visited schools more than once every few months and had little opportunity to work directly with principals beyond making their way through a compliance checklist. Since launching its redesigned Instructional Leadership Director program in 2013, Tulsa Public Schools has expanded the number of principal supervisors² from just two overseeing 44 schools each, to nine, supporting no more than 12 schools. The District of Columbia Public Schools, which began revamping its program during the

2010-11 school year, today enlists nine principal supervisors, each responsible for an average of 12 schools, down from as many as 28 schools in 2010 when the district had six principal supervisors.

The result is that Tulsa and D.C. principal supervisors now spend at least 70 percent of their time inside schools, scheduling formal visits in each building every few weeks, dropping by as needed, and staying in regular contact through calls, emails and text messages. The supervisors now play a critical role in everything from instruction to testing to personnel issues as they work hand in hand with their principals to determine the best path for each school.

TRAILBLAZING A NEW ROLE

In Tulsa, principal supervisor Kayla Robinson drags her black, rolling briefcase across the long parking lot at Skelly Primary School, loaded down with new data and curriculum materials to share with each of three principals she will visit during a nearly 12-hour day. Robinson typically grabs a protein shake and piece of fruit for lunch on the road and clocks about 30 miles a day in her car before heading back to her office in the evening to write follow-up emails to principals and administrators in the central office.

As Robinson enters Skelly, a first grade teacher greets her with an exuberant, “Hi!” and compliments her on her taupe and white striped jacket. Another teacher, walking by with a parade of kindergarteners, stops to give Robinson a hug. “She’s my guardian angel,” the teacher says. Two years earlier, the then-first-year teacher was on the verge of losing her job at another school. “I thought she really had talent,” says Robinson, but the school and principal were “not a good match.” Ultimately, Robinson helped orchestrate the teacher’s move to Skelly, preventing one more now “very successful teacher from exiting the profession within the first three years.”

Robinson, who worked as an elementary school principal for 23 years, including 19 years at Marshall Elementary School in Tulsa, never had aspired to be a principal supervisor. The old compliance officer model “did not appeal to me at all,” she says. But when Tulsa implemented its new Instructional Leadership Director program she was intrigued, and she has found that she loves the ever-changing challenges that come with the new job. “Every day is different, so I never know exactly what’s going to happen,” Robinson says. “But when I see the culture and the climate of a school begin

¹ <http://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/Domain/87/Principal%20evaluation%20report.pdf>

² A note about terminology: In Tulsa principal supervisors are called “instructional leadership directors;” in D.C they are referred to as “instructional superintendents.” For clarity, this report refers to all those in the position as “principal supervisors.”

to change, and I can see joy and engagement in both learning and teaching, there's nothing better than that.” Under the district's old system, the two principal supervisors (then called “associate superintendents”) provided virtually no instructional assistance. “You would see your superintendent at evaluation time or if there was any kind of fire to be put out,” recalls Jennifer Gripado, a former Tulsa principal who was part of a team that helped create and manage the Instructional Leadership Director program before becoming a principal supervisor herself. As a result, the position was most often occupied by those looking for managerial jobs after years in the trenches as principals or teachers.

Today, in both Tulsa and D.C., the position typically attracts educators who are drawn to the instructional and coaching roles – and who have little interest in sitting behind a desk. Tulsa Public Schools Superintendent Deborah Gist says the position demands people who “first and foremost know instruction really well, who understand teaching and learning, and know it well enough to guide and support the professional development of their principals.” D.C. Public Schools Chancellor Kaya Henderson believes the revamped role is central to the school system's strategy for improving education. “It is one of the most important positions in

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When I see the culture and the climate of a school begin to change, and I can see joy and engagement in both learning and teaching, there's nothing better than that.

– Kayla Robinson, principal supervisor, Tulsa

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the district, sitting at the nexus between schools and our central strategy for educating young people,” she says.

A FOCUS ON INSTRUCTION

D.C.'s ambitious goals for the position helped attract people like Janice Harris, a former New York City English and social studies teacher who gave up an 11-year tenure as principal of a Connecticut elementary school

D.C. Public Schools Chancellor Kaya Henderson





Elizabeth Namba observing 3rd graders with teacher Brian Gardner

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The principal supervisor ‘is one of the most important positions in the district, sitting at the nexus between schools and our central strategy for educating young people.’
– D.C. Public Schools Chancellor
Kaya Henderson
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to uproot her family and sign on as a principal supervisor for a diverse cluster of 12 elementary schools. “I really wanted to challenge myself, but more importantly I was attracted to the mission and the work at D.C. Public Schools,” says Harris, who is responsible for some of the lowest and highest performing schools in the city. “There are excellent teachers and excellent leaders here, and our job is to coach them and grow them to really

allow our system to excel. The system is not going to fire its way to excellence.”

After just 18 months on the job, Harris already sees evidence that her presence makes a difference. Nowhere is that more apparent than at Hyde-Addison. Although the school is located in the affluent Georgetown area, 59 percent of its students come from other neighborhoods, having gained entry through a lottery system, and 19 percent receive free or reduced-price lunch. The school is one of the most diverse in D.C., with a student body that is roughly 50 percent white and 50 percent black. It also faces a significant achievement gap between African-American students and their white peers, especially in reading. Both Harris and principal Namba are determined to close that gap.

When Harris enters the school, she and Namba immediately get down to business, discussing the three classrooms they’ll visit that day and what they’ll be looking for – specifically, consistency in reading instruction. They start with a visit to a third-grade class where small groups of students are discussing different books they read for their “book clubs.” Harris sits down comfortably with a table of four children eager to show off

their work. She asks about the book they're reading – *My Name is Maria Isabel*. Several talk at once, excited to provide details about the book, which tells the story of a Hispanic girl growing up in the United States who begins having problems at school when her teacher starts calling her Mary.

“How will you show what you know about this book?” Harris asks. The kids seem to think that if something strikes them as important they'll write it down on Post-it notes or just talk about it quietly in their groups.

The children discuss other aspects of their reading experience, too. “If you don't finish the book, you can just take it home and then finish it there,” says one girl. Adds another: “And we can take notes if we want!” Harris is curious about the note-taking. “So tell me a little bit more about that, that's sort of interesting to me,” she says.

“So if we like find something important in the book, it's like we're summarizing,” the girl explains. The boy across from her chimes in: “Yeah, we're just looking for character traits and we have to write it down on paper.” “Thank you so much for sharing,” she says to the kids, her face lit up by a warm smile. “Now get back to reading.”

Outside the classroom, Harris can hardly contain her excitement. “I can't even begin to tell you the change I'm seeing here. At the beginning of the year, these students were off track and unengaged. Now they are enjoying and understanding what they're reading and learning. This is a huge change. It makes me so happy I want to cry.” She also says she has detected hopeful signs that efforts to close the achievement gap for African-American students are headed in the right direction: “What I saw today was a lot of engaged African-American students, particularly boys.”

After each classroom visit, Harris, Namba and an instructional coach assigned to the school huddle in the hall to discuss what they've seen. Namba explains how she is encouraging teachers to carefully choose the books they're giving kids to read. “We surveyed kids about the books they liked, and I think we're seeing the result now,” she says.

They discuss a few relatively minor red flags they observed in the classroom. Harris notes that the kids were not able to explain fully how they were going to share what they knew about the book. Namba suggests that the teacher should ask more “clarifying questions so the

(Continued on p. 8)

Hyde-Addison students working with special education teacher Jilian Gundling as Janice Harris looks on





TRAINING THE TRAINERS: LEARNING TO BE A PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR

Tulsa Principal Supervisor Kayla Robinson provides professional development at principal portfolio meeting.

While most principal supervisors are former principals themselves, few come to the role with specific training in how to do the job effectively. For this reason, both the Washington, D.C., and Tulsa, Okla., principal supervisor programs include a strong professional development component.

In D.C., principal supervisors meet every Tuesday to receive training on topics such as leadership development and coaching. Once a month, they also participate in school walk-throughs with each other to observe their colleagues in action and provide feedback. They are typically accompanied by one of two deputy chiefs responsible for supervising the principal supervisors. “The walk-throughs give me a sense of how well they are pushing a principal on a critical issue. Are they providing actionable feedback, or just saying, ‘Everything’s great,’ or, ‘You need to improve,’ but not being specific in what needs to happen?” says Amanda Alexander, the deputy chief for elementary schools in D.C.

In the past, a lack of standards for gauging principal supervisors’ work made it difficult to measure success. That changed in December 2015, when the Council of Chief State School Officers released the first-ever [standards](#) for principal supervisors crafted by a team of educators from across the nation. Developed with support from The Wallace Foundation, the standards provide a clear definition of what principal supervisors should know and be able to do, shifting the focus of the job from bureaucratic compliance to helping principals improve instruction.¹

The principal supervisors interviewed for this report all agreed that being a strong principal does not automatically translate into success as a principal supervisor. And all considered ongoing training invaluable. “Overall, our team is exceptionally well-versed in instruction and pedagogy. But there are other

¹ <http://www.ccsso.org/Documents/2015/2015PrincipalSupervisorStandardsFinal1272015.pdf>

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How do we empower our principals to have honest conversations with teachers about their performance?

**– Harry Hughes,
D.C. principal supervisor**

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areas, such as coaching, that warrant more attention,” says Alexander.

At a Tuesday professional development session in D.C., the principal supervisors began the day by discussing an assigned book, *Masterful Coaching*, by Robert Hargrove. They divided into small groups to share insights about the book and grapple with difficult problems, such as how best to manage underperforming principals.

The supervisors were also eager to discuss worrisome new testing data showing a continuing wide achievement gap between students of color and other students. Together, they pondered strategies to motivate principals to work more aggressively with teachers to significantly improve results. Several suggested that principals often rate teachers too high. “How do we empower our principals to have honest conversations with teachers about their performance?” wondered Harry Hughes, an elementary school principal supervisor in D.C.

CULTIVATING FUTURE PRINCIPAL SUPERVISORS

The hope is that consistent training, as well as support from other principal supervisors, will lead to greater stability in a position historically characterized by high turnover and unclear professional standards. A 2013 [study](#) by the Council of the Great City Schools found that educators in these positions lacked access to the instructionally focused professional development needed to help strengthen principals as instructional leaders. What’s more, few had enough time to grow in the job. The study found that the average tenure for the position in urban districts was just three years.²

² <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/school-leadership/district-policy-and-practice/Pages/Rethinking-Leadership-The-Changing-Role-of-Principal-Supervisors.aspx>

Tulsa Public Schools hopes that by cultivating a pipeline of principals interested in becoming supervisors, it will be able to create a more seamless transition when turnover inevitably occurs. Seven Tulsa principals and two former principals who now hold central-office positions are participating in the district’s two-year Learning Leaders program. The program identifies high-performing principals and pays them stipends for successful completion of training covering topics such as coaching techniques and tools.

Principals who had been exceptionally strong teachers are often the best fit for the program. “Being able to work with a principal and provide effective coaching and mentoring really comes down to being an effective teacher,” says Jennifer Gripado, who helped create and manage the Instructional Leadership Director program in Tulsa and is now a principal supervisor herself.

LEARNING FROM OTHER PRINCIPALS

Both the Tulsa and D.C. programs also provide a more formal structure for principals to learn from each other. Monthly “principal portfolio” meetings in Tulsa, for example, allow all principals in a supervisor’s cluster of schools to come together for training and sharing under the guidance of their principal supervisor. “My portfolio group is a real blessing for all of us. We’re a tight group, and we collaborate a lot,” says Candace Stine, the principal of Robertson Elementary in Tulsa.

A recent principal portfolio session at Robertson, led by principal supervisor Kayla Robinson, began with each principal discussing important successes during the past month. One principal talked about how a previously struggling first-grade teacher was “really taking off;” another discussed improvements in the “culture of the building.” Robinson then had them break into smaller groups for classroom walk-throughs, instructing the principals to “look closely at what teachers and students are doing and what the level of learning is.” After the visits, they regrouped and presented “immediate action steps” teachers could take to improve instruction. They also participated in role-playing exercises to practice effective ways to talk to teachers about weak elements in their instructional approach. “I work really hard to bring the principals together to problem solve and support each other. They should never feel like they have to figure all of this out by themselves,” says Robinson.

(Continued from p. 5)

kids know why they're actually having a conversation about the book and not just reading."

Such discussions are part of an ongoing dialogue between Namba and Harris that focuses almost exclusively on improving instruction. "When she and I talk, we don't talk about my building infrastructure.... We focus on the day-to-day academics in the building," says Namba. "We look at our long-range plan. We look at our professional learning, how staffing is going, everything that affects the day-to-day instruction of students. She keeps me focused on my main role as the instructional leader of the building."

THE CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTATION

Upending the old ways isn't easy, especially in school districts comfortable with the status quo. To effectively sell the program to wary principals and central office administrators, D.C.'s Chancellor Henderson started from the premise that everything was secondary to teaching and learning. "When we made the shift, there were people in the central office who didn't understand exactly what we were doing," she recalls. "But when you start to orient your organization around teaching and learning being at the center, you start to prioritize things differently."

For instance, making room in the budget to hire more principal supervisors meant transferring pieces of work that did not directly focus on instruction, such as technology, to other city agencies. And although the principal supervisors initially maintained some operational responsibilities, those tasks were also eventually transferred. Indeed, a key component of the redesigned D.C. program was to assign an operations assistant to each cluster of schools so that principal supervisors could focus their attention on improving reading and math scores rather than fixing broken boilers. "One of the things that we realized is that in order for instructional superintendents to really maximize teaching and learning, they can't be responsible for anything else but teaching and learning," says Chancellor Henderson.

The personnel changes did not come without some pain. Previous supervisors had large staffs, which were eliminated to make room in the budget for more principal supervisors. In the end, none of the previous principal supervisors stayed on. "The position was no longer a comfortable fit for their skill set," says Kimberly Barrett, who manages Wallace-funded work in D.C.

Tulsa took a similar approach, eliminating positions of staff members who had worked for the two former associate superintendents, then combining the funding

TRADE-OFF FOR PRINCIPALS: LESS AUTONOMY, MORE SUPPORT

Being a principal has always meant calling the shots. But giving up some of that autonomy is inevitable under redesigned principal supervisor programs.

"Every principal wants to run their school the way that they want to," says Rachel Skerritt, who has been the principal of Eastern High School in Washington, D.C., for five years. "But we also know that we are a district of schools. ... We can't just all be renegades, doing our own thing. And so, it does come with a sacrifice of autonomy."

There are times, she says, when she and her principal supervisor, David Pinder, have "agreed to disagree" on issues such as suspending students. "Superintendent Pinder has certainly denied a suspension or two – or eight – that definitely would not have been my call."

Pinder, a former principal at McKinley Technology High School in D.C., which was recognized by the U.S. Depart-

ment of Education as a top-performing National Blue Ribbon school under his tenure, acknowledges the difficulty of establishing the right tone with his former colleagues. "I'm constantly dealing with the conundrum of being both the evaluator and the coach. So, building trust is not easy."

Sometimes, in an effort to reassure his principals that he's on their side, he lets them know that he is not including something in his evaluation that could technically be there. "I want them to understand this is not just about evaluating their practice," Pinder says. "It's also about taking risks, feeling like they can get engaged with you in a way that it's not going to land in their evaluation report at the end of the year."

Still, some tension between the old and new ways is inevitable. "There are those who kind of long a little bit for the days where you just closed your door and did your thing ... but those days are really history," says Tulsa, Okla., Superintendent Deborah Gist.



Kayla Robinson watches 5th grade students at work at Robertson Elementary School.

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‘It takes time and it takes hard
work to build that trust’
with principals.
– Kayla Robinson
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saved as a result with ongoing grants to hire additional principal supervisors. To handle parent complaints, child-family support services and other responsibilities that previously had fallen to the associate superintendents, the district named two new directors of constituent and student services for elementary and secondary schools, sending a clear message that the principal supervisors would primarily focus on instruction. Tulsa’s principal supervisors are “available for triage support” to help put out occasional operations fires, notes Gripado. Principal supervisor Robinson feels that part of her

role is to remove as many roadblocks as possible so principals have a clear path to reach their instructional goals: “If I can do some of the compliance work and ... make it easier to solve a problem, then I’m giving them back time they need.”

Still, many principals had a hard time believing the change wasn’t simply the education fad of the month. “I think there was fear among the principals that it might not be lasting, that they would work with me for a year, and then it might be something different,” recalls Robinson. A clear and consistent message from then-Superintendent Keith Ballard about the district’s strong commitment to increasing support for principals helped alleviate some of those fears, recalls Gripado. Today, one of the chief complaints from principals is that they don’t see their supervisors enough. Robinson admits that central-office demands sometimes get in the way of spending time in schools. “I’m trying to get better at saying, ‘No,’ or finding others who can handle it,” she says.



Principal Katy Jimenez (R) of McClure Elementary School discusses classroom observations with Kayla Robinson.

BUILDING TRUST: COACH VS. BOSS

To do their jobs effectively, principal supervisors need to be a shoulder to cry on and a safe space for principals to share their struggles. At the same time, they are the principals' bosses, responsible for evaluating their work. These seemingly contradictory roles can make it difficult to build trusting relationships with principals. A 2016 report examining the experiences of six urban school districts in a related Wallace Foundation initiative found novice principals have generally positive views about support from their supervisors, with 80 percent saying they helped them set effective goals and develop plans to meet those goals during the 2014-15 school year. But the report also said some principals suggested their supervisors need to spend more time in

schools or have yet to develop the trust needed for the principals to discuss their weaknesses candidly.³

Although Robinson has a strong, productive relationship with her principals today, that wasn't always the case – particularly during her first year on the job, when three quit. “They were all open with me about the fact that they weren't going to be able to function as principals without the autonomy they were used to,” says Robinson. They were also uncomfortable with the enhanced focus on instruction. There was a learning curve for Robinson as well. “I didn't ever develop the kind of relationship with them that made them want to continue to do the work,” she says. “It takes time and it takes hard work to build that trust.”

³ <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/school-leadership/district-policy-and-practice/Pages/Building-a-Stronger-Principalship-Vol-4-Evaluating-and-Supporting-Principals.aspx>

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I always remind principals that school isn't here because of the adults. It's here because of the children.

– Angela Chapman, D.C. principal supervisor

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Jennifer Pense, the principal of Skelly Primary School in Tulsa, admits that she initially had a hard time being completely honest with Robinson about the difficulties she faced as a first-year principal. “When your supervisor comes to your building, or sends an email that says, ‘I want to talk to you,’ there’s always this, ‘Oh my gosh, did I do something wrong?’ ” Pense now says she feels completely comfortable with the relationship and understands the importance of being honest with Robinson. “It doesn’t feel evaluative. She is truly a coach,” she says. “That has kind of taken away a lot of that fear of asking for help, and not having to feel like I need to be perfect.”

Balancing the coaching role with responsibility to evaluate principals can be especially challenging, according to several supervisors. LaKimbre Brown says she “agonizes” about writing evaluations and potentially compromising her relationship with the principals in the 14 elementary schools she handles in D.C. “I know that they’ve made progress, but I still have to say at the end of the day that they get a ‘2’ (‘minimally effective’) rating,” she says. “It creates this tension. I think I spend too much time belaboring how to craft the managerial part to preserve the relationship.”

Angela Chapman, who also oversees a cluster of D.C. elementary schools, is clear with her principals. “I always remind principals that school isn’t here because of the adults. It’s here because of the children. It’s a tough love thing.”

MEASURING SUCCESS

Especially for new principals like Katy Jimenez, who heads McClure Elementary School in Tulsa, the support

provided by her principal supervisor has meant the difference between pushing ahead in the face of seemingly insurmountable problems – and giving up.

During her first year on the job, Jimenez describes herself as “a deer in the headlights.” She had worked as an elementary school teacher in Tulsa for 11 years and suddenly found herself struggling to rebuild the highest poverty school in the district. “Our students come from a trauma-saturated environment. A lot of neglect. A lot of violence. Many times they are forced to shoulder adult problems and see things that are way beyond what their little minds can comprehend.” The result, occasionally, is students who act out repeatedly – to the point where neither Jimenez nor her staff members can resolve the problem.

“What kind of help do you need? What are you thinking?” asks her principal supervisor, Kayla Robinson, as they discuss Jimenez’s painful decision to suspend the troubled 4-year-old who had hit and scratched his teacher. “I’m trying to reach the mom. I know she won’t be happy, but I want to let her know what we’re thinking so she’s not caught off guard,” answers Jimenez.

Robinson shares similar problems she has seen at other schools, quickly sending a signal to Jimenez that she is not alone in facing such challenges. Together they discuss next steps to ensure the boy gets the help he needs. Despite the tough realities she is navigating, Jimenez believes the school has come a long way in the three years since she took the helm. “McClure had become a dumping ground for bad teachers, and there just wasn’t a lot of support,” she recalls. In 2014, after her first year, Jimenez hired 27 new teachers, working closely with Robinson to select individuals they believed could succeed at the school. But the second year, when several proved to be a poor fit, she had to replace more than a third of those teachers. Jimenez says of Robinson’s support during that tumultuous period: “She’s probably the best thing I could have asked for as a new principal.” Today, both Jimenez and Robinson agree that the school has come a long way. “This is a school now. Three years ago, any time of the day, it was just chaos,” says Robinson.

Hard data can’t yet measure the impact principal supervisors such as Robinson have on schools. A major independent evaluation under way of six districts receiving Wallace funding for principal supervisor work is expected to provide insights into how changing the supervision of principals affects principals’ performance. But



Tulsa Public Schools Superintendent Deborah Gist

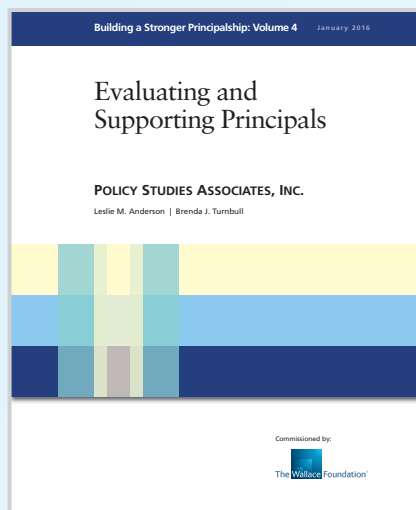
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Principal supervisors embody the notion that ‘teaching and learning is at the heart of what we do, that it’s a craft we continuously hone and develop.’
– *Deborah Gist, superintendent, Tulsa Public Schools*

the before and after pictures painted by close observers of McClure and Hyde-Addison suggest some promise in the changed principal supervisor role. At the beginning of the 2015-16 school year, 74 percent of students

at Hyde-Addison were reading at the proficiency level, up 10 percentage points from the previous year. D.C. schools overall have seen some of the most impressive increases in attendance and graduation rates in the nation since the redesigned principal supervisor program was launched. In describing the central role of principal supervisors in that progress, Chancellor Henderson calls them “the keepers and executors of the vision.” They are, she says, where “the magic happens.”

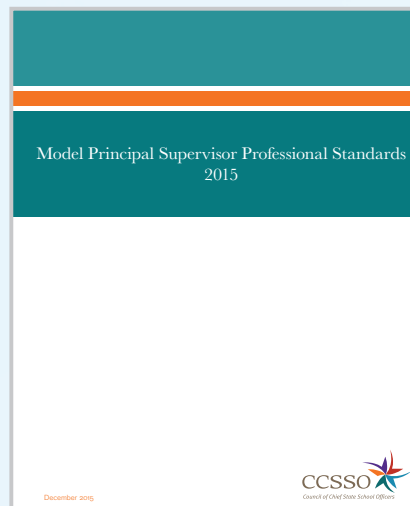
In Tulsa, Superintendent Gist believes the principal supervisors embody the notion that “teaching and learning is at the heart of what we do, that it’s a craft we continuously hone and develop.” For students, teachers, principals and their supervisors, there is no ending point. “I want a district that embraces ongoing growth and improvement as something all of us strive for,” says Gist. In Tulsa and D.C., principal supervisors keep everyone marching toward that goal every single day.

Further Reading From The Wallace Foundation About Principal Supervisors



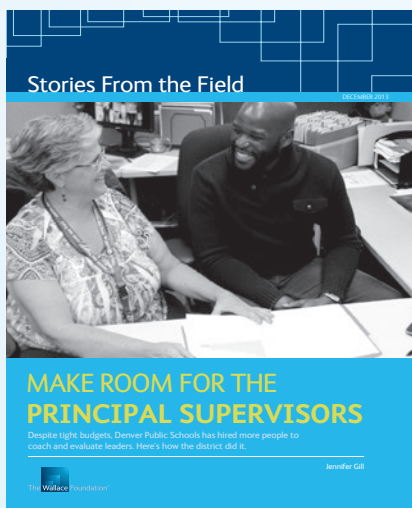
Building a Stronger Principalship, Vol. 4: Evaluating and Supporting Principals (2016)

The fourth in a series of reports about Wallace’s Principal Pipeline Initiative explores, among other things, the role of principal supervisors in principal support and evaluation.



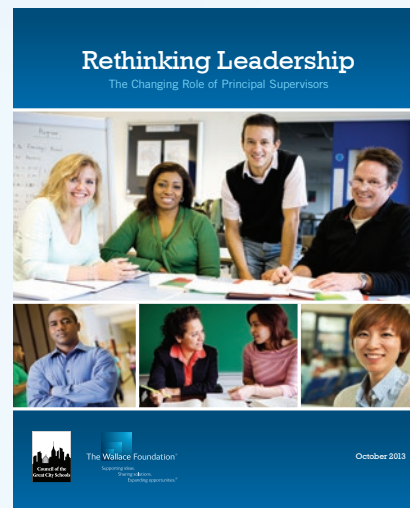
Model Principal Supervisor Professional Standards 2015 (2015)

A set of voluntary national standards for principal supervisors suggests that these managers focus on developing the effectiveness of principals rather than overseeing their compliance with regulations.



Make Room for the Principal Supervisors (2013)

This article details how Denver Public Schools put a new focus on the people who coach and evaluate principals—despite tight budgets.



Rethinking Leadership: The Changing Role of Principal Supervisors (2013)

How can school districts ensure that principal supervisors are able to help principals meet the demands of their jobs? This report provides some early answers.



The Wallace Foundation is a national philanthropy that seeks to improve learning and enrichment for disadvantaged children and foster the vitality of the arts for everyone.

Wallace has five major initiatives under way:

- School leadership: Strengthening education leadership to improve student achievement.
- Afterschool: Helping selected cities make good afterschool programs available to many more children.
- Arts education: Expanding arts learning opportunities for children and teens.
- Summer and expanded learning: Better understanding the impact of high-quality summer learning programs on disadvantaged children, and enriching and expanding the school day in ways that benefit students.
- Audience development for the arts: Making the arts a part of many more people's lives by working with arts organizations to broaden, deepen and diversify audiences.

Find out more at www.wallacefoundation.org.