Australian Principal Certification Program

Professional certification for accomplished principals: directions for Australia

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Contents

Executive summary

This review was commissioned by Principals Australia Institute. Its purpose is twofold: to review approaches to assessing and evaluating principals internationally; and to draw on this review in developing recommendations for building a rigorous and beneficial professional certification system for accomplished principals in Australia.[1]

There is widespread agreement that our society needs to place greater value on the important and complex work of teachers and principals (Productivity Commission 2012). Whether that happens will depend in large part on our capacity to develop standards for successful practice and rigorous methods for identifying those who meet them. Our ability to recognise and value quality professional work depends on our ability to evaluate it.

Certification refers to an endorsement by a professional agency that a member of that profession has attained a designated standard of accomplished practice. A *professional certification system* is a system for defining high-quality standards, promoting development towards those standards and identifying those who reach them.

The main justification for certification systems is their capacity to promote widespread implementation of effective practices consistent with the latest research. Certification is the way most professions drive continual improvement in their members' practice; in their own and in the public interest. The ability to develop a publicly credible certification system is a defining credential of a profession.

Professional certification systems need to be distinguished from performance management arrangements within particular organisations. National professional bodies usually run certification systems, independent of particular employing authorities, whereas performance management systems are rightly and properly the responsibility of particular employing authorities.

Research on principal evaluation

Although research confirms the importance of effective leadership to a school's success and despite over a hundred years of research on principal evaluation, it has not been easy to develop valid and reliable methods for predicting who will make a successful principal, or for distinguishing principals who have attained high performance standards from those who have not. Davis et al. (2011) point out that:

The body of literature on principal evaluation is surprisingly thin. Both primary and secondary sources are limited in number and distributed broadly across topics. Publications focused on principal evaluation vary widely in their purposes, topics and methodologies. Thus, the field lacks a strong theoretical base or an empirically sound rationale for principal evaluation as a mechanism for advancing individual or organisational effectiveness. The literature also leaves open the question of what impact, if any, stronger principal evaluation systems and practices may have on increasing effective leadership, strengthening teaching, reaching school improvement goals, or enhancing student growth. (p36)

Most research on principal evaluation falls within the context of performance management and supervision for accountability purposes. As with the research of teacher evaluation, the evidence is that bureaucratic modes of principal evaluation fail to deliver, both in terms of accountability and as a vehicle for change. Similarly, despite the potential benefits of assessment and feedback, few studies demonstrate the benefits for professional learning. There is a poor match between performance management models of evaluation and the nature of professional work.

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[1] In this paper, *assessment* refers to methods used to gather evidence about a principal's knowledge and performance in relation to a set of professional standards. *Evaluation* refers to the procedures used to determine whether the standards have been met.

Standards-based approaches to principalship

Research-based standards for effective principals are providing a sounder basis on which to evaluate principal performance. Well written standards create a bridge between research and practice. They synthesise the implications of research for what aspiring professionals need to know and be able to do – and the practices for which it is reasonable to hold them accountable.

Professions evaluate practice in terms of its consistency with what current research indicates members of that profession should know and be able to do. They use standards based on research and the wisdom of successful practitioners. They describe what members need to know and be able to do to enter the profession, to remain in it and to achieve high levels of accomplished practice. However, as a recent report from the Wallace Foundation points out:

While we know more about what it takes to lead the learning work of a school, education has been slower than many other fields in developing and widely adopting well-crafted, reliable ways to assess the performance of its leaders. (Wallace Foundation 2009 p1)

While a consensus has emerged about the type of standards that reflect the knowledge and practices of successful principals, the major challenge for assessment developers is to create a valid connection between the standards and the methods of assessment. According to recent reports, a fundamental weakness in many current principal evaluation schemes in the USA is the poor match between the assessment methods used and professional standards for principals.

Which assessment measures might be suitable for principal certification?

The review explores methods for assessing principal performance that might be suitable for professional certification purposes. However, as there are few examples of professional certification systems, there are few examples of assessment methods that have demonstrated their suitability for this purpose, except possibly those being field-tested currently for the National Board for Professional Teacher Standards (NBPTS) in the USA. In their extensive review of research on principal evaluation, Davis et al 2011 report that.

Valid and reliable principal evaluation instruments designed to address leadership behaviours are very limited in number and in the sophistication of their research designs. Only a few are available in the academic literature or publicly accessible through online search engines. (p16)

Most current assessment methods are based on perceptions rather than direct evidence of performance or accomplishments. And most are usually used as stand alone, isolated measures, whereas what is needed for certification purposes are holistic and authentic examples of principal performance over long periods of time.

Portfolio project(s) seem the most suited to including measures of change over time, such as changes on measures of staff collaboration, partnerships with the community, or measures of student outcomes. Methods for gathering evidence relevant to standards for certification should not only be reliable, they should also be authentic. Leadership takes time, often years to bear fruit.

Portfolio project(s) should be based, as much as possible, on initiatives that are meaningful to principals; part of what they normally do. They should reflect the wholeness and seamless nature of principals' work, wherein several professional practices are always at play. Carefully constructed portfolio entries have the capacity to meet these criteria.

Toward a conceptual framework for the certification of accomplished principals in Australia

This paper presents a conceptual framework for the certification of accomplished principals. Its purpose is to provide one suggested model for the development of methods for assessing and evaluating principals engaged in professional certification.

The conceptual framework indicates that a certification system for accomplished Australian principals might be based on portfolio entries, that will provide valid and reliable evidence of a principal's demonstrated achievement of the Australian Professional Standard for Principals (the Australian Principal Standard).

Recommendations

Recommendation **1** **That portfolio entries form the main source of evidence for assessment**

Certification focuses on performance rather than perceptions. Portfolio entries have the capacity to encompass the full story of leading and managing an initiative to improve some specified area of professional practice. No other method has the capacity to incorporate multiple forms of evidence over time demonstrating change or improvement.

Recommendation **2** **That PAI develop an Assessment and Evaluation Framework**

The purpose of the Assessment and Evaluation Framework will be to design and field test portfolio assessments based on entries that provide valid and reliable evidence about a principal's accomplishments in relation to the professional practices and leadership requirements set out in the Australian Principal Standard.

Introduction

This review was commissioned by Principals Australia Institute. Its purpose is twofold: to review approaches to assessing and evaluating principals internationally; and, to draw on this review in developing recommendations for building a rigorous and beneficial professional certification system for accomplished principals in Australia.

There is widespread agreement that our society needs to place greater value on the important and complex work of teachers and principals (Productivity Commission 2012). Whether that happens will depend in large part on our capacity to develop standards for successful practice and rigorous methods for assessing those who meet them. Our ability to recognise and value quality professional work depends on our ability to evaluate it.

Recent research on principal evaluation indicates we have a lot to learn. Although research confirms the importance of effective leadership to a school's success and despite over a hundred years of research on principal evaluation, it has not been easy to establish valid and reliable methods for distinguishing principals who have attained high performance standards from those who, as yet, have not.

Recent research consistently indicates the importance of school principals in establishing the conditions and cultures that lead to better teaching and learning (Leithwood et al. 2004; Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe 2008; Robinson 2010; Wahlstrom et al. 2010; Louis et al. 2010). However, it also indicates a poor match between standards for successful school leadership and what most principal evaluation schemes actually assess, or are capable of assessing (Wallace Foundation 2009; Portin 2006; Clifford and Ross N.D.; Davis et al. 2011).

The work of principals is complex and methods for capturing relevant evidence of effective leadership and assessing and evaluating it need to reflect that complexity. However, this is rarely possible in the context of traditional models of performance management and appraisal of principals (Clifford and Ross 2011; Davis et al. 2011).

Therefore, it is appropriate that Australia examines the development of an independent, stable and professionally credible scheme for recognising principals who can implement what research shows to be successful leadership practices. International evidence suggests that it is difficult to implement high quality assessment processes solely within the context of managerial accountability (OECD 2013).

Certification has the potential to provide a valuable service to the profession and to employing authorities seeking a sound basis on which to reward principals who have achieved high professional standards. It also has the potential to provide successful principals with a highly respected and marketable professional certification. The success of such a scheme will clearly depend on the rigour and fairness of the procedures used to evaluate principal performance.

The paper is based on the assumption that the appropriate role of governments and other employing authorities is to provide support and recognition for a certification system if it proves its rigour, not to operate or control it. This is standard practice with other professions. Australia is more likely to build an effective evaluation system if the profession is entrusted with one of the key responsibilities of a profession; to define its own standards for accomplished practice and to develop credible methods for recognising those who attain them.

While annual performance management models undoubtedly have an important role to play, there is considerable research evidence indicating that they have struggled to gain professional credibility, especially when linked to bonus pay schemes (Mongan & Ingvarson 2002). The context surrounding typical performance management cycles makes it difficult to assemble the range and depth of evidence required for a valid evaluation of a principal's performance.

By definition, certification is a standards-based assessment and evaluation process. Therefore, it is important to examine the current state of our knowledge about how to assess and evaluate the effectiveness of principals in ways that are valid and reliable and in ways that support professional learning and school improvement. Before doing that, it is important to clarify a few terms and make some important distinctions.

Certification

Certification refers to an endorsement by a professional agency that a member of that profession has attained a designated standard of accomplished practice. Australian examples include *Chartered Engineer, Certified Practising Accountant and Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons.*

A professional certification system is a system for:

- defining high-quality standards

- promoting development toward those standards and

- identifying those who reach them.

A certification system stands or falls according to its ability to carry out each of these functions effectively. Professions are normally trusted to run their own certification systems. If convinced about the validity and reliability of a certification system, employing authorities usually encourage members of the profession to seek certification and provide recognition for its attainment in a variety of forms.

The essential characteristics of a professional certification system are that it is:

- *profession-wide*: provided by an independent professional body, not an employer, statutory authority or university (eg Engineers Australia, Chartered Accountant)

- a *standards-based assessment of performance* by professional peers: not an academic qualification

- *voluntary:* available to all members of that profession

- *portable:* not specific to particular jurisdictions or employing authorities; and

- *owned by the individual*: not a job or position specific to a school or school system (although employers may recognise its achievement in various ways).

Why certification?

The main justification for professional certification systems is their capacity to promote widespread implementation of effective professional practices. Certification is the way most professions drive continual improvement in their member's practice; in their own and in the public interest. Professions provide novices with high performance standards to aim for over several years. They provide a rigorous and independent system for assessing when they have attained those standards. Successful applicants gain a respected certification that employers are willing to pay for, thus creating a strong market for their knowledge and expertise. They gain the esteem of being recognised by their profession.

The ability to develop a publicly credible certification system is perhaps a defining credential of a profession. There are many accomplished teachers and principals, however, unlike many other professions, education has been slow in developing its own system for recognising expertise and providing professional certification. Recognition from expert peers is a powerful form of reward for professionals.

With their own professional standards and certification systems, teachers and principals are more able to speak on equal terms with politicians and administrators about directions for enhancing the quality of Australian schools. A professional certification system can provide a sounder evidential basis on which to recognise accomplished performance than is possible with one-off or annual bonus pay schemes. A rigorous and well-rewarded professional certification system provides incentives for principals to collaborate, rather than compete, in attaining high standards.

One way to make certain that professional standards are taken seriously is to create a rigorous and highly respected certification system and work hard to ensure it gains public and employer recognition. Another is for the profession to also create its own professional learning system with a close fit between the standards and programs that prepare principals for professional certification. Standards provide a means by which the profession can take responsibility for building its own stable professional learning system guided by its own standards and recognised by professional certification. By determining its own standards, the profession gains greater control over the purpose and direction of its own professional learning. Programs provided by universities and other professional learning providers will still be very important, but the key question for principals will be, "how does this professional learning help me move toward meeting the standards for professional certification?"

Performance management and appraisal

A professional certification system needs to be distinguished from performance management arrangements within particular schools or school systems. National professional bodies usually run certification systems, independent of particular employing authorities, whereas, performance management systems are right and properly the responsibility of particular schools and school systems. The main purposes of performance management systems are to support professional learning and to ensure teachers and principals fulfil their contractual duties and retain their current positions.

In contrast, a certification system governs decisions at key transition points in a professional career pathway, such as graduation, registration (entry to the profession) and advanced professional certification. These are important quality assurance stages in any profession. Certification decisions are usually the responsibility of a profession-wide body; such as the General Teaching Council for Scotland, or the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) in the USA.

Both purposes are important and should be seen as complementary. A rigorous national certification system can provide valuable support for performance management at the local level. A school system can encourage principals to engage in certification as an independent assessment for recognition, career progression or promotion purposes. A certification system is more likely to be successful if employing authorities respect its rigour and build recognition for certification into selection and promotion procedures. A performance management system is more likely to be effective in promoting professional learning if it provides incentives for staff members who gain certification.

While the purposes and methods for each are similar, Table 1 exaggerates the differences for the sake of clarifying distinctions.

Table 1: Performance management and professional certification compared	Performance management	Professional certification
Jurisdiction/authority	Employer-specific, managerial authority	Profession-wide, charter
Criteria	Based on contractual duties	Based on profession-defined, research-based standards
Who evaluates?	Conducted by supervisors	Conducted by peers trained in standards-based evaluation
Incentives	Promotion – maintenance of position – maybe bonus pay	Professional recognition – portable certification – marketable
Assessment methods	Observation, interviews, staff/student surveys, 360-degree instruments, school-level data	Methods based on rigorous development, piloting, trials. Written assessments, portfolio entries, artefacts, research projects, school-level outcomes/indicators. Multiple sources of evidence
Judging performance	Supervisor judgment	Centralised training of evaluators based on performance standards, standards-based rubrics, benchmarks, weighting of evidence, etc; Emphasis on validity and national consistency.
Accountability	Loyalty to the employer	Loyalty to the client

Licensure, qualification and professional certification

In the USA, the terms *licensure* and *certification* are often used interchangeably. Licensure commonly means a person is eligible to apply for any principal post within a particular state. Most state governments require aspiring principals to complete a paper and pencil licensure test of professional knowledge, such as the School Leaders Licensure Assessment (SLLA), provided by the Educational Testing Service (ETS 2013). A licensure system like the SLLA aims to assure school district selection panels that entry-level principals have the standards-relevant knowledge believed necessary for competent professional practice.

Qualification is another term, which usually refers to completing an accredited course in a tertiary institution. Until recently, the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) in England was a mandatory requirement. The Scottish Qualification for Headship is very demanding. The Ontario Ministry of Education requires aspiring principals to complete the similarly demanding Principal Qualification Program, linked to the Ontario Leadership Framework (Leithwood 2012). Most states in the USA and most Canadian provinces are, in effect, regulated systems. No Australian state or territory requires a leadership qualification or a license. (However, the WA Education Department has used an assessment of personal attributes to assist principal selection (Wildy et al. 2011)).

In contrast, *certification* is an endorsement by an independent professional body that a person's performance in the job has met a high standard. One way to clarify the distinction is in terms of the nature of the agency that provides the credential, as shown in the following table. Universities provide *qualifications.* State regulatory bodies provide *licensure* (or registration). Professional bodies provide *certification.* However, a license, a qualification and a certification are also similar in one key respect. They are portable credentials that belong to the person. While not tied to one particular employer or employing authority, they still aim to provide them with an important quality assurance service.

As the table also shows, employing authorities usually conduct principal evaluation for selection, performance management and career progress. As we shall see, most of the research on principal evaluation relates to methods use by employing authorities for performance management purposes.

Table 2: Purposes for principal evaluation and responsible body				
Responsible Body				
Purposes for principal evaluation	Universities	Statutory authorities	Employing authorities	Professional bodies
Qualification	✓			
Licensure		✓		
Selection			✓	
Performance management			✓	
Career progression			✓	
Certification				✓

Methods of assessment will vary somewhat according to purpose. While a licensure assessment, for example, might rely on a paper and pencil test, this method would be less appropriate for performance management or certification purposes. Similarly, portfolio entries providing case studies of how standards are met would seem to be more appropriate for qualification and certification than performance management purposes.

An example of a licensure assessment for aspiring principals is the School Leaders Licensure Assessment (SLLA) mentioned earlier. The SLLA was developed by the Education Testing Service in the USA as an assessment service for states that mandate a license (over 20 states choose the SLLA). The SLLA measures whether entry-level principals have the standards-relevant knowledge believed necessary for competent professional practice. It is a paper and pencil/online test lasting four hours with 100 multiple-choice and 7 constructed scenario assessment items. Detailed guidelines for applicants together with samples of test items and scored responses can be found at http://www.ets.org/sls. The exercises provide useful starting points for group discussion among principals.

Examples of qualifications to become a principal include the Scottish Qualification for Headship and the Principal's Qualification Program in Ontario. Both are provided by accredited universities after extensive coursework based on their respective standards for principals. The Ontario College of Teachers, the self-regulatory body that certifies, governs and regulates teachers and principals, provides a resource entitled The Principal's Qualification Program Guide, which offers a detailed overview of the program. Also available on the College's website is a list of the universities and organisations that offer the Principal's Qualification Program. The Program was developed and delivered by practising principals and has a province-wide focus. A typical fee is about $CAN2000.00.

The Scottish Qualification for Headship (SQH) is designed to enable program participants to develop and demonstrate the competencies they require to meet and achieve the Scottish Framework for Headship. Most Scottish universities provide a version of the Scottish Qualification for Headship accredited by the General Teaching Council for Scotland. The Program provided by the University of Edinburgh, for example,

spans 26 months and comprises five courses. Each course has 200 hours of coursework and assessments of about 4000 words. The fifth and final course has double weighting and the assessment includes a portfolio of evidence against the Standard.

Research on methods for assessing and evaluating principals

Although research confirms the importance of effective leadership to a school's success (Leithwood et al. 2004; Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe 2008; Robinson 2010; Louis et al. 2010) and despite over a hundred years of research on principal evaluation (Ginsberg & Berry 1990), it has not been easy to develop valid and reliable methods for predicting who will make a successful principal, or for distinguishing principals who have attained high performance standards from those who have not. In summarising their major review of research on principal evaluation from 1980 to 2010, Davis et al. 2011 point out that:

The body of literature on principal evaluation is surprisingly thin. Both primary and secondary sources are limited in number and distributed broadly across topics. Publications focused on principal evaluation vary widely in their purposes, topics and methodologies. Thus, the field lacks a strong theoretical base or an empirically sound rationale for principal evaluation as a mechanism for advancing individual or organisational effectiveness. The literature also leaves open the question of what impact, if any, stronger principal evaluation systems and practices may have on increasing effective leadership, strengthening teaching, reaching school improvement goals, or enhancing student growth. (p36)

The difficulties in principal evaluation start with defining leadership and what *good* principals know and do. For many years, the research emphasis was on identifying the personal attributes of effective leaders (Ginsberg and Berry 1990; Leithwood 2012) rather than the actions that characterised successful leadership performance. As with research on effective teachers, this route did not take us far, other than to show that they needed to be mature, fair and tactful people, like any effective adult. While personal attributes are doubtless important, this approach to defining good principals told us little about the kind of leadership practices schools needed to better serve students.

Performance management approaches

During the 1990s, with a greater press from governments for bureaucratic models of accountability, the annual appraisal model of of performance management became widespread in Australia (eg Clayton-Jones 1993), as well as other countries. The basic model remains familiar to current principals, though these days it is more likely to be referred to as human resource management or performance and development cycles. A recent Wallace Foundation report typifies the practice in these terms:

Appraising leaders is not a new practice within schools and districts. In general, however, leadership appraisal follows locally determined, contract-driven review processes largely for personnel purposes. Typically, principals establish some set of goals through a form and process defined by their district. They then meet annually with a supervisor who determines whether or not their work has been satisfactory. Assessments are often weakly tied to leadership standards and opportunities for professional growth. And they may or may not focus primarily on the instructional aspects of a leader's performance. (Wallace Foundation 2009 p3).

Recent research on principal evaluation mostly lies within this context of supervision for accountability purposes (Portin, Feldman and Knapp 2006). As with the research of teacher evaluation, the evidence is that most bureaucratic modes of principal evaluation fail to deliver, both in terms of accountability and as a vehicle for change. Similarly, despite the potential benefits of assessment and feedback, few studies demonstrate benefits for professional learning. In a recent major review of USA research on principal evaluation, Clifford and Ross (2011) point out that:

• principals view performance evaluation as having limited value for feedback, professional development or accountability for school improvement (Portin, Feldman & Knapp 2006)

- principal evaluations are inconsistently administered; therefore, performance is inconsistently measured (Thomas, Holdaway, & Ward 2000)

- performance evaluations may not align with existing state or national professional standards for practice (Heck & Marcoulides 1996; Reeves 2009) or standards for personnel evaluation (Goldring et al. 2009); and

- few widely available principal evaluation instruments display psychometric rigor or make testing results public so that validity and reliability can be examined (Clifford, Menon, Gangi, Condon & Hornung 2012; Condon & Clifford 2010; Goldring et al. 2009; Heck & Marcoulides 1996 p2).

It should be noted that all of these studies report on principal evaluation by local education authorities *for performance management purposes* (Clifford, Hansen & Wraight 2012), not certification. However, it is probably fair to say that the typical performance management methods described in these studies from the USA will be familiar to Australian principals. There are a few research studies on methods for teacher and principal appraisal in Australia (Redman and Mackay 1994; Ingvarson and Chadbourn, 1998; Dempster and Lindsay 1999; Mongan and Ingvarson 2002; Mulford et al. 2008; Wildy, Pepper and Guanzhong 2011). Clayton-Jones (1993) reported that although principals were positive about the appraisal process, they saw a considerable discrepancy between actual and ideal reasons for its introduction.

Clifford and Ross (2011) point out that USA studies raise questions about the consistency, fairness, effectiveness, accountability and value of current principal evaluation. "While principal evaluation holds great potential, improvements are long overdue" (p2). They go on to point out that:

> Although states and districts require principal evaluation, research suggests that compliance with the law does not ensure that quality performance evaluations are used (Goldring, Cravens, Murphy, Elliot, & Carson 2009). Two independent reviews of research on principal evaluations concluded that evaluation systems have not been designed or enacted in ways that promote accurate judgments of principal effectiveness (Clifford and Ross 2011; Davis, Kearney, Sanders, Thomas, & Leon 2010).

It is evident that annual appraisal models, in the context of supervision and managerial accountability, have a limited capacity to deliver credible and useful evaluation. Their methods struggle to capture the rich complexity and sophistication of what accomplished principals know and do. There appears to be a poor match between the nature of professional work and appraisal, models introduced from business management. This is reflected in many research studies showing that principals typically regard annual reviews more as a ritual than a valid or helpful assessment of their leadership (Bryman 1994; Goldring et al. 2008).

It may be unrealistic to expect that the values, expertise and judgment that underpin professional work can be encompassed within a brief list of annual objectives and two or three interviews. And when achievement of these objectives becomes linked to annual bonus payments, the well-documented phenomena of goal distortion, gaming and goal displacement come to the fore (Mongan and Ingvarson 2002; Pink 2009; Springer 2009; Sandel 2012), undermining the very purposes for which such schemes were designed.

Standards-based approaches

More recently, some have argued for defining effective principals in terms of gain score measures of student achievement. However, a moment's reflection reveals the limitations of this approach because it does not actually describe the knowledge, beliefs and practices that underpin effective leadership.

Professions do not define good practice in terms of outcome measures, which is not to say that the latter should be ignored. Professions evaluate practice in terms of its consistency with what current research indicates members of that profession should know, understand and be able to do. They use standards based on research and the wisdom of successful practitioners. They describe what members need to know and be able to do to enter the profession, to remain in it and to achieve high levels of accomplished practice. They ground their standards in what can be supported by current research. They measure what matters for improvement. However, as a recent report from the Wallace Foundation points out:

While we know more about what it takes to lead the learning work of a school, education has been slower than many other fields in developing and widely adopting well-crafted, reliable ways to assess the performance of its leaders. (Wallace Foundation 2009 p1)

Well written standards create a bridge between research and practice. They synthesise the implications of research for what aspiring professionals need to know and be able to do – and the practices for which it is reasonable to hold them accountable. A consensus is emerging about the type of standards that reflect the knowledge and practices of successful principals (Ingvarson 2013). Table 3 compares the Australian Professional Standard for Principals with two other well respected leadership standards; the *Ontario Leadership Framework* (Leithwood 2012) and the *Educational Leadership Policy Standards (*Council of Chief State School Officers 2008) developed by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC), the most widely used leadership standards in the USA. Each provides a strong rationale for each standard based on research on effective leadership practices.

The similarities are clear. Table 3 indicates that the structure of the Australian Professional Standard for Principals is consistent with the most respected and research-based leadership standards internationally. As indicated earlier, what is noteworthy about recent standards is the shift in emphasis from describing successful principals mainly in terms of capabilities and personal attributes, to describing the areas where leadership initiatives and action are needed if a school is to provide optimal conditions for quality teaching, learning and student wellbeing.

Table 3: Three sets of leadership standards compared		
Australian Professional Standard for Principals (2011)	**Ontario Leadership Framework (2012)**	**ISLLC Standards (2008)** **An education leader promotes the success of every student by:**
1 Leading teaching and learning Principals create a positive culture of challenge and support, enabling effective teaching that promotes enthusiastic, independent learners, committed to lifelong learning.	**1 Setting Directions** The principal builds a shared vision, fosters the acceptance of group goals and sets and communicates high performance expectations.	**1** Facilitating the development, articulation, implementation and stewardship of a **vision** of learning that is shared and supported by all stakeholders.
2 Developing self and others Principals work with and through others to build a professional learning community that is focused on the continuous improvement of teaching and learning.	**2 Building relationships and developing people** The principal strives to foster genuine trusting relationships with students, staff, families and communities, guided by a sense of mutual respect. The principal affirms and empowers others to work in the best interests of all students.	**2** Advocating, nurturing and sustaining a **school culture and instructional program** conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.

3 Leading improvement, innovation and change	3 Developing the organisation to sustain desired practices	3 Ensuring **management** of the organisation, operation and resources for a safe, efficient and effective learning environment.
Principals work with others to produce and implement clear, evidence-based improvement plans and policies for the development of the school and its facilities.	The principal builds collaborative cultures, structures the organisation for success and connects the school to its wider environment.	
4 Leading the management of the school	4 Leading the instructional program	4 Collaborating with faculty and community members, **responding to diverse community interests** and needs and mobilising community resources.
Principals use a range of data management methods and technologies to ensure that the school's resources and staff are efficiently organised and managed to provide an effective and safe learning environment as well as value for money.	The principal sets high expectations for learning outcomes and monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of instruction. The principal manages the school effectively so that everyone can focus on teaching and learning.	
5 Engaging and working with the community	5 Securing accountability	5 Acting with **integrity, fairness and in an ethical** manner.
Principals embrace inclusion and help build a culture of high expectations that takes account of the richness and diversity of the school's wider community and the education systems and sectors.	The principal is responsible for creating conditions for student success and is accountable to students, parents, the community, supervisors and to the board for ensuring that students benefit from a high quality education. The principal is specifically accountable for the goals set out in the school improvement plan.	6 Understanding, responding to and influencing the **political, social, economic, legal and cultural context.**

This shift reflects that recent research is providing a sounder basis on which to write standards for effective school leadership.

As noted earlier, the three standards in Table 3 were developed with different purposes. The Ontario Leadership Framework is primarily intended as a guide for school leader preparation programs in universities. The ISLLC Standards provide a framework for state licensing purposes (eg the ETS School Leaders Licensure Assessment) and for performance management (Goldring et al. 2007; Murphy 2005). They also form the basis for *The Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education* (VAL–ED), a 360-degree rating instrument. As yet, the Australian Principal Standard is not linked to licensure, qualification or professional certification purposes. PAI on behalf of principals and principal associations has undertaken to develop the Australian Principal Certification Program ensuring that it is linked to the Australian Principal Standard.

Matching assessment methods to standards

According to recent reports, a fundamental weakness in many current principal evaluation schemes in the USA is the poor match between the assessment methods used and professional standards for principals, such as the ISLLC Standards (eg: Wallace Foundation 2009). (No Australian research appears to have addressed this topic). Catano and Stronge 2013 recently examined the congruence between instruments for assessing principals and professional standards in the USA. They found that despite a lot of official language about the importance of instructional leadership, this was not reflected in the instruments used and that this was producing "role conflict and subsequent role strain as principals strive to comprehend which expectations they should focus their attention on". (p394)

We suggest that it would be prudent for school districts to align their principal assessment instruments with both state and professional standards. This alignment would facilitate clearer communication to principals regarding expectations of responsibilities and their performance of those responsibilities. (p395)

The Wallace Foundation paper goes on to identify several characteristics of high-quality methods for assessing principals:

• they measure what they are designed to measure (valid)

• they are consistently applied and tested for fairness (reliable)

• they are seen as an ongoing process for professional growth, not just a "tool" or an isolated event (the assessment process itself is vehicle for professional learning)

• they are based on the best available evidence, often from multiple sources (reliability increases with the number of independent sources of evidence)

• they reinforce the organisation's core goals

• they provide actionable feedback on what matters most; and

• they help build a culture of continuous improvement (Wallace Foundation 2009 p2).

The recent development of research-based standards, such the Ontario Leadership Framework and the ISLLC Standards, which are linked to actions that improve student outcomes, is providing a sounder base on which to develop more valid and reliable methods for assessing and evaluating principals. Standards become more meaningful when brought to life through being used to evaluate actual examples of practice. They are tools for making informed and useful judgments about performance in order to improve it. By definition, standards must be assessable. Standards are of little use if they cannot be used to assess performance; even if the assessment is of one's own performance. So far, however, few instruments have been developed that effectively assess new leadership standards such as those in Table 3.

The lack of systems for providing useful and accurate feedback about performance is perhaps one of the fundamental weaknesses in current professional learning systems for principals. Informed feedback is what anyone needs as they try to incorporate new skills into their practice. The view is sometimes expressed that standards are fine for professional development, but they should not be used for assessing performance. This is misguided. The point is that their use for professional learning is minimal if they cannot be used to make valid assessments of performance.

We are not talking here about assessment or evaluation as a regulatory function. We are talking about informed professional judgment that aims to help people lift their performance. Feedback is essential to learning, especially learning new skills and the capacity to give or gain useful feedback is limited without valid, insightful assessments of performance, based on standards.

Outcome measures and practice measures

A key task for this review is to explore methods for assessing principal performance that might be suitable for professional certification purposes. As mentioned above, most methods have been developed in the USA for supervision or performance management purposes. The NBPTS is the only body internationally that provides a professional certification system and it asks principals to provide portfolio entries built around developing and implementing a strategic plan to meet an identified need for school improvement.

In their extensive review of research on principal evaluation from 1980 to 2010, Davis et al, (2011) reported that:

> Valid and reliable principal assessment instruments designed to address leadership behaviours are very limited in number and in the sophistication of their research designs. Only a few are available in the academic literature or publicly accessible through online search engines (p16).

Clifford, Hansen and Wraight (2012), from the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, provide a useful guide to designing principal evaluation systems in which they classify current "measures" for assessing principals into two main groups: principal *outcome* measures and principal *practice* measures.

A. Principal outcome measures include, but are not limited to:

1 Student growth measures

- value-added models
- student achievement trends
- percentage of student learning objectives achieved in a school
- locally or regionally used subject- specific test results.

2 Instructional quality measures

- teacher placement indicators (eg: placement in subject area in which teachers are certified)
- teacher retention rates
- specific measures of instructional quality
- school performance measures
- student behaviour measures (eg: attendance, attrition, behavioural incidents).

3 School climate measures

- community participation, interaction and satisfaction measures
- progress on school improvement plans
- progress on school fiscal management plans (as applicable).

B. Principal practice measures include, but are not limited to:

- observation instruments (eg: observations of principal and teacher evaluation practices or data presentations)
- parent, student, or teacher surveys
- 360-degree surveys
- portfolios or evidence binders
- principal professional development plan achievements or evidence of learning.

According to their report, since 2005, some 35 states have enacted new legislation on principal assessments aimed at putting less emphasis on inputs, such as how well particular leadership tasks are met and more on student "outcomes" and the leadership behaviours likeliest to improve instruction (Clifford, Hansen and Wraight 2011).

Despite considerable concerns among measurement experts (eg: Haertel 2013) about the validity and reliability of judgments based on student test scores, the US Federal Government has been using its Race to the Top grant program to mandate that value-added or growth scores form at least fifty per cent weighting in teacher and principal evaluation, a stipulation that has been causing considerable compliance problems. Many of those laws were prompted by a desire to win competitive federal grants, notably the 2009 Race to the Top program, intended to induce states to mandate changes in the way districts assess both teachers and principals.

In the Australian context, so far as measures of principal outcomes are concerned, it is doubtful that value-added models, based on tests of student achievement (eg: NAPLAN), would be considered acceptable, appropriate or applicable, as stand-alone measures for high-stakes purposes.

In contrast to measures of *outcomes*, principal *practice* measures aim to capture more direct evidence about what principals actually do. Clifford, Hansen and Wraight (2012), provide a useful review of each method. In summary, none at present provides a sound basis for a high stakes performance evaluation, such as will be needed in a certification system. Some measures that seem to be relevant, such as observation, turn out to be impractical as well as costly, unreliable and of doubtful validity.

One of the most widely used measures is the 360-degree survey and one of the more sophisticated examples is the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (Porter et al. 2008). As the developers describe it **http://www.valed.com/about.html**:

> The Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (VAL-ED) is a research-based tool that measures the effectiveness of principals by providing a detailed assessment of a principal's performance as perceived by teachers, the principal and the principal's supervisor. The VAL-ED instrument consists of 72 items that comprise 6 core component subscales and 6 process subscales. The VAL-ED can be used as part of a comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of a leader's behaviours. It can be used annually or more frequently to measure performance growth, guide professional development and to facilitate data-based performance assessment. All items and response scales were developed to be aligned with the ISLLC Standards.

There are two parallel forms (A and C) of the assessment to facilitate measuring growth over time. In this 360 degree evidenced-based assessment of leadership behaviours, each respondent rates the principal's effectiveness on a six point scale after having first indicated the sources of evidence on which the effectiveness is rated. The principal does not need to have performed the leadership behaviour directly, but may have ensured that the behaviour was done by others. The reference period is the current school year.

Goldring et al. (2007) provide a conceptual framework for the VAL-Ed instrument, which is designed to focus on learning-centred leadership behaviours that influence teachers, staff and student achievement.

There is evidence that feedback from some commonly used measures, such as 360-degree surveys, is not as effective as is typically assumed and in some circumstances may even be harmful (DeNisi and Kluger 2000). The Centre for Great Teachers and Leaders, American Institutes of Research, provide useful profiles of several commonly used measures, such as the one for 360-degree surveys shown in Table 4. More can be found at http://resource.tqsource.org/GEP/

Table 4: 360-degree surveys

360-degree surveys

- gather and compare perception-based feedback from multiple constituents (the principal, staff, teachers, parents, students, supervisors) to create an aggregate profile of a principal's performance on specific competencies

- are usually paired with mentoring and coaching and designed specifically to help principals to reflect holistically on their performance both through self-assessment and by examining feedback from their key constituents

- include principal self-assessment using a common set of survey questions and topic areas, allowing a principal's perspective to be compared with the perceptions of other constituents

- often provide a uniquely designed survey instrument for each constituent type but can be used for stand-alone staff, parent and student surveys for 360-degree purposes if the questions and topics are similar and the principal uses the survey questions to engage in self-assessment.

Research base

- despite their rising popularity in principal assessment, rigorous research on the effect of 360-degree surveys on principal performance is lacking

- studies of 360-degree approaches in other fields have provided mixed results, but studies suggest that this approach works best when used as part of a coaching model.

Strengths

- provide a wide breadth of feedback about a principal's performance, usually on a number of important components of leadership

- are designed to facilitate both broader and deeper principal self-reflection by providing access to more data during the self-assessment process

- enable multiple constituents to provide feedback that can easily be compared and that is intended for formative development of the principal.

Cautions

- rely on perception-based data and were originally designed largely to support principal self-reflection and principal coaching; 360-surveys should not be used as a single, stand-alone measure of principal performance

- work best when incorporated into formative evaluations combined with strong coaching. Incorporating 360-degree survey data into summative evaluations should be used with caution and only as part of the self-assessment component in a broader evaluation model.

Guide to Evaluation Products, Centre for Great Teachers and Leaders, American Institutes of Research

Which assessment methods might be suitable for principal certification?

As there are few examples of principal certification systems, there are few examples of assessment methods that have demonstrated their suitability for this purpose, except possibly those being field-tested for the NBPTS in the USA.

A feature of the assessment methods discussed in this paper is that they are based on perceptions rather than direct evidence of performance or accomplishments. Another feature is that most are usually used as stand alone, isolated measures, whereas certification would seem to require more holistic and authentic examples of principal performance over long periods of time.

Performance, whether it be diving, singing or leadership, is necessarily an integration of many capabilities and standards. It is often said that, as all measures have inherent strengths and weaknesses, an evaluation system should make use of multiple measures to increase reliability. This is certainly true up to a point, but not if the thing that is being assessed, in this case leadership performance, is fragmented by the process.

To illustrate, we ask the Olympic diver to show how they can bring together all the components inherent in making a successful diving performance. We do not assess each component in isolation. In the case of diving, we recognise that it would be unwise to do so; likewise for principalship performance. If we use several assessment methods like a 360-degree survey, a parent survey and student outcome measures in isolation from each other, we run the risk of not seeing the wood for the trees. We are not allowing a principal to show how they bring their knowledge, their values and their interpersonal skills together in leading and managing a project that improves school functioning.

A fundamental problem with many of these measures is that they are often conducted as decontextualised, one-off events. Principal assessment needs to be based on authentic actions that principals view as part of their normal responsibilities. Consider a principal who sets out to build a more accountable professional culture in their school, focused on student outcomes. This might become a "project" that covers a concerted effort over two or three years or more and can provide evidence of a principal having met the Australian Principal Standard in their school context.

One question to ask about the measures discussed in this paper is the extent to which they are capable of measuring the professional practices that form the Australian Principal Standard. Do they measure what really matters? How capable are they of gathering the evidence of the professional practices that are linked to improving student outcomes? Take, for example, the first professional practice in the Australian Principal Standard:

Leading teaching and learning: Principals create a positive culture of challenge and support, enabling effective teaching that promotes enthusiastic, independent learners, committed to lifelong learning.

What might a principal do to show that they meet this professional practice? The Australian Principal Standard does not prescribe how a principal should meet it, nor should it, but it is non-negotiable that a principal applying for certification should be able to show examples of how they meet it, within their current school context. The same applies to the other four professional practices.

If a reliable method is to be developed for assessing principal achievement of the Australian Principal Standard, a principal would need clear guidelines as to what he or she is expected to do – a framework would need to be carefully constructed so that different principals make the same interpretations about what is expected. It would need questions that provided scaffolding for their writing. The project would need to be conceived of as a long term goal, not a snapshot in time; as a 'story' that may cover a year or more of planning, implementation, evaluation and consolidation before evidence of impact becomes apparent. Building a culture of challenge and support does not happen overnight.

If a principal were to document a successful initiative in *Leading teaching and learning*, a school climate measure might be applied two or three times to indicate improvement. Student and parent surveys might also be relevant, as might data about teacher collaboration focused on student outcomes and student achievement trends. Once the project is completed and documented, it might become an entry for a principal's professional portfolio.

An assessment requirement for certification purposes would therefore seem to be that principals provide evidence over time. Assessments that only provide snapshots at one point of time cannot tell us much about what a principal has achieved. They can serve as predictors of future performance, but not measures of actual performance. Similarly, interviews methods may probe personal attributes for selection purposes, but are unreliable indicators of actual performance (and personal attributes for that matter).

The potential of portfolio project(s) for certification purposes

Structured portfolio project(s) seem the most suited to including measures of change over time, such as changes on measures of staff collaboration, or changes in student behaviour or student achievement. Methods for gathering evidence relevant to standards for certification should not only be reliable, they should also be authentic.

Experience indicates that porfolio project(s) should be meaningful and based as much as possible, on what prinicipals normally do. They should reflect the wholeness and seamless nature of principals' work, wherein several professional practices are always at play. It is a mistake to assess one professional practice at a time in isolation. Where possible evidence against several professional practices should be crossed at the same time. Portfolio project(s) should be based on meaningful, typical work that accomplished principals perform over time.

School leadership essentially consists of initiatives that mobilise collaborative efforts to improve specific areas of school functioning over extended periods of time. If well documented, these initiatives will normally produce a natural harvest of evidence about implementation and outcomes that can be incorporated into a portfolio entry.

For example, the standards frameworks in Table 3 highlight the important role of principals in building a positive and collaborative culture among staff. Achieving this is a rich, long-term and undoubtedly authentic task. A focus for a portfolio project might be a report based on developing and implementing a strategy for strengthening the school as a professional learning community, with a particular focus on the leadership role of the principal.

In undertaking such a project, it is likely several sources of evidence would be collected as a matter of course and as part of the job. These might include, for example, evidence about the extent to which staff meetings focus on joint reviews of students' progress, or the extent to which teachers receive feedback about their classroom performance from peers trained in classroom observation, as well as relevant measures of student outcomes. This means that the evidence in the portfolio project would be based largely on the evidence normally documented as part of effective school functioning, with only context, commentary and reflection needing to be added.

Figure 1 illustrates how completing a portfolio entry like *Building an accountable professional community* could provide evidence related to several professional practices in the Australian Principal Standard at the same time. This project would necessarily provide evidence about a principal's knowledge, interpersonal skills and ability to lead the development of their school as a professional community. The justification for this project is the research indicating that strong professional communities are associated with improved teaching and student learning outcomes.

Rather than asking principals to provide evidence related to each standard in turn, preparing an entry based on Figure 1 asks principals to draw on evidence relevant to several professional practices and thereby, preserves the "wholeness" of leadership practice. This is where evidence using several assessment methods can now be useful for measuring change or improvement, such as measures of school climate, staff collaboration and trends in student outcomes.

Figure 1: The Portfolio wheel

In summary, valid assessment processes for certification purposes should engage principals in the activities of leadership - activities that call for the application of leadership knowledge and skill. Projects should provide opportunities for candidates to provide commentary about their school context, to explain and justify their actions and to engage analysis and reflection on outcomes. As an example, these are the principles that underlay the assessment development process for NBPTS portfolio entries (Perlman 2008):

- tasks should be authentic and, therefore, complex

- tasks should be open-ended, allowing principals to show their own practice

- tasks should provide ample opportunity and encouragement for analysis and reflection

- professional knowledge and values should underlie all performances

- tasks should encourage principals to exemplify good practice

- each task should assess a cluster of standards; and

- each standard should be assessed by more than one task.

The NBPTS is currently testing the feasibility and reliability of the following set of entries that a principal would prepare for National Board Certification over a period of two to three years. Carefully constructed guidelines and questions are provided for principals. Note how the entries, as a group, hang together and provide evidence relevant to all the domains in the standards. This is essential for reliable assessment.

Entry **1**   Contextual Information and Strategic Plan: developing a strategic plan that inspires and nurtures a culture of high expectations where actions and results are aligned with vision and mission

Entry **2**   Student Efficacy and Growth: promoting student growth and achievement through student connectivity and engagement, academic rigor and student support systems

Entry **3**   Teacher Efficacy and Practice: creating a culture of teacher support and efficacy that advances student growth and achievement

Entry **4**   Parent and Community Engagement: engaging parents and community and building partnerships to support student growth and achievement

Entry **5**   Principal's Leadership, Growth and Reflection: reflecting for professional growth and effective leadership

Entry **6**   Continuous Improvement and Accountability: demonstrating accountability for high performance and continuous improvement.

Figure 2 below shows the Architecture of Accomplished Educational Leading that underpins these NBPTS portfolio entries. It provides a guide to principals as they prepare each portfolio entry and shows how performance brings together the three main strands in the NBPTS standards; values, skills and applications. It is noteworthy how the architecture covers all the standards and how they are integrated and dynamic in practice.

Figure 2: The Architecture of Accomplished Educational Leading

The Architecture of Accomplished Educational Leading triple helix illustrates the upwardly spiraling process reflective of an accomplished educational leader's practice. The three strands portray the skills, applications and dispositions as defined in the core propositions and applied through eight stages in an integrated process.

7. Celebrate successes, reflect on the opportunities for all, and inspire stakeholders inside and outside the learning community to high levels of performance.
(Leadership, Vision, Learners & Learning, Ethics, Equity, Advocacy)

8. Set new goals that build on all students' and adults' successes and needs to advance the school's mission and vision, increase growth and performance, and strengthen your leadership.
(Leadership, Vision, Learners & Learning, Equity, Advocacy)

5. Engage the broader district and community to provide resources and support interventions, system building and change to achieve the goals.
(Leadership, Vision, Management, Advocacy)

6. Assess and adjust systems and strategies to strengthen the learning culture and better achieve goals for all learners.
(Leadership, Management, Culture, Ethics, Equity, Advocacy)

3. Design, develop and deploy organizational, curricular and instructional interventions to strengthen the learning culture and achieve goals.
(Leadership, Management, Culture, Ethics, Advocacy)

4. Lead, facilitate and use interventions, resources and systems while developing stakeholder capacity to build a learning culture and achieve desired results.
(Management, Culture, Instruction, Ethics, Equity, Advocacy)

2. Engage stakeholders in setting equitable, substantial and high value goals informed by data.
(Vision, Management, Learners & Learning, Ethics, Equity, Advocacy)

1. **Your Learning Community & Your Leadership**
What is the vision/mission?
What are the goals for the learning community?
What is the context of your learning community?
Who are your stakeholders?
Where are your stakeholders in relation to the visions/mission?
What do they need or you need from them?

What are your leadership strengths?
How can you effectively lead your learning community?
How can you and your learning community achieve desired results?
(Leadership, Vision, Management, Culture, Learners & Learning, Ethics, Equity, Advocacy)

National Board for Professional Teaching, Certification for Educational Leaders
First Edition, www.nbpts.org

Final considerations

This paper should be seen as offering a starting point for discussion about how methods for assessing and evaluating principal performance and accomplishments might be established. It provides a conceptual framework that focuses on the second stage in developing a certification system after developing the content standards (the Australian Principal Standard in the Australian context). There is a further third and equally complex stage in which procedures for setting performance standards and training judges to evaluate portfolio entries will need to be established.

There are several important points to note about developing a conceptual framework for principal certification. The first is about the likely validity of the assessment process. This will clearly depend on the nature of the portfolio project(s) and their relation to the Australian Principal Standard. Projects must be authentic examples of what accomplished principals know, understand and do.

The second consideration is reliability or consistency. It is important to note that the reliability of assessment increases with the number of independent pieces of evidence about a principal's performance. Reliability also relates to the fairness of the assessment and evaluation process, which will depend in part on the quality of the assessor training.

The assessment and evaluation framework must be highly credible and will need to be established to the satisfaction of the certifying body, the profession and the public.

A typical concern about portfolio project(s) is the demand on a principal's time. The leadership work involved in completing an authentic leadership project may take a year or more, if it is to include evidence of change. The level of prestige and recognition afforded to nationally certified principals will need to make the effort worthwhile.

The NBPTS experience (Ingvarson and Hattie 2008) shows, perhaps counter-intuitively, that portfolio project(s) should be tightly structured, rather than leaving many options. A portfolio is not a curriculum vitae. It is a container into which one puts examples of one's best work. While a good portfolio scaffold should not tell a principal how to lead, it should provide a common "shell" in which each applicant is free to show how he or she meets the professional practices in his/her context. It is incumbent on assessment developers to make sure it is clear what assessors will be looking for and how they can make good choices for the content of each entry. This also helps to reduce the workload for principals and judges. Loosely structured portfolio entries will create extra work for principals and the resultant entries will be difficult to assess reliably and therefore, fairly.

Another way in which carefully structured portfolio entries limit the workload is that the evidence is based on the natural harvest of artefacts and data that an accomplished principal would gather as a matter of course in planning and evaluating projects to improve some aspect of school functioning.

It should be expected that the process is challenging, if it is to be valid and valued. The period of time from initially applying to completion may be seen as two to three years. The onus is on the principal to be actively engaged in gathering the evidence to show how they meet the Australian Principal Standard. This is not a passive performance management process in which a principal is rated by supervisors. While most methods used to assess principals are relatively undemanding in terms of time and effort, they have little validity, respect or value as sources of professional learning. However, some measures such as school climate, student achievement and 360-degree surveys could form part of the evidence included in a portfolio entry and provide useful evidence of change over time.

The NBPTS experience also shows that well-written portfolio entries provide a very effective means of professional development. Preparing an entry will engage principals in purposeful professional learning. Almost all NBPTS candidates report that the process of preparing their portfolio entries was the best professional learning experience they had ever had, even if deemed "not ready yet". If they miss out first time, most apply again.

It should be clear from these considerations that rubrics indicating levels of performance should be based on what a portfolio entry is designed to assess; that is, a clear specification about what a principal is being asked to show they can do.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are limited to those directly concerned with establishing a system for the assessment and certification of accomplished principals; not with matters related to establishing an independent national professional certification body, its constitution and governance, its membership, or the broad policy parameters that will need to be established early in its life. However, certain assumptions about certification will be made, such as the following:

- it will be voluntary

- only practising school principals will be eligible

- eligible candidates will need to have been school principals for a defined period of time

- there will be one cycle of receiving and evaluating applications each year.

As the certification body PAI will, of course, need to address many other important questions for the certification system to become fully operational. However, it will be assumed here that providing a rigorous standards-based certification system will be the body's core, distinct function. As outlined in the consultation paper *Quality leadership through principal certification*, PAI will collaborate with providers of principal professional learning to identify programs that can contribute to the Australian Principal Certification Program. It will not need to be a provider of courses, such as university courses, designed for principals to achieve certification. These will emerge as the certification gains credibility and recognition. As a rigorous certification system is a longitudinal leadership formation process, principal support centres and networks of various kinds will certainly be needed in each state and territory, providing cohorts of principals with support and assistance directly related to the preparation of portfolio entries.

Developing rigorous assessments and setting standards for national certification is complex work. Some may hope for simple, undemanding assessments, but effective school leadership is not simple. The assessment process needs to respect and reflect the sophistication and complexity in the knowledge and practice of accomplished principals. A professional certification system needs to be valid and reliable, gain public credibility and be legally defensible. Assessments for certification purposes should reflect the APPLE criteria:

- **a**dministratively feasible

- **p**rofessionally acceptable

- **p**ublicly credible

- **l**egally defensibility; and

- **e**conomically affordable.

Failure to meet any one of these criteria will threaten a certification system's chances of survival. In the case of NBPTS certification, costs have been reduced and feasibility increased significantly by the recent introduction of an electronic portfolio system. The other three criteria depend fundamentally on the validity and reliability of the assessment and evaluation system.

Recommendation **1** **That portfolio entries form the main source of evidence for assessment**

Certification focuses on performance rather than perceptions. Previous sections have provided a strong rationale for the suitability of portfolio evidence for certification purposes. Each of the professional practices in the Australian Principal Standard calls for evidence of a successful leadership initiative over a considerable period of time. No other method has the capacity to encompass the full "story" of leading and managing an initiative to improve some specified area of professional practice as well as a portfolio entry. The story might begin with a need identified in the analysis of data about student achievement or teaching practices, followed by a plan to meet that need, evidence of implementing the plan and evidence of the need being met in later data about student achievement or teaching practices. No other method has the capacity to incorporate multiple forms of evidence over time demonstrating change or improvement, or that a need has been met.

Recommendation **2** **That PAI develop an Assessment and Evaluation Framework**

The purpose of the Assessment and Evaluation Framework will be to design and field test portfolio assessments based on entries that provide valid and reliable evidence about a principal's accomplishments in relation to the professional practices and leadership requirements set out in the Australian Principal Standard.

PAI as the certification authority, in consultation with principals, would determine the number of entries, but the overall design must ensure adequate coverage of all practices and requirements in the Australian Principal Standard. Preparation of portfolio entries is complex work. It is recommended that PAI establish a team consisting of experts in standards-based performance assessment and highly regarded principals to undertake this work.

Conclusion

The recent OECD report, Synergies For Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment (OECD 2013 p45) includes a review of international trends in the assessment and evaluation of principals. The report observes that:

As countries strive to transform their educational systems to prepare all young people with the knowledge and skills needed to function in rapidly changing societies, some common policy trends can be observed in one form or another in most OECD countries, including decentralisation, school autonomy, greater accountability for outcomes and a greater knowledge management capacity. Decentralisation and school autonomy are creating a greater need for the evaluation of schools, principals and teachers while greater IT capacity allows for the development and analysis of large-scale student assessments as well as individualised assessment approaches.

This review has shown that current methods for assessing and evaluating principals based on performance management systems are not up to the challenge of promoting and recognising successful leadership practices. In a context of greater autonomy for schools, the need for systems that establish and ensure profession-wide standards will increase. A rigorous certification system is an example of such a system.

The OECD report emphasises the importance of building capacity for quality assessment and evaluation and recognises that this will require considerable investment in developing competencies and skills at all levels. In identifying main policy directions, the report also mentions the importance of ensuring strong links between principal appraisal and professional development; as well as career advancement opportunities to reward successful principals. An independent professional certification system for accomplished school principals is consistent with these policy directions.

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