



Guidance for the Selection and Support of Exemplary Principals

Under the Quality Education Investment Act

The Integrated Leadership Development Initiative (ILDI) drafted the following leadership expectations for district leaders engaged with Quality Education Investment Act (QEIA) schools. ILDI is a collaborative focused on strengthening school and district leadership in California, with representatives from the California Department of Education, California County Superintendents Educational Services Association, Association of California School Administrators, California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, California State University, and California Comprehensive Center at WestEd.

Introduction

Over the past few years, progress has been made in improving many of California's districts and schools. However, a large number of schools and districts still need special attention and support to meet national and state expectations.

The Quality Education Investment Act and Exemplary Principals

Senate Bill (SB) 1133, the Quality Education Investment Act of 2006,¹ provides \$3 billion over seven years to 488 low-performing schools to close the achievement gap. Eligible schools ranked in the lowest two deciles of the state's 2005 Academic Performance Index. Several strategies in QEIA include reducing class size, improving teacher and principal training, hiring more school counselors, and giving local school districts the flexibility to support programs that best fit their students' needs.² The law outlines significant, long-term resources that are available to QEIA sites to bolster various efforts by teachers, staff, district and site leadership, community members, and support providers to reach QEIA's goals.

Common sense and recent research indicate that quality leadership in schools contributes to improved instruction and student learning. For example, studies show that the impact of high quality leadership on student achievement is second only to that of an effective teacher,^{3,4,5} and turning around lower performing schools only takes place with effective principals.⁶ It is with this in mind that QEIA requires districts to affirm that exemplary principals are leading QEIA schools.

What Is an "Exemplary" Principal?

Low-performing schools are often some of the most complex organizations and fit varying profiles. Therefore, a single definition of an "exemplary" principal for a QEIA school is not feasible, nor is it useful. The successful principal in a low-performing school has to be more than qualified or licensed. He or she must be able to work through and with others to significantly change the vision, instructional practices, operations, family partnerships, and culture and capacity of the school community to close the achievement gap. Therefore, a robust description of what an "exemplary" principal does in working with others to achieve targeted results, and not a single definition, is needed to shape the practice and continuous improvement of successful site leaders.

"Exemplary" principal is described in this document through generalized, observable expectations for principals. The expectations are adapted from the six California Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (CPSEL), with particular emphasis on QEIA's direction and purpose. Each standard is followed by a set of expectations that indicate the principal actions needed to lead, guide, and support changes required to improve these

challenged schools. The indicators set high expectations for principals. However, the expectation of “exemplary” practice is attainable when principals serve as the “lead learners” of their schools and have sustained guidance and support from district and state leaders throughout their careers.

This Document and Its use

This document is intended as a resource for those individuals engaged in defining “exemplary” principals, as specifically mentioned in QEIA legislation. The document results from current consensus on the most critical actions required of principals leading underperforming schools toward improvement, including themes of continuous improvement, improved teaching and learning, shared responsibility and leadership, and equity and cultural responsiveness.

The expectations in the document are not intended as a checklist or a “pass/fail inventory.” Rather, they are a set of research-based and best practices for district leaders to use to initiate discussions as they define district expectations within their own context and school improvement goals.

Furthermore, this document is not meant as a tool to evaluate principals. Rather, these standards and expectations provide guidance for district leaders to determine selection and assignment of principals, professional learning needs and opportunities, and coaching and support systems that result in principals continuously improving their performance. This guidance is critical because QEIA places accountability for “exemplary” principals squarely on district superintendents. There is no state monitoring for this QEIA provision.

This document, then, provides district leaders with a targeted and aligned perspective on leadership expectations for principals in underperforming schools and QEIA schools. Using the CPSEL as a foundation for QEIA expectations brings both clarity and coherence to a statewide effort to build and support strong principals in all of California’s districts and schools – including those participating in QEIA.

Standards and Expectations for Exemplary Principals

Adapted from the California Professional Standards for Educational Leaders

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students through the following standards of practice:

Standard 1

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.

To achieve Standard 1, an exemplary principal:

1. Facilitates the development of, communicates, and implements a shared vision and mission for the achievement of all students and subgroups of students.
2. Shapes school programs, plans, and activities to ensure that they are coherent, integrated, articulated through the grades, aligned with school and district goals, and consistent with the vision.
3. Maintains lifelong learning for himself or herself and others at the core of professional practice, including awareness of current research and proven practices.
4. Uses systems thinking and open communication to establish a clear focus on attaining student achievement goals that staff, students, parents, and the community share and understand.

Standard 2

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.

To achieve Standard 2, an exemplary principal:

1. Shapes a culture where high expectations for all students and for all subgroups of students constitute the core purpose.

2. Creates and supports an accountability system focused on learning, grounded in standards-based instruction, and driven by an ongoing process of collaborative inquiry at the site and grade-level/department levels.
3. Promotes student learning through the support of instructional practices that are culturally responsive and relevant to the student population.
4. Facilitates and ensures the continuous professional growth of teachers and support staff as part of a comprehensive professional development plan aligned to school goals.
5. Understands what constitutes effective teaching practices for all represented student subgroups and uses this knowledge to develop, support, monitor, and evaluate staff in a manner that promotes and supports successful teaching and learning.
6. Evaluates program effectiveness based on quantitative and qualitative student achievement data and uses this information to continuously evaluate and revise the school plan.
7. Understands and builds the capacity of the school community to implement California's nine Essential Program Components.
8. Facilitates and supports the use of technology as a tool to monitor progress, organize and analyze data, and support student learning.
9. Promotes improved attendance rates among all groups of students and improved graduation rates among all groups of high school students.

Standard 3

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

To achieve Standard 3, an exemplary principal:

1. Sustains a safe, efficient, clean, well-maintained, personalized, and productive school environment that ensures student learning and supports the continuous professional growth of himself or herself, teachers, and support staff.
2. Aligns fiscal, human, and material resources and organizational time with school improvement priorities to support academic coherence and programs that result in the learning of all students and subgroups of students.
3. Utilizes effective systems management, organizational development, problem solving, and decision-making techniques.
4. Manages legal and contractual agreements and records in ways that foster a professional work environment and secure privacy and confidentiality for all students and staff.

Standard 4

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.

To achieve Standard 4, an exemplary principal:

1. Recognizes and respects the goals, aspirations, and cultures of diverse family and community groups and includes these stakeholders in decision-making and school improvement activities.
2. Communicates to parents and guardians on a regular basis, providing information about school status, teacher qualifications, student progress, and other relevant information.
3. Supports the equitable success of all students and all subgroups of students through the mobilization and leveraging of external partnerships and community support services.
4. Plans and implements targeted family outreach, involvement, and education initiatives.

Standard 5

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by modeling a personal code of ethics and developing professional leadership capacity.

To achieve Standard 5, an exemplary principal:

1. Models personal and professional ethics, integrity, justice, and fairness and expects the same behaviors from others.
2. Makes and communicates decisions based on student needs, relevant data, and research about successful teaching and learning, effective leadership and management practices, and issues of equity.
3. Facilitates and manages change, open communication, and collaborative problem solving in a manner that promotes staff and community support.
4. Creates a working environment that promotes staff satisfaction and retention, including support for planning and collaboration, professional development, and opportunities for shared leadership and decision-making.
5. Reflects on personal leadership practices, recognizes their impact and influence on the performance of others, and seeks professional development to strengthen those practices.

Standard 6

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

To achieve Standard 6, an exemplary principal:

1. Works with the governing board, district and local leaders, and associations to influence and advocate for policies that benefit all students.
2. Influences and supports public policies that ensure the equitable distribution of resources and support for all students and subgroups of students.
3. Ensures that the school operates consistently within the parameters of federal, state, and local laws, policies, regulations, and statutory requirements.
4. Opens the school to the public; encourages public participation; and welcomes and facilitates constructive, ongoing, two-way communication with key decision-makers in the school and greater community.

End Notes

¹ SB 1133 established the Quality Education Investment Act of 2006 for the purpose of implementing the Proposition 98 settlement agreement between the California Teachers Association, et al. v. Schwarzenegger, et al.

² QEIA online. Retrieved May 28, 2008, from <http://www.qeia.org/about/about.html>.

³ Leithwood, K., Seashore Louis, K., Anderson, S. & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How leadership influences student learning*. New York, New York: Wallace Foundation. Retrieved May 28, 2008, from <http://www.wallacefoundation.org>.

⁴ Marzano, R., Waters, T., & McNulty, B. (2003). *Balanced leadership: What 30 years of research tells us about the effect of leadership on student achievement*. Aurora, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning.

⁵ Marzano, R., Waters, T., & McNulty, B. (2005). *School leadership that works: From research to results*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

⁶ Leithwood K., Day, C., Sammons, P., & Hopkins, D. (2006). *Seven strong claims about successful school leadership*. Nottingham, England: National College of School Leadership.