

4. ASSESSING PARTICIPANT LEARNING AND PROGRAM COMPLETION

High quality evaluation of principal preparation programs examines inputs, processes, outputs, and outcomes. These components are depicted in the evaluation pathway framework below.

Evaluation Pathway for Leadership Preparation Programs (adapted from [UCEA, 2013](#)):



This paper is part of a [series](#) documenting lessons learned by New Leaders in utilizing this framework to guide internal evaluation of its Aspiring Principals Program (APP). The paper focuses on the third step in the pathway, participant learning and program completion.

Assessing candidates to determine whether they have learned the material taught by the program should be an important element of any leadership development program. Although assessments that take the form of a “test” can effectively measure latent knowledge, performance-based assessments that require participants to demonstrate their ability to enact effective leadership practices in authentic setting are preferable for determining whether participants have acquired leadership skills.

All of New Leaders’ assessments are performance-based. They consist of three unique assignments that participants carry out two times each in their residency site twice for a total of six assignments. For example, one assignment is to conduct a 10-15 minute mini-observation of one of their primary teachers, collecting literal notes and student actions. Residents then analyze their notes, prepare and hold a coaching session where they provide feedback to the observed teacher, and debrief the coaching session with a faculty member. These assessments serve formative and summative purposes. The local program director provides participants with detailed feedback during learning meetings to enable participants to continuously improve. The assignments and learning meetings are designed to provide evidence related to each of the program standards and competencies (which are listed in the next section of this paper). All of the scores from assignments are factored into summative decisions regarding whether a participant should be endorsed for the principalship, but scores from the second implementation of the assignments are double weighted to encourage and value growth.

In the past, New Leaders has utilized different assessments for formative and summative purposes. We found, however, that this approach overly burdened the program participants and the directors charged with scoring. We also narrowed the assignments from 12 assignments down to three assignments. The three assignments are carried out twice for a total of six assignments, but the smaller number of assignments has enabled more rigorous training and norming for scoring.

SUMMARY OF NEW LEADERS APPROACH TO ASSESSING PARTICIPANTS

The following chart summarizes the indicators and data sources that New Leaders uses to track the three sets of participant characteristics.

| Participant Learning and Program Completion | Indicators Used by NL | Data Sources Used by NL |
|---|--|--|
| Participant Learning | NL Standards and Competencies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal leadership • Instructional leadership • Cultural leadership • Adult and team leadership | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residency Assignments • Learning Meetings |
| Program Completion | Minimum requirements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend all national and local sessions, program meetings, and virtual sessions • Attend two monthly meetings with Program Director at residency site • Attend all learning meetings • Complete individualized learning plan • Complete all program assignments • Ensure completion of midyear and end-of-year 360 survey | Minimum requirement checklist |
| Endorsement for Principalship | Endorsement decision (typically 85% of program completers are endorsed as ready for the principalship). Decisions are based on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum requirements • Participant learning of competencies • School and teacher outcomes | Participant records (stored on Salesforce platform) |

RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON LESSONS LEARNED

Recommendations based on New Leaders' experiences regarding assessing program participants are:

- Make **design assumptions** about participant assessment explicit. For example, is growth or final scores a better measure of participants' potential as a principal?
- For any assessment, it is important to **maximize the variability in scoring** (especially in the case of rubric scoring) by 4 including scales that include at least points. New Leaders currently uses a rubric scoring framework with 7 seven points.
- To **ensure inter-rater reliability and consistency of assessment and scoring**, programs should provide thorough rater training and engage in continuous quality assurance activities. The process to norm scorers should include group norming activities, followed up with individual norming sessions, and accompanied by clear scoring guides. The levels of the rubric should be consistent across each standard and should include very objective, concrete language to facilitate consistent scoring. For purposes of quality assurance and feedback, scoring activities should also include compilation of evidence to support the numerical score. The evidence that connects the participants' behavior, skills, or knowledge to the particular score on the rubrics should be noted.
- Programs need to find a **balance between formative and summative assessment**. As with any assessment, over-reliance on summative assessments places a great deal of weight on end-of-year practices without providing sufficient feedback throughout the year to participants, and without the participants being set up for success by having experienced lower-stakes assessments. Conversely, an over-reliance on formative assessments does not provide a comprehensive snapshot of participants that would be useful for determining success in the program or be useful for communicating to potential employers. A balance between the two formats translates to dispersed workload (for participants and scorers), a consistent schedule of feedback, and multiple opportunities to learn and develop.
- **Invest in data systems** with the necessary identifiers that will allow programs to link participant assessment scores with other data sources and outcomes. New Leaders uses the Salesforce platform to store, manage and retrieve participant data.

REFERENCES

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