Improving Leadership for Learning

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Leadership Assessment

Purposes, Uses, and Practices of Leadership Assessment in Education

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This report is one of a series produced by a research team at the Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, a national research consortium home-based at the University of Washington. Developed with support from The Wallace Foundation during the early stages of an initiative that explores central issues in the exercise of educational leadership, the reports synthesize studies, conceptual work, and examples of current and emerging practice.

The reports are intended to clarify each leadership issue, while assembling what is known from empirical studies. The information in these reports lays the groundwork for further study and practical experimentation by leaders and reformers in states, districts, and schools.

The first report offers an overview of leadership and leadership support in relation to the overarching goal of improving learning. The remaining six explore in more detail particular issues within that terrain.

This document and the others within the series can be downloaded free of charge from the Center's Web site, **www.ctpweb.org**, and also from The Wallace Foundation's Knowledge Center site, **www.wallacefoundation.org.**

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Introduction: Understanding the Purposes, Uses, and Practices of Leadership Assessment

The evaluation of school and district leaders' performance has a long history, primarily in the realm of personnel evaluation. In that regard, school and district systems have long made use of relatively simple devices—an annual visit by a superintendent, a checklist of behaviors, a formal review at the time of contract renewal—to render a "report card" on the work of individuals in traditional administrative positions. The purpose of the activity has generally been summative: to assert and maintain some accountability for the leaders' work; to justify hiring, firing, reassignment; or to inform the renewal of an administrative contract.

As valid and reliable *assessments* of the leaders' work, these devices generally fall far short of accepted standards in the measurement field; work samples are skimpy or nonexistent, "measurement" (if it can be called that) is largely retrospective, and the assessment tends to rely on leadership traits or characteristics (inputs) rather than meaningful measures of the results of leaders' work (outcomes) (e.g. Bridges, 1982; Davis, 2005; Ginsberg & Thompson, 1992; Goertz & Duffy, 2001; Hood, 1998; Heck & Marcoulides, 1992). What is more, the assessments tend to be poorly aligned, if at all, with priorities for educational practice and improvement in a given locale (e.g., Heck 1993, 2000; Linn, 2000; Louden & Wildy, 1999; Marcoulides, Larsen, & Heck 1995; Stiggins & Duke, 1985). As such, these "assessments" beg several basic and essential questions. What is the reference point for assessing leaders' "successful" performance—a standard of "good" leadership practice, the contribution to student achievement, the nature of the context in which leaders work, the stage of a leader's career, or all of these? What purposes should and can the assessment of leaders serve? How, in pursuit of these purposes, can the process of leadership assessment or the data it produces be used ? And what assessment practices serve these purposes and uses best?

Over the past decade, the education field has moved rapidly toward answers to some of these questions. Standards for leadership practice developed by such groups as the Interstate School Leaders' Licensure Consortium (ISLLC)

or professional associations have been widely disseminated. These standards and the larger accountability systems to which they relate have focused increasingly on results rather than inputs (Davis, 2005; Murphy, 2003). Reformers as well as the developers of standards have begun to connect the assessment of leaders' work to school improvement initiatives. And as a result, scholars have worked hard on identifying how educational leaders' efforts might influence student learning—widely assumed by reformers, the public, and leaders themselves to be the ultimate reference point for leaders' work

The work of identifying clear connections between leadership and student learning, however, is complicated and far from complete. While many people have pointed to leadership as an essential element in improving schools and increasing student academic achievement, the relationship between what leaders do and how students perform has been hard to establish (e.g., Leithwood, Jantzi, 1999; Marks & Printy, 2003; Witzers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003). That said, evidence accumulating across several decades demonstrates convincing links—mostly indirect, though some direct—between school leaders' actions and learning outcomes (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Other scholarship has begun to establish a parallel set of links between student learning outcomes and leadership at the district level (e.g., Murphy & Hallinger, 1988; Peterson, 1999). Paralleling these empirical studies is a stream of theoretical and conceptual work on the nature of school leadership and its possible links to learning (e.g., Elmore, 2000; Stoll, Fink, & Earl, 2003; Knapp, Copland, & Talbert, 2003), which has helped to broaden conceptions of "learning-focused leadership" and "instructional leadership," who might exercise it, and how they might do it.

This growing body of scholarship implies that the exercise of leadership aimed at the improvement of leadership performance is an important target of assessment. Yet the attributes, knowledge, or skills of individual leaders on which leadership assessment systems tend to focus are only weak proxies for these targets. *Leadership*, often exercised by more than one individual, is what guides practice in schools and ultimately affects learning outcomes (e.g., Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004; Bryk, Camburn, & Louis, 1999).

With increasing clarity about what is to be assessed (the ways in which the exercise of leadership affects learning) and with what end in mind (the improvement of leadership performance), the stage is set for the assessment of

leadership performance to play an increasingly important role in the ongoing effort to improve teaching and learning (Supovitz & Poglinco, 2001). Especially at this time of high-stakes testing and increased accountability, school, district, and state leaders, as well as others, need useful information about what in their practice supports or obstructs the general health of the school or district and its improvement initiatives. Specifically, leaders and other stakeholders in public education need greater insight into the ways that their leadership practice meets federal, state, and local expectations; creates conditions for good schooling; and contributes to student achievement. Appropriately nuanced and interpreted assessment information about leadership performance can help various audiences, starting with the leaders themselves, achieve these ends.

This paper clarifies the purposes and uses to which leadership assessment is—or can be—put and notes the implications for leadership assessment practices throughout educational systems. We accomplish this goal by drawing together literature that deals with personnel evaluations, professional learning, accountability, and the relation of leadership to learning. We pay special attention to the relatively small number of actual studies of assessment in action and to related literatures that help to conceptualize or offer evidence of the ways that assessment fits into leadership practice (Huff, 2006). At the same time, we do not concern ourselves with the technical details of assessment design, as these are being extensively dealt with by others engaged in the redesign of assessment instruments and systems.[1] In the same vein, we spend little time reviewing the body of writing offering advice and tools for leadership assessment (e.g., Bottoms & O'Neal, 2001; Reeves, 2004; Lambert, 1998; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2006; Sparks, 2000; SREB, 2004). Rather, our focus is on empirical literature that informs how leadership assessment is or can be used in relation to learning improvement.

The paper unfolds as follows. To anchor our discussion to leaders' daily work, we first offer several scenarios that highlight underlying issues in the assessment of leadership performance. Following that, we conceptualize the purposes and uses of leadership assessment and suggest how local, state, and national conditions both guide and complicate assessment practices. Next, we characterize a range of current assessment practices, noting developmental trends and emerging practices that seek to establish more comprehensive and constructive patterns of assessment use. Finally, we discuss unanswered

questions prompted by current and emerging practice, in light of the framing ideas, while acknowledging enduring dilemmas that will always be present in the act of leadership assessment.

Leadership Assessment in Action: A Few Examples

Three scenarios ground this topic in concrete concerns. Consider first this situation in which an elementary school principal in a large urban district finds herself:

> The principal is awaiting the arrival of the area superintendent, a person who is responsible for 35 schools in the southwest quadrant of this city district. It is time for the principal's annual review, and she is not looking forward to it. Evaluation in her view is mostly a negative experience, which generates relatively little information of use to her, beyond establishing that she can keep her job and is well regarded downtown. Not that this principal is particularly fearful. She feels like she has done a reasonably competent, though not stellar, job. The school gained a little (very little) ground in last spring's testing, and there have been few crises that required the attention of those in the district office in the last six months. And this principal has made new efforts to improve her instructional leadership in response to the districtwide mandate that principals spend more time with their teachers. In fact, she has engaged a number of teachers in a new kind of conversation about professional "growth cycles," a practice that seems to have some promise. The area superintendent is usually quite prompt and businesslike; this session will probably not even take an hour, and it will be followed within three weeks by a formal letter acknowledging strengths, weaknesses, and concerns. As she waits, this principal gives little thought to her own growth cycle, a concept which has hardly occurred to her. As she sees it, she receives all the feedback she could ever handle in the daily complaints, comments, and responses from parents, teachers, and students …

The assessment of this leader's performance is conceived and executed very narrowly. It presumes that what matters about the leader's influence on school conditions and outcomes can be known from a short conversation, supplemented by the flow of routine information to the central office across the year. It is carried out annually and has the limited purpose of ascertaining whether there is a "problem" or, conversely, some noteworthy performance that deserves special commendation. In between, where most leaders' performance lies, is a gray area that begs for more thoughtful examination over time, and where clues lie for what could be done to improve the leaders' performance in significant ways. It is ironic that the principal has begun to visualize what such an assessment process might offer to her teachers but has never made the leap to her own work.

What is taking place in this scenario is captured schematically in Table 1, in terms of the assessment's purposes, practice, uses, and likely contribution to improvement.

Table 1. Diagramming the Principal's Annual Evaluation

PURPOSE What purpose(s) does the assessment serve? Whose purposes does it serve?	PRACTICE Who participates and how? What information is collected?	USES How are the assessment data interpreted and used? By whom?	LIKELY CONTRIBUTION TO IMPROVEMENT How will this assessment prompt the improvement of leadership practice and, ultimately, teaching and learning?
Assessment satisfies personnel policy requirements for annual evaluation Assessment asserts overall control of personnel by district officials	District official (assessor) evaluates principal (assessee), based on information from a brief annual conversation, commentary about the school, and other existing records of the school	Assessment maintains an official, cumulative record of employee's performance, potentially justifying personnel actions and verifying that the employee has been "supervised" Assessment process communicates to principal who is "in charge"	Assessment contributes little if anything to leaders' attempts to improve her own practice, nor to others' efforts to guide or assist her

Another scenario illustrates an assessment process that develops a more multifaceted picture of leadership in action and seeks explicitly to guide change in leadership practices:

This urban high school has failed to meet the federally mandated Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for two years. As part of the new statewide school improvement initiative, largely funded by federal dollars to improve student achievement, this school is visited by a five-member audit team made up of working and retired school and district leaders from other school districts. The audit team interviews all the adults in the school, either individually or in focus groups, and conducts focus groups with students and parents. The team also interviews district personnel, reviews leadership artifacts, and observes all school activities for three days. At the end of three days, the audit team writes a comprehensive report addressing a complex rubric for leadership, instruction, and professional development practices. A major section of this report concerns the quality of leadership in the school, and it addresses the way leadership is exercised by many individuals (principals, assistant principals, department heads, and several teacher leaders). A month later, the leader of the audit team returns to the school to present the audit findings to the staff and school administrators. The audit report is distributed to the superintendent, the school board, the principal, and all of the teachers in the school. Along with the assessment report, the school is given a school improvement facilitator for three years and $50,000 a year to develop and implement a school improvement plan that directly addresses the findings in the audit report. The state expects regular progress reports on the steps taken to get the school back on track.

In this scenario, assessment of leadership is subsumed within the assessment of the school's performance—a far cry from the limited evaluation of an individual administrator illustrated by the first scenario. Taken together, the assessment data and the findings they produce serve a number of purposes: determining how the school and also the school leader measure up to external

standards of performance; identifying where improvement is most needed in the school, including in the exercise of leadership itself; guiding improvement planning, thereby structuring the leaders' approaches to the improvement process; and offering a means for monitoring improvement. Each of these purposes combines leadership assessment data with other information about the school's functioning, and implicitly connects leadership more closely to overall school performance.

This assessment scenario differs in other fundamental respects, and its outcome is uncertain. The audit process has been prompted by perceived school failure, and it represents a substantial investment of resources (here, state funds) in an effort to improve the school. It remains to be seen, however, whether the externally imposed character of this assessment system and the circumstances that prompted it will succeed in engaging the school's leaders and staff in the needed improvement activity. Nonetheless, as noted in Table 2, the assessment process takes aim in a more central way at the improvement of leadership practice and does so with a richer information base than is usually available to educators in the midst of their daily practice.

Table 2. Diagramming the High School's Improvement Audit

PURPOSE What purpose(s) does the assessment serve? Whose purposes does it serve?	PRACTICE Who participates and how? What information is collected?	USES How are the assessment data interpreted and used? By whom?	LIKELY CONTRIBUTION TO IMPROVEMENT How will this assessment prompt the improvement of leadership practice and, ultimately, teaching and learning?
Assessment seeks to determine current leadership activities, staff perceptions of leadership, and schoolwide needs for leadership in a school that is demonstrably struggling	A team of outside experts (assessors) evaluates principal and school staff (assessees), based on information from systematic interviews and focus group data from various stakeholders, review of school records, three-day on-site observations, and student performance records over time	Assessment documents the current state of practice and, in relation to a rubric for improved practice, offers guidelines, incentives, and assistance for improving leaders' and others' practices Assessment process communicates explicit expectations for leaders' work	Assessment charts a path for improvement and seeks to motivate school staff to proceed along that path Though the external push for improvement may be resisted, the clear expectations, attention, and resources for improvement may facilitate improvement efforts, and possibly outcomes

A final scenario acknowledges the public face of leadership assessment in a situation with a different set of leadership assessment issues:

The school board in a district with nine middle schools is curious whether the superintendent's initiative is working. The initiative is keyed to the ISLLC standards and is intended to expand and improve the professional development support for the principals of these schools. The board asks for data that would demonstrate the payoff of this substantial investment in something that does not appear to be serving students directly. The superintendent creates an Assessment Task Force, composed of Testing and Assessment Office staff, an outside consultant, and a high school principal. This group decides to have principals document various things about their daily work with teachers, along with data about their participation in the professional development series, time spent with "buddy" principals, and participation in an ongoing principals' study group. Mindful that it is often difficult to show direct connections between professional development and change in student achievement scores, the task force is devising a teacher survey that would get at changes in school climate, improvements (if any) in administrators' support for teaching, and other features of these schools that teachers attribute to their principals' efforts. The task force hopes the survey results and other documentation will convince the board that student learning is likely to improve. The superintendent is crossing her fingers about the outcome of this assessment process.

Here, the assessment of leadership performance serves yet another goal: convincing external stakeholders that investments in principal support are actually improving the quality of leadership and ultimately the quality of schooling. These are not easy things to demonstrate, as the scenario account implies, and yet some demonstration of impact on leadership quality is needed to retain the support of a public audience on whom the whole enterprise of public schooling in this community depends. Whether the task force has chosen the most effective way to carry out the assessment is open to question, but at least they are considering a variety of data that offer multiple vantage

points on the impacts of the principals and the implications for teaching and learning in the middle schools.

Each of these scenarios represents an orientation toward leadership assessment that produces different information about school leadership for a variety of purposes and for different people to use. Aligning purposes, practices, and uses with each other, and with the ultimate goal of improvement in leadership, classroom teaching, and student learning, creates a potentially powerful role that assessment can play in the development of effective schooling.

Understanding Leadership Assessment

Understanding the purposes, uses, and practice of leadership assessment in these scenarios—and in the full range of assessment situations within public education settings—starts by clarifying what the ultimate target of leadership assessment might be. With that in mind, we identify the different functions that leadership assessment can play in relation to that target within educational systems and educational reform, and we note implications of these functions for leadership assessment practices. We then consider how the expectations, guidance, and support shape the ways that leadership assessment is designed and carried out and affect its ultimate contribution to learning and organizational health.

Assessment Target: The Exercise of Leadership in Relation to Learning

This way of framing leadership assessment proceeds from the premise that the *target* of leadership assessment is the exercise of leadership, often by individuals but also in some instances by leadership teams, *in relation to learning and learning improvement*. As we and others have argued elsewhere, the business of leadership is ultimately about learning, and not just the learning of the students served by the schools (Copland & Knapp, 2006; Stoll, Fink, & Earl, 2003). It also concerns the learning of the professionals who staff schools, districts, and other agencies, as well as the learning of the educational system itself, as it develops more coherent and effective ways of serving students (Stein & Nelson, 2003). In this view, learning is not the same as achievement, although the latter is subsumed within the former.

We assume further that what is learned and how it is learned, by students, professionals, and the system, can be described as more or less powerful—that is, offering challenging opportunities to deepen knowledge and master habits of mind that will enable further growth and enhance prospects for leading fulfilling lives. In addition, learning may vary in how equitable it is—that is, how equally it offers opportunities for learners whose backgrounds differ from each other in many ways.

Needless to say, assessment activities in the previous scenarios do not all proceed from the same premise. The annual personnel evaluation in the

first scenario is not about learning at all, except in the limited sense that the assistant superintendent might notice if test scores were going down. And the learning of the principal herself is far from the minds of both the assessor and the assessee. By contrast, assessment practices in the latter two scenarios appear to embrace a more robust conception of the learning, and how to guide it. In particular, the learning of various school leaders and other professionals is included, and a variety of indicators of learning and performance—of students, professionals, and the school as a whole—are under consideration. While the scenarios are not detailed enough to indicate in more precise terms what the assessors consider learning to include, they are at least suggestive of a breadth of concern for the kinds of learning that good schooling might entail.

Yet the actual target of leadership assessment is more than learning itself, however construed. We find it helpful to identify three aspects of the exercise of leadership that are appropriate targets for assessment: (1) who leaders are and what they bring to their work, (2) leadership practice itself, and (3) its effects on learning:

- *What leaders bring to their work.* Leaders approach their work in schools with their own experience base; beliefs; knowledge; images of what learning can look like for students, professionals, and the system itself; and notions of how their efforts can affect that learning. A host of influences have shaped this leadership set, including but also far exceeding experiences in formal leadership preparation programs (e.g., Tyack, 1976; Duke & Iwanicki, 1992; Heck, 1993; Darling-Hammond et al., 2005).

- *Leadership practice.* When in schools and districts, leaders take action to manage their organization, guide teaching and learning, and handle the intricate balance of interests in an institution serving a pluralistic public. Their actions reflect a burgeoning set of roles and responsibilities, not all of which are concerned with teaching and learning (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, & Gundlach, 2003; Portin, Alejano, Knapp, & Marzolf, 2006).

- *Leadership influences on learning.* Both directly and indirectly, leaders' actions can and do have various impacts on learning (Knapp, Copland, & Talbert, 2003), as an accumulating body of empirical studies are beginning to demonstrate (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood &

Riehl, 2003; Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). As such, the extent and nature of the leaders' effects on student, professional, and system learning are a central input into the leadership assessment process.

A simple figure (Figure 1) hints at the dynamic relation among these elements in the exercise of leadership.

Figure 1. Assessment Target: The Excercise of Leadership

The Exercise of School Leadership in Relation to Learning

| **Leaders:**
What they bring to their work,
and what they learn
about and from it | ⟷ | **Leadership
practice** | ⟷ | **Leadership influences**
on student, professional,
and system learning |

Leadership Assessment Functions

With such a target in mind, leadership assessment can serve three distinct, yet potentially related, functions in educational systems: personnel management, professional development, and organizational improvement. Each represents different purposes for leadership assessment, leads to different forms of assessment practice, and emphasizes different potential uses for the results of such assessments.

Assessment as a formal tool for personnel management. As the first scenario indicates, albeit in a distinctly limited sense, leadership assessment is a basic tool of personnel management (e.g., Baldridge, 1998; Bridges & Groves, 1999; Boyd & Crowson, 1981; Boodoo, 1998; Davis & Hensley, 1999; Heck & Glasman, 1993; Hood 1998; Stronge & Tucker, 1999; Stronge & Dipaola, 2001). Though this form of assessment can often mean a relatively perfunctory exercise, as in the scenario, various assessment tools and processes can be used to strengthen quality control, the deployment of human resources, and the supervision of staff (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007). In practice, the process often involves goal-setting activities that school leaders engage in with their supervisors followed by attempts to gather evidence of goal attainment, in a manner prescribed by state or district policy and collectively bargained

agreements. Often focused on particular behaviors or more generalized skills and dispositions, the results of these assessments are used in a variety of personnel decisions concerning hiring, (re)assignment, compensation, promotion, rewards or sanctions, contract renewal, mentoring, and professional growth planning. For these ends, the assessment of leaders may also be intended to identify learning needs at varying leadership career stages. Many school systems establish performance pathways, establishing different levels of support and accountability based on experience, past performance, and the particular challenge the school may present.

Assessment as a guide for professional learning. Though some formal personnel assessments may seek to inform the growth and learning of leaders, a wider class of assessment tools and systems contributes to a career-long professional learning process (Argyris & Schön, 1996; Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Russo, 2004). In this regard, assessment provides a feedback loop that completes a learning cycle (Schön, 1983), along with evidence that supports the claim that assessees have accomplished what they set out to do. Increasingly found in leaders' participation within professional learning communities, various forms of informal as well as formal assessment bring evidence to bear on leaders' efforts to develop their skills (e.g., how to handle student data wisely, how to work with a multicultural community) or conceptual knowledge (e.g., what good literacy teaching consists of, what democratic participation means in schools). The leader as learner takes in feedback, imagines what it reveals about progress made or new areas for learning, and establishes different sets of learning aims. This feedback is not necessarily public but is part of the individuals' efforts to make sense of their own learning.

Formal and informal assessments aimed at professional learning are meant to play a substantial role in the second scenario. The initial audit establishes a performance baseline—for leaders, staff, and the school as a whole—and subsequent assistance efforts and resources are brought to bear on aspects of practice that are deemed in need of improvement. Further feedback on these aspects of performance will happen both formally and informally. While the imposed character of this professional learning agenda in the context of formally declared school failure may or may not be conducive to learning for the high school staff, the audit process and its aftermath have at least envisioned an ongoing role for feedback on the quality of leadership and

other aspects of the school's performance. One could imagine other scenarios, in which school staff put in place such feedback systems long before an audit was called for, perhaps forestalling the need for an audit ever to occur.

Assessment as an instrument in a larger strategy of organizational improvement. In the second scenario, and to an extent in the third, leadership assessment is part of a process of determining how well the school or district as an organization is working and how it can be improved. Here, the focus of assessment shifts from leaders to leadership, often with attention to the collective contributions that individuals in a team or "distributed" arrangement are making to organizational performance and health. Sometimes, this kind of assessment may concentrate on designated leaders (e.g., principal, assistant principals, or department heads in a school; the superintendent or other officials in a district central office) and their effectiveness at leading the school or central office community. In other instances, leadership assessment that aims at organizational improvement seeks to capture more comprehensively the will and capacity of the entire school community (including its leaders) to embrace an improvement agenda, for example, through community and climate surveys, program audits, self-studies, or other means. The school inspection system in England through the office for Standards in Education illustrates an elaborate form of this kind of organizationally focused assessment. It uses:

> … [a] process of evidence gathering in order to provide an assessment of how well a school is performing. Inspections are short and focused, and dialogue with senior managers in the school plays a central part. The school's self evaluation provides the starting point for inspectors, and account is taken of the views of pupils, parents and other stakeholders. Inspections are conducted by a lead inspector (HMI or AI) and a team of inspectors and must result in a written report. (Ofsted, 2006)

Assessment of organizational performance may not single out leaders, however, as in accountability systems that focus attention on learning improvement goals through publicly reported indicators of organizational performance (e.g., results of student assessments). While meant as an assessment of student learning, the public nature of these systems means that school and

district leaders pay close attention to these measures and how they represent the performance of their respective institutions (Goertz & Duffy, 2001; Supovitz & Poglinco, 2001). As such, these measures provide incentives for leaders to ensure that the schools meet standard. In this case, assessment serves as a lever for change by moving school practice into a public space where educators will assume responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning in their schools (Luhm, Foley, & Corcoran, 1998; Spiri, 2001). In this same spirit, some assessments seek to capture leaders' performance directly so as to encourage compliance with reform mandates, establish benchmarks to measure improvement (or value added), and even reward leaders when turnaround in achievement patterns takes place in their school.

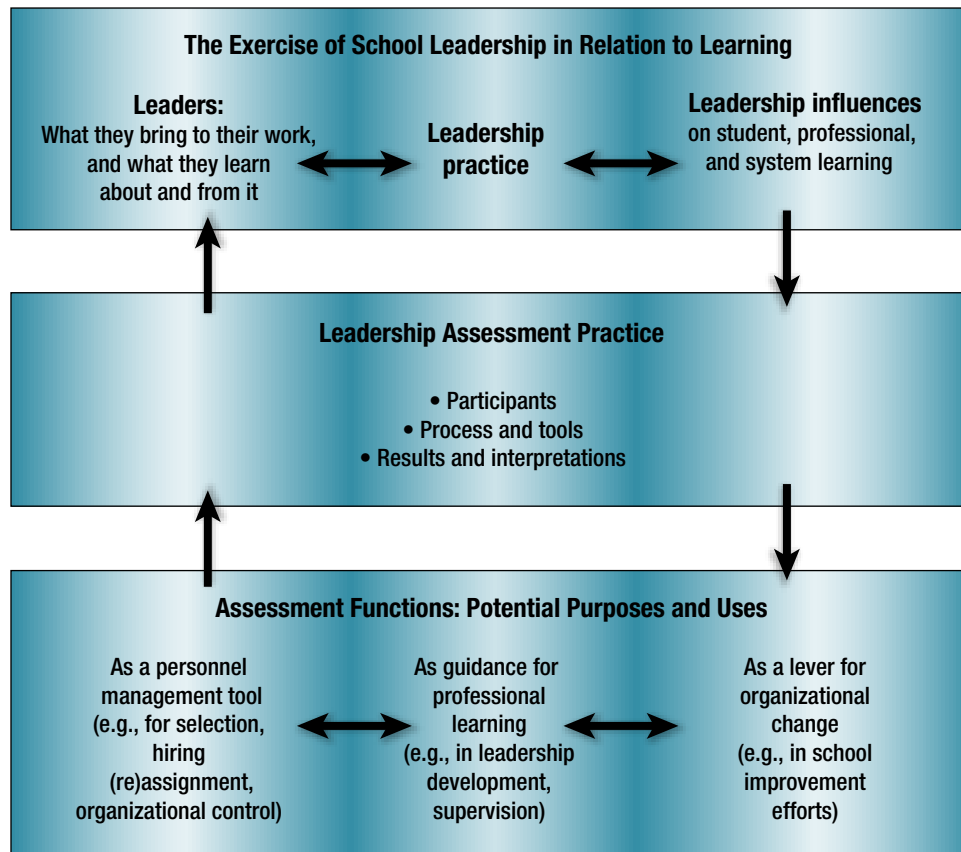## Implications for Leadership Assessment Practice

The function that a leadership assessment plays and the intended purposes and uses for it have many implications for the nature of the assessment practice itself, as Figure 2 schematically suggests.

In particular, the function affects who participates (as assessors, assessees, and users of assessment results), what kinds of assessment processes and tools are used, and what kinds of data and interpretations are likely to result from the assessment process. Here, a wide range of processes and assessment tools may come into play, as we discuss later in this report, and they vary tremendously in their technical capacity to represent leaders' work validly, reliably, and in other ways that affect the quality and usefulness of measurement (e.g., Heck & Marcoulides, 1992; Snyder & Ebmeier, 1992). While it is not our purpose in this paper to discuss these technical aspects of the design of assessment systems, it is worth noting that the functions leadership assessment are to play may alter the criteria and terms for considering what a "good" assessment process may be.

Figure 2 underscores one other way that leadership assessments, serving different functions, may vary. This is represented in the feedback given to leaders about their practices and the influence they may be having, signified by the upward pointing arrows, which may be extensive (as in the second scenario) or very limited (as in the first scenario). This feedback may also be aimed at other audiences (as in the third scenario) in ways that can affect leaders and leadership practice more indirectly. For obvious reasons, the kind and extent

of feedback have important ramifications for the likely contribution that leadership assessment may make to learning and organizational improvement.

Figure 2. Leadership Assessment Functions and Practices

The Exercise of School Leadership in Relation to Learning

Leaders:
What they bring to their work, and what they learn about and from it

⟷

Leadership practice

⟷

Leadership influences
on student, professional, and system learning

Leadership Assessment Practice

• Participants
• Process and tools
• Results and interpretations

Assessment Functions: Potential Purposes and Uses

As a personnel management tool (e.g., for selection, hiring (re)assignment, organizational control)

⟷

As guidance for professional learning (e.g., in leadership development, supervision)

⟷

As a lever for organizational change (e.g., in school improvement efforts)
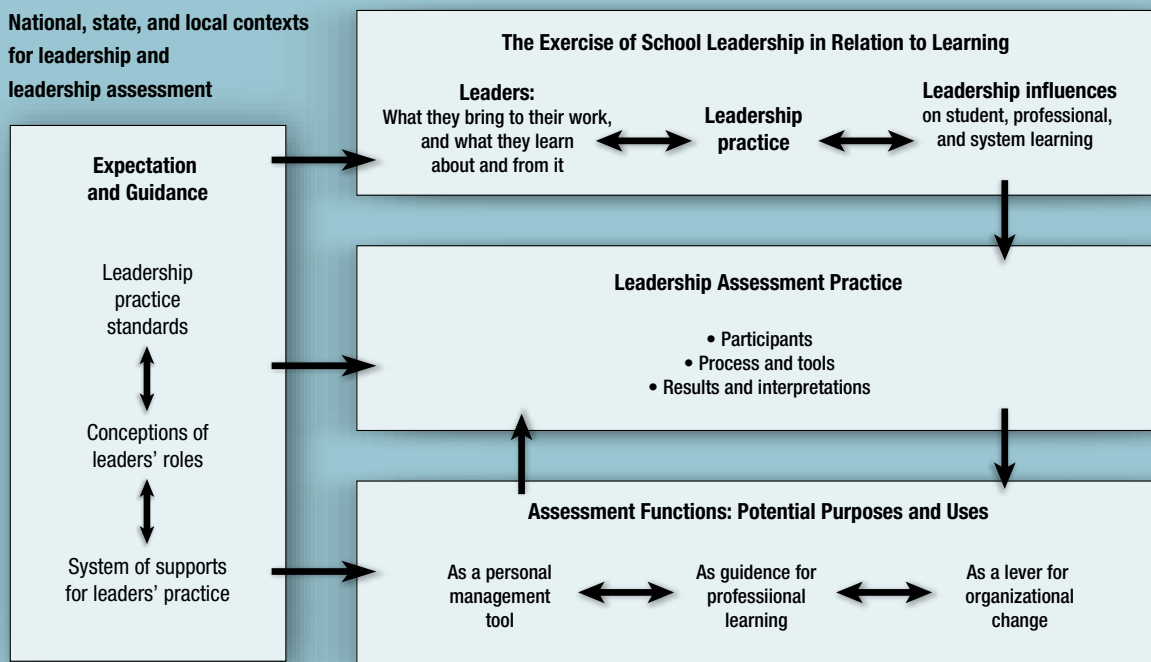
Contexts for Leadership Assessment: Expectations, Support, Constraints

The image of leadership assessment just discussed leaves out one important dimension: the national, state, and local contexts for education and education reform. Taken together, these contexts exert profound influence on leaders' practice and the evidence gathered about it (Gipps, 1999). What is more, these contexts are changing. What school leaders needed to know about their own practice just five years ago is different than what they need to know now. Each context is a source of expectations, supports, and constraints, any or all of which can influence the form that leadership assessment takes, what is learned from leadership assessment, and the purposes and uses for leadership

assessment data. Given their differing proximity to leadership practice, however, the contexts vary in the way they influence leadership assessment.

Of particular importance to leadership assessment are three interrelated features of these contexts, schematically shown in Figure 3: (1) the promulgation of standards for leadership practice; (2) the conceptions of leaders' roles that are embedded in hiring, leadership preparation programs, position assignments, and accountability requirements (see Portin, Alejano, Knapp, & Marzolf, 2006); and (3) what may be called the "systems of support" for leaders' work and learning over time (see Knapp, Copland, Plecki, & Portin, 2006, for a more extended discussion of this notion). These features guide, direct, and support leaders' work, the way it is assessed, and the functions that leadership assessment is to play.

Figure 3. Contexts and Expectations for Leadership Assessment

Consider how the *national context for leadership assessment* may shape what takes place in the local assessment of leadership practice in schools (Thomas, Holdaway, & Ward, 2000; Smylie, 2003; Leithwood,

2000; Leithwood, 2001). On the one hand, in the wake of the movement to define ambitious learning standards for students, generic professional standards for leadership practice have been developed and widely promulgated by prominent professional associations (e.g., National Association for Secondary School Principals, 1996; National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2002) or governmental consortia such as the ISLLC (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996). These represent an influential and changing image of desirable practice, and in broad strokes suggest the content for a new generation of leadership assessment. On the other hand, federal education policy—most notably No Child Left Behind, but other policies as well—has added impetus to the call for the consequential, results-oriented assessment of educators' and schools' performance, and hence of school leaders. These are among the more specific national influences on local assessment practices, but there are others lodged in intellectual trends, technological advances, and evolving ideas about "good practice" in fields other than education.

States, for their part, exert a related set of influences on local leadership assessment. In one sense, *the state context for leadership assessment* amplifies and channels the dictates of federal policy At the same time, states give more specific definition to the standards for professional practice by legislating their own versions of leadership standards or else by adopting the ISLLC standards, as many have done. States also codify the requirements for certification and licensure for formal leadership roles such as principal or superintendent (e.g., Murphy, Yff, & Shipman, 2000; SREB, 2004). The state is also a driving force in the standards-based reform movement and the associated accountability systems, which place specific expectations on schools and districts to improve measures of performance for all students. In the context of accountability and concern for educating all students well, the assessment of school leaders can figure prominently, either implicitly or explicitly, often as part of a measure of school performance, as in the second scenario earlier in this report. Other policies, events, and conditions at the state level can also play a role in creating an environment of leadership assessment—among them, accreditation systems, the selection of preferred assessment tools, reporting requirements, school improvement planning mandates, employment-related legislation, and to varying degrees the advocacy of administrators' associations (Stecher, Chun, Barron, & Ross, 2000).

These larger forces and conditions play out in the *local context for leadership assessment* where they interact with local priorities for education, beliefs about assessment and accountability, and local interpretations of state or federal policy. Personnel practices and policies are fashioned in school districts with input from unions and, under the aegis of employment contracts, form the backbone of the local organizational control system. To varying degrees, formalized assessment systems set up by the district are a part of these personnel practices and are considered as input to employee hiring, (re)assignment, compensation, supervision, and other personnel matters. At the same time, various efforts at organizational and professional improvement may surface a parallel set of leadership assessments that aim less at control and more at ongoing professional learning and support. A host of local conditions set the stage for these local assessment practices: The history of reform and current reform priorities are especially important, as are the availability of resources, district size and complexity, and informational capacity of the district, not to mention its organizational culture. These conditions are all likely to figure into a specific set of decisions made at the district level about the form, timing, instruments, and procedures to be used in the assessment system.

The immediate environment for school leaders' practice, and hence for any attempts to gather and interpret data about it, is the *school context for leadership assessment*. Here, family expectations, staff expectations, students' experiences, past assessment practices, school resources, restructuring efforts, and relational trust among the school professional staff are among the factors that shape assessment processes and results, or the meanings that may be attached to them. As will be discussed later, conditions within the school are intertwined with leaders' actions—and almost inescapably, more than a single titular leader is implicated in the story of school leadership. Assessments are likely to capture—and may not disentangle—what various individuals who take on formal and informal roles contribute to school leadership or its effects.

Finally, to the extent that leadership assessment focuses on specific individuals, the leader's career trajectory, along with commitments, skills, and capacities for leadership work, affects what assessments yield and how they are used by the leader to learn about and improve his or her practice. Thus, *the context of individual leaders' careers* affects what leaders bring to their practice and the assessment of it and what they take from it to further the next stages of their career (Portin & Knapp, 2003; White, Crooks, & Melton, 2002).

Evolving Practices and Emerging Strategies in Leadership Assessment

The dynamics of leadership assessment portrayed in the conceptual discussion above play out in an evolving landscape of ideas about school leadership and education in general. Approaches to assessment have changed accordingly, seemingly in step with broader movements in education concerning learning theory, conceptions of teaching effectiveness, educational reform, and methods of assessment and evaluation (Linn, 2000). Ideas about "scientific management" earlier in the 20th century produced approaches to leadership assessment that emphasized efficiency and generic management skills. The effective schools movement in the 1980s focused leadership assessment on the role of the school leader in a supposedly "effective" school. When the evaluation of teaching emphasized teacher inputs and later discrete teaching behaviors, leadership assessment followed suit, with assessment instruments built around checklists of leader characteristics or observable behaviors. And the process has continued, with the emergence of leadership standards in the wake of the standards-based reform movement and a preoccupation with student achievement test scores in response to the increasing accountability provisions in this reform movement.

To understand current leadership assessment practices and to grasp the possibilities in emerging assessment strategies and systems, it is helpful to review the ways that leadership assessment has evolved and diversified over the past several decades.

Evolution and Diversification of Leadership Assessment Practices

Leadership assessment is thus inextricably linked to changing conceptions of leadership roles and responsibilities (e.g., Murphy, 2003; Heck & Glasman, 1993; Marcoulides & Heck, 1993; Portin, Alejano, Knapp, & Marzolf, 2006). The net result has been an ever-widening repertoire of assessment tools and approaches, which we characterize briefly below. Within the burgeoning of assessment approaches, however, one can identify a long-term trend toward leadership assessment approaches that is more complex, comprehensive, and focused on the presumed results of leaders' work. While relatively little empirical evidence indicates that one approach is superior to another, the continu-

ing development of assessment approaches and emerging literature help to identify different roles that leadership assessment can play.

The present range of leadership assessment practices and tools, summarized in Table 3, vary in terms of (1) what is assessed; (2) who is assessed; (3) when the assessment occurs; and (4) how the assessment is conducted. The ingredients are somewhat overlapping, and may be combined in a single leadership assessment system. Each of the ingredients in the table rests on explicit or implicit assumptions about what matters in school leadership and how one can best know it. The differences address different aspects of the leader, the leader's work, or the presumed outcomes of the leader's work.

- *Differences in what is assessed.* In general terms, a large number of leadership assessment tools and systems attend to individual characteristics of the leader, sometimes social, sometimes matters of disposition, personality, or style. Alternatively, assessments concentrate on behaviors, actions, or interactions—in other words, observable aspects of the leaders' daily work that are assumed to correlate with desired outcomes. What is assessed, however, may not be closely related to what leaders consider their most important responsibilities (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2006; Reeves, 2004).

- *Differences in who is assessed.* The school principal (or assistant principal) has often been a primary target of leadership assessment activities. Others who figure prominently in leadership activity are not as likely to be assessed—for example, parents, teacher leaders, community partners, and in some cases students—though, in some instances, the target of assessment is the whole school staff (as in school audits).

- *Differences in the timing and frequency of assessments.* In common practice, the assessment of leadership performance is infrequent, perhaps yearly at most, though leaders are sometimes assessed more frequently. The timing of assessments may also be related to the stage in leaders' careers, with more frequent assessment occurring at the front end of their careers.

- *Differences in how the assessment is conducted.* The actual means for gathering information about school leaders range widely from informal to formal means, a one-time event to multiple occasions, single measures to multiple measures (e.g., as assembled into a portfolio,

"360-degree" feedback surveys, assessment simulations, three-day workshops for self-assessment, computer logs and interactive assessment programs that continuously collect data from multiple sources).

Underlying the wide array of current assessment practices is a major trend over the past three decades that reflects important shifts in thinking about leadership and, consequently, how to assess it. This trend started from a period in time several decades back when most leadership assessment—

- Focused on individual traits and characteristics (largely inputs).

- Assumed that these attributes of the leader, conceived of and captured in a decontextualized way, were correlated with good schooling.

- Concentrated on the smooth management of the school.

- Aimed at ascertaining how well leaders fit local priorities and criteria.

- Served largely summative purposes as part of personnel management.

At the time, because school leaders were usually thought to be organizational managers, it was natural to assume that generic management skills made school leaders effective. Assessment, therefore, concentrated on these skills and on personal characteristics that were widely assumed to characterize leaders who possessed or would develop the generic skills (Tyack, 1976; Alston, 2000). Alternatively, formal assessment was not always needed in some people's view, for example, where hiring practices were based on social connections with the hiring authority. Under these circumstances, leadership assessment was typically a pat on the back at the end of a yearly lunch, followed by a letter of recognition and gratitude. Improvement in leadership practice under these conditions came through personal relationships with mentors (Alston, 2000).

Paralleling personalized notions of leadership assessment was the practice of judging leaders by the degree to which they met the implicit, often hidden expectations of the district or the characteristics of a particular school. Research has established that school district hiring and firing do consider whether a principal "fits" the job (Duke & Iwanicki, 1992); though not "fitting" does not necessarily mean lack of competence for the job.[2]

Table 3: Range of Ingredients in Leadership Assessments

What is assessed	Who is assessed	When assessment occurs	How assessment is conducted
Individual characteristics • Social • Personal • Dispositions • Leadership style *Behaviors* • Actions • Interactions • Engagement in activities *Competencies, knowledge* • Knowledge of instruction • Facilitation skill • Managerial knowledge • Entrepreneurial ability *Goals and standards* • Goal setting • Goal attainment • Meeting standards *Relations with others* • Popularity • Parent complaints • Quality of relationships • Partnerships *Functions* • Facility management • Instructional leadership • Student discipline • Supervision *Organizational impacts* • Change, innovation • School improvement • Student achievement *Other* • Compliance • Fit with school/district norms, needs, preferences	*Individuals* • The principal *Teams* • The school's administrative team • The principal and teacher leaders *Organizational staff* • The whole school	*Prior to entry* • Entrance to preparation program • Completion of preparation program • Before licensure *During induction years* • Once in a career • Once in the first year of service • Repeatedly across the first year • Various times across the first several years *Across a career* • Once in a career • Every three years • Every other year • Every year • Twice a year • Three times each year • Continuous interaction/feedback	*Data sources* • Checklist • Survey • Observation by supervisor • Performance on simulation • Standardized tests • School records • Holistic appraisal against rubric • "Learning walk" • School program audit *Self-guided sources* • Retrospective self-assessment • Reflective conversation with colleagues • Portfolio • Survey self-assessment *Others' perceptions, evaluations* • Teacher report (e.g., climate survey) • Parent report • Peer feedback • Mentor feedback • "360-degree feedback" *Informal sources* • Conversation with supervisor • Debriefing on learning walk • Teacher feedback

More recently, as notions of school leadership have increasingly emphasized learning and school improvement, ideas about leadership assessment and their embodiment in newer instruments or assessment systems have—

- Emphasized leaders' performance and results (outcomes), rather than traits and dispositions, not only as individuals but as collectives—especially, their contributions to learning, the improvement of teaching, and school improvement.

- Aimed at ascertaining how well leaders and their performance meet criteria defined by professional bodies (e.g., leadership standards) and policy (e.g., accountability requirements).

- Served formative as well as summative purposes, often aiming at leaders' learning and further development.

- Assumed that leaders' work was context dependent and could be best understood in relation to particular kinds of organizational and community contexts.

This broad trend explains the proliferation of assessment tools and techniques, and at the same time it highlights some new ways leadership assessment can work in the service of learning improvement. While relatively little empirical work has been done on the evolving nature and uses of leadership assessment approaches, scholarship does shed some light on five shifts that underlie the broad trend pattern, specifically, the movement toward (1) behaviors and actions, rather than traits and dispositions; (2) a professionalized basis for leaders' work through the codification of leadership standards; (3) a focus on student learning and results; (4) an emphasis on leadership development and improvement; and (5) understanding and appraising leadership in organizational context.

Movement from traits and dispositions to behaviors and actions. Early personnel evaluation practice often emphasized characteristics of the leader—traits, dispositions, credentials, attributes of leadership style (Ginsberg & Thompson, 1992; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). All of these were assumed to come from a combination of the leader's basic personality, background experiences, and training. Such matters could be assessed through a variety of means, in effect, providing a picture of what leaders brought to the job, more than their performance once in it.

Over time, a trait-focused approach to leadership assessment has been replaced in many instances by one more focused on behaviors, actions, and performance. Deriving from behaviorist theories and methods, the latter set of approaches operates from the assumption that the only thing that really matters is what leaders *do* in their work. While this focus may obscure the role that the leaders' thinking, reasoning, approach to ethical or moral dilemmas, and decision making may play in leadership, it does draw attention to the medium (actions) through which leaders exert influence on others. It does not explain leaders' actions, however—that is, get at why they do what they do and what ideas they seek to convey through their actions.

Movement toward a professionalized basis for leaders' work through the codification of leadership standards. The local determination of expectations for leaders' work and criteria for assessment begs questions about whether there are more widely held conceptions of "good practice" that can provide an anchor for leadership assessment. Nationally acknowledged standards for leadership practice have emerged as one answer to these questions: the ISLLC standards (1996) and those of a number of national professional associations introduced in the wake of nationally developed standards for student learning and teaching (e.g., Weiss et al., 2002). A flurry of policies and related assessment tools were developed to aligned with the new standards (Murphy, 2003). At present, the majority of states are using some form of school leadership assessment tool based on the ISLLC standards, sometimes in combination with other sets of standards (Murphy, 2005). Despite some differences in emphasis, these standards are largely in agreement with one another about what matters in school leadership.

In obvious ways, the existence of the leadership standards provides a natural basis for leadership assessment. However, their broad framing leaves many questions about how specifically to make them operational and see them in action—a continuing challenge for developers of assessment systems.

Movement toward a focus on learning and results. Embedded within the idea of standards and in the standards-based reform movement as a whole is an increasing emphasis on the improvement of teaching and learning as a primary responsibility of the school leader, as demonstrated by measurable results. Leadership standards are increasingly clear and explicit about the central role that school leaders are expected to play in the improvement of instruction and learning outcomes (e.g., Fink & Resnick, 2001; Leithwood

et al., 2004). A small indicator of this shift in focus is the growing number of training opportunities for experienced school leaders that concentrate on instructional leadership, among them, the Harvard Summer Institute for School Leaders, continuing education opportunities at the Center for Educational Leadership at the University of Washington, and a variety of training activities supported by the Institute for Learning at the University of Pittsburgh's Learning Research and Development Center.

Accountability requirements embedded in state and federal standards-based reform policies add further impetus for the focus on learning and results. These policies spotlight student achievement and imply that leaders' work should be largely judged in terms of improved student performance measures. Chicago, Seattle, and the state of Delaware, among others, use student test scores as a part of school leaders' evaluation. In many school districts, an unofficial (and often misleading) evaluation of school leadership occurs when student test scores are published in the newspaper and the real estate ads in the community.

It is not surprising, then, that current discussions of leadership assessment encourage a focus on improving learning in classrooms (e.g., Reeves, 2005; Marzano, 2005; NASSP, 1996, 2006; Lambert, 1998; Sparks, 2000).

A growing emphasis on leadership development and improvement. Rather than rendering summative appraisals of particular leaders, as is likely under many accountability systems, interest in discovering what assessment can do for leaders is growing (Stiggins, 2002). As a potentially powerful formative or developmental tool, leadership assessment can offer feedback to school leaders to help them make constructive revisions in their practice. Studies of ssessment and feedback in other learning contexts (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000)—including athletics (Darden, 1999), computer technologies (Stolovitch & Keeps, 2000; Janelle, Kim, & Singer, 1995), medicine (Ericsson, 2003), the military (Chatham & Braddock, 2001), and business (Testa, 2002)—have all investigated the formative role of feedback. What has been learned from these sources about the purposes and uses of assessment, feedback, and revision to improve practice has important implications for education; though the matter has not yet been extensively studied in school leadership.

Movement toward understanding and appraising leadership in organizational context. As leadership theories have increasingly recognized

the situated nature of leadership (e.g., Leithwood et al., 2004; Spillane et al., 2003; Seashore Louis, Kruse, & Marks, 1996), models of leadership assessment have also emerged that consider the leaders' work in relation to that context. The organizational analysis model (Hart, 1992), for one, emphasizes assessing the leaders' ability to understand and predict the complex context of his or her school. In this view, it matters less who the principal is or what discrete behaviors he or she displays; rather, how the principal thinks about what is going on in the organization offers better indicators for leadership assessment.

Recent elaborations of the climate survey offer an additional vantage point on leadership performance in an organizational context, this time from the multiple perspectives of the stakeholders. The "360-degree evaluation survey" (Wilkerson, Manatt, Rogers, & Maughan, 2000; Blase & Blase, 1999), for example, captures the situated nature of school leadership by surveying groups of people (as few as six or more than 50) who have the opportunity to view and appraise a principal's (or any administrator's) leadership from different points of view. The survey data may be kept confidential so that only the principal ever reads them; in other cases, the surveys are returned to the principal's supervisor, and the principal never sees them but is given a summary report for planning improvements. In still other cases, in the spirit of enhancing transparency, the results and related plans for improvement are shared in full with the whole school community. While this 360-degree assessment responds to the situated nature of school leadership, it is not without its drawbacks. It is based on perceptions of people who may not know what the principal is attempting to accomplish or who view the leaders' actions only in terms of their own interests. Last, the tool may be a better measure of the leaders' popularity than of progress made on needed, though possibly unpopular, changes.

Uses and Usefulness of Leadership Assessment Practices

These trends in leadership assessment, and the proliferating set of assessment tools and strategies, set the stage for leadership assessment to be used in all three functions identified earlier in the report (tool for personnel management, guide for leaders' professional learning, and lever for organizational improvement). Emerging literature sheds some light on how assessment is contributing to these functions and what it is—or could be—offering educational systems. Although the literature base on the uses and usefulness of

leadership assessment is thin, several observations can be made about what leadership assessments are being used for and what might make them useful in light of the different functions that leadership assessment may serve:

- The uses and usefulness of leadership assessment depend in part on where the user sits.

- Assessing leaders' performance can guide further learning and efforts to improve leadership through more frequent and systematic feedback.

- Formative uses of leadership assessment may imply a reconsideration of the expertise that assessment captures.

- Leadership assessment can be an integral part of efforts to improve schools as organizations, where internal and external conditions support the school's and leaders' readiness to make use of the assessment process and results.

- While leadership assessment has been and can be used in broader reform strategies, policies do not always link leadership assessment explicitly to learning goals.

The uses and usefulness of leadership assessment depend in part on where the user sits. A few studies get at perceptions of usefulness from different vantage points, as in one investigation in which superintendents thought that the evaluation system in their districts was more complete than their principals indicated (Stiggins & Duke, 1985). Other studies have found that principals perceive their evaluation process to be more political than substantive, in contrast to superintendents who find the evaluation process to be helpful (Davis & Hensley, 1999; Thomas, Holdaway, & Ward, 2000). Where leadership assessment serves the purposes of organizational control (Dornbusch & Scott, 1975), the evaluation of personnel may be seen as useful to those who are in a position of control and less so or not at all to their employees. At the root of this situation, assessors and assessees may have fundamentally different purposes for leadership assessment, and hence they will use assessment results differently.

Assessing leaders' performance is likely to guide the leaders' further learning and efforts to improve leadership when they receive more frequent and systematic feedback. Where leadership assessment is meant to be used in formative ways to support leaders' learning, the nature and frequency of

the feedback cycle may have much to do with how useful the assessment is for this purpose. Recent research on learning (Vye & Goldring, 2004; Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000) makes clear the efficacy of clear, specific, and timely feedback followed by frequent opportunities to revise practices. Short, responsive feedback loops can create significant opportunities to improve leadership practice. In this regard, formative assessment data are potentially helpful tools for learning new leadership practices and ideas and for planning professional development, either by ascertaining what leaders do or do not know and know how to do, or by documenting how leaders use what they know and how they learn new leadership practices. The typical infrequency of assessment feedback, except by the most informal means, suggests room for further experimentation with this aspect of leadership assessment systems.

Formative uses of leadership assessment may imply a reconsideration of the expertise that assessment captures. Every assessment system rests on certain notions of what leaders need to know and be able to do, and as we have pointed out, these notions are evolving. In the current context, getting at leaders' "adaptive expertise"—or ability to engage problems that have no technical solutions (Heifetz, 1994)—may be as important as determining the extent of their technical know-how. The need for new learning on the part of educational leaders, both novice and veterans, is easy to demonstrate in the current context of reform. Consider the case of veteran administrators who took on school leadership roles prior to the onset of high-stakes standards-based reform (eight to 10 years ago, in many states) and before explicit expectations that all students succeed were in place. Leading schools in which ALL students are to meet high academic expectations means for these administrators learning to lead new and different activities in the community, the school district, schools, and classrooms. Assessments that clarify what it is the leader needs to know and do to create the conditions inside the school for all students to meet high academic standards necessarily tap different aspects of the leaders' repertoires than in times past.

Leadership assessment can be integral to improving schools as organizations, where internal and external conditions support the schools' and leaders' readiness to make use of the assessment process and results. Approaches to the renewal of the school as an organization increasingly imply explicit attention to the assessment of leadership and its connections to the school's performance as a whole. Seen this way, leadership is part of the

school's capacity to deliver a high-quality education to its students, and therefore assessment of staff's and schools' "capacity for leadership" is essential (Lambert, 1998).

But for assessment data to play a significant role in school-focused improvement efforts, certain conditions may need to be in place. Research on one such school improvement effort—the KEYS initiative, a self-reflective renewal process sponsored by the National Education Association—offers a cautionary image of the assessment of leadership within a larger school renewal initiative (Portin, Beck, Knapp, & Murphy, 2003). As a way of establishing a starting point and focus for renewal activity, this survey-based process assesses the current state of a school on 35 indicators of school quality, many of which reference leadership action (e.g., "administrators assess student learning daily," "central and building administrators are committed to long-range, continuous improvement," "there is two-way, non-threatening communication between school administrators and others"). Case studies of KEYS implementation in various schools in nine states demonstrated that internal and external conditions in the schools greatly affected their "readiness for renewal" and hence their capacity or desire to use the survey-based data in ongoing renewal efforts (e.g., Portin & Knapp, 2003; Smylie, 2003).

While leadership assessment has been used in broader reform strategies, policies do not always link leadership assessment explicitly to learning goals. Leadership assessment has already been incorporated into state reform strategies as a device for catching the attention of local educators. Some research has demonstrated that assessment raises standards (Black & William, 1998)—perhaps a case of leaders "leading to the test." Leadership assessment can also be part of accountability systems, as in Washington state, which makes assessment of leadership in failing schools part of the audit process to which such schools are subjected (see, for example, the second scenario earlier in this report).

Whether and how much the assessment of leadership helps to set new standards and prompt new practices are debated in the literature. On one side of the argument is the belief that assessment is a useful tool for improving practice in areas that have not been expected before (Black & William, 1998). Others argue that the assessment of what people do not know is unfair and unproductive because the assessment data will favor what is not known rather than what is and may obscure the picture of a leader's strengths. For example,

the majority of assessment tools do not focus on attempts to address equity as a dimension of leadership practice. The few assessment tools that do so treat equity as a personal disposition rather than as actions. Such tools ignore the all-important question of how school leaders can take steps to improve equity, especially in district contexts where this is not a priority. And without data that document potentially disruptive efforts to improve equity, leaders' attempts to address inequity can easily be seen as a failure of leadership rather than a courageous leadership action.

If leadership assessment is to play a consequential role in broader reform strategies, attention will need to be paid to how the different policies and requirements that affect the appraisal of leaders' qualifications or performance are aligned with reform goals. Policies governing licensure for school leaders are a case in point. Leadership assessment for many years has been part of the state control of licensure for individuals who seek formal administrative positions in schools. In such instances, policies concerning licensure and accreditation act as a gatekeeper as well as a prompt for change in administrator preparation programs. Recent analyses of state licensure requirements, however, reveal that more often than not, states do not take advantage of this policy lever as a means for encouraging a focus on learning as a primary entry requirement (Adams & Copland, 2006).

Emerging Practices: The Attempt to Develop Coherent Leadership Assessment Systems

The three functions of assessment discussed in this report are related to one another in various ways, and in practice, one function can overlap others. Assessment built into the yearly supervisory visit, for example—which often reflects a limited conception of assessment for personnel management purposes—can become a springboard for the leader's engagement in professional development over an extended period of time. Rather than hope for these connections to happen serendipitously, some districts and states are trying to develop leadership assessment systems that operate in a coherent way, fulfilling all or most of the functions at once. A series of examples illustrate what is happening at the local level, in collaborative efforts between local authorities and others, and at the state level. These examples surface issues and challenges in developing useful leadership assessment systems that have yet to be resolved.

These examples vary in how fully they bring into play policies, resources, and actors at both state and local levels, and how much emphasis they place on the different assessment functions. In all instances, however, policymakers and others are taking leadership more seriously and giving it greater attention than would normally happen elsewhere. And they are doing so by connecting different uses of leadership assessment into a more comprehensive reform-oriented assessment system.

Aligned administrator assessment systems at the local level. New York City offers a good example of a district's attempt to align administrator assessment so that it includes support for aspiring teacher leaders, leadership preparation, and leadership induction. Beginning with a leadership-for-learning rubric developed for general commercial use, experienced leaders at the New York City Leadership Academy reworked the rubric for the context in which New York City school leaders work.[3] The Academy, a within-district program serving aspiring school leaders, is still refining the tool's reliability and validity in an effort to ensure that an aspiring leader who is successful in the Academy will also be successful as an administrator.

Collaborative development of leadership rubrics and assessment systems. The criteria or standards by which leaders' performances are assessed reflect local or state priorities. Where these have been collaboratively developed, they are likely to reflect a working consensus, one of the key ingredients of system coherence (Knapp & Associates, 2003). For example, principals in the Eugene, OR, School District, in partnership with faculty and graduate students at the University of Oregon, developed a leadership assessment rubric that captures the particular interests of the district, including cultural competence (DeFranco & Golden, 2003). This tool aligns with the district's goal and a related state goal of increasing the cultural competence of school leaders. Whether the use of this assessment instrument will help in the development of cultural competence remains to be seen, but the tool has the potential to do so.

A broader, statewide example illustrates a similar process at work. South Carolina approached the development and validation of a statewide principal evaluation system as a collaborative process involving university faculty, the South Carolina Educational Policy Center, the state Department of Education, community stakeholders, and job experts. Using three sets of performance standards, this diverse group of stakeholders worked collaboratively

to develop for the state a principal assessment tool and system (Amsterdam, Johnson, Monard, & Tonnsen, 2003). This attempt to align the interests of multiple stakeholders to create a statewide commitment to the assessment system represents a step in the direction of a more coherent approach to leadership assessment.

State development of leadership assessment tools and systems in the service of reform goals. A new state policy in Iowa that requires administrators to be evaluated has prompted the development of an assessment tool and accompanying assessment process.[4] The state has also taken the opportunity to train all school superintendents in how to conduct evaluations and to understand the renewed vision of school leadership embedded in the assessment tool. This assessment system aligns state policy, superintendents' professional development, and the expectations for school leaders across the state. Because this system is not an overhaul of an old assessment practice, but rather an assertion of a new state expectation, the state has an important opportunity to use a leadership assessment tool as a way to communicate and promote new school leadership expectations.

Delaware has undertaken a more comprehensive leadership assessment system that aligns state policy, leadership preparation, administrator licensure, and in-service administrator assessment.[5] The whole state uses one leadership assessment tool, but districts or individuals at the local level differentiate which parts of the tool to use depending on the particular interests of a school leader. The assessment process involves several steps: a supervisor or mentor delineates which areas on the assessment tool will be addressed; the administrator and supervisor set goals in those areas; and then a 360-degree survey is used that asks raters to address these areas. This aligned administrator system uses a single, relatively untried assessment tool, which means that its long-term usefulness has still to be established. Like many leadership assessments, it combines the ISLLC standards, the McREL correlates of effective leadership practice (Marzano, 2005), and parts of established assessment tools. The system purports to be flexible by allowing users to differentiate the tool to fit local priorities. A challenge with differentiation is that it will be hard to know how much of any one part of the assessment tool to use or when the activities described on the assessment tool are the right activities to be conducted.

Challenges ahead for development and use of leadership assessment tools and systems. At present and for the foreseeable future, leadership assess-

ment will take place in a context of substantial changes in education: the focus on leadership for learning, the aspiration to set and meet higher academic expectations for all students, the need to make data-informed decisions, the presence of external measures of accountability, and new expectations for school performance transparency. All are likely to exert influence, sometimes contradictory, on emerging practices in leadership assessment in ways that demonstrate the trend noted earlier in this report. Leadership assessment systems are likely to continue to move away from more limited approaches—e.g., informal annual performance reviews, check lists of desired administrative behaviors, climate surveys of follower satisfaction—and toward approaches that measure interaction, assess groups rather than individuals, link leadership appropriately with student learning outcomes, and consider the leaders' role in programmatic changes and whole school performance. Such systems may also seek to connect leadership assessment with the assessment of students and teachers in more formal ways.

Unanswered Questions and Enduring Dilemmas

The evolution of leadership assessment just described, in light of the framing ideas noted earlier in the report, raises important questions about the way useful leadership assessment systems can be constructed, enacted, and used in routine practice. These questions concern (1) impacts on teaching and learning; (2) impacts on leadership practice; (3) the nature of the expertise that is assessed; (4) the coherence of leadership assessment systems, and (5) the assessment of leadership teams and distributed leadership arrangements. These questions are ripe for further experimentation by educators and investigation by scholars. Yet underlying these questions are enduring dilemmas in assessment systems themselves that will not disappear as new and viable forms of assessment are developed and better scholarly understanding emerges.

Impact on teaching and learning. One set of unanswered questions arises from the perennial challenge to link leadership to the important outcomes of student learning in schools. This necessitates further description of the actions of leadership and how they connect to teaching and learning outcomes across levels and contexts of schools. This raises these important questions:

1. In what way does leadership assessment direct leadership toward those actions most likely to affect equitable opportunities to learn?

2. Under what conditions and to what extent does leadership assessment demonstrably influence the quality of teaching in a school, and through what chain of influences does the assessment have its impact on teaching?

Impact on leadership practice. A second set of unanswered questions, focused on the leader's learning and changes in leadership practice, probe how a system of leadership assessment and related supports might affect leaders' professional learning at all stages of the leaders' development, starting with initial preparation and carrying on throughout the leaders' careers. In various ways, assessment can promote new learning for aspiring leaders, the

re-equippment of experienced leaders, and continual self-evaluation for all leaders in schools. Key questions in this regard include:

3. In what ways, if at all, and under what conditions does leadership assessment lead to improvement in leadership practice?

4. What forms of leadership assessment encourage leadership that is focused on learning? How do these assessments connect with and support the professional learning of leaders who wish to engage in learning-focused leadership?

5. Under what conditions do leaders and others pay close attention to leadership assessment results and use them to inform the leaders' further learning and development?

The leadership expertise that is assessed. Here, the issue concerns what is actually being assessed—specifically, what current assessment systems presume about the expertise leaders need to guide instructional improvement and their own future development in a variety of school settings:

6. In what ways do or can assessment systems allow for differentiation of assessment by leaders' work setting or stage in career, without compromising high standards for leaders' work?

7. In what ways do assessments get at the leaders' expertise in teaching and learning, as well as their "adaptive expertise" and ability to engage in new learning when confronted with problems that defy technical solutions?

Coherence of leadership assessment systems. Here, the central issue concerns actions and conditions that make leadership assessment systems more coherent—that is, connected to compelling purposes for learning improvement (e.g., as embedded in student learning standards or goals of standards-based reform), aligned across levels and positions, and reflecting sufficient working consensus.[6] The following sub-questions help to explore the matter:

8. How closely and in what ways does leadership assessment reflect state and local learning standards and improvement goals?

9. In what ways are school-level administrator assessments (e.g., for principals) aligned with those for district leaders or others who exercise leadership (e.g., teacher leaders)?

10. How can leadership assessment in the context of accountability make responsible use of assessment data regarding student performance?

Assessment of leadership teams and distributed leadership arrangements. A final set of unanswered questions concerns the unit of assessment. As noted throughout this report, assessment practices, as well as leadership roles, can focus attention on both individuals and collections of individuals. The ideas of distributed leadership and the challenges of leading schools mean that both those with formal authority and others without it will jointly assume collective responsibility for the outcomes of schooling. Differentiating individual and collective assessment of practice is no easy task and prompts questions such as:

11. In what ways does leadership assessment feasibly and usefully capture the performance of leadership teams and other distributed arrangements for guiding school and instructional improvement?

Important issues also arise at the intersection between leadership assessment and other facets of leaders' practice, or attempts to improve that practice. Hence, in pursuing the questions regarding leadership assessment noted above, researchers, developers, and users of assessment will need to consider how leadership assessment systems take account of (a) expectations for school leaders' roles and responsibilities, (b) the availability and cost of pertinent information, (c) the availability of resources needed for the job, and (d) authority enabling school leaders to respond to current needs. (For a fuller discussion of these matters, see other reports in this series, especially Portin, Alejano, Knapp, & Marzolf, 2006; Plecki, Alejano, Lochmiller, & Knapp, 2006; and Plecki, McCleery, & Knapp, 2006.)

These questions are likely to be explored in the short and long term as localities and states continue to experiment with more comprehensive forms of leadership assessment and as scholars direct their attention to this facet of leadership practice and educational reform. What may emerge from these

efforts is a robust set of images about the roles that leadership assessment can play in pursuit of a more powerful, equitable system of schooling for the nation's young people. As this work continues, however, practitioners and scholars will need to keep a watchful eye out for the potentially dysfunctional aspects of more elaborate forms of assessment, and they will also need to remember that not all questions about leadership assessment have answers, but rather they are a function of enduring dilemmas.

Enduring Dilemmas in the Assessment of Leadership Performance

As Figure 1 and the earlier scenarios suggest, the act of assessing what leaders do and produce is not a simple matter. A set of tensions or dilemmas pervade the assessment of leaders' performance and the subsequent use (or non-use) of the assessment data. In some basic sense, these tensions cannot ever be fully resolved, only managed. Consider at least the following.

The tension between summative and formative purposes. Here, the impulse to render a judgment about leaders' performance, without regard for the improvement of that performance, may compete with the desire to assemble evidence that helps leaders improve their effectiveness. The former, summative assessment is especially useful for decisions that have little to do with the leaders' improvement trajectory over time (e.g., whether or not to certify administrators, renew their contracts, or reassign them from a current position). The latter, formative assessment is obviously more useful for focusing the leaders' efforts on particular skills or areas of knowledge that they will be seeking to develop. The two contrasting purposes for assessment data imply different approaches to assessment that yield varied data: It is as difficult to fire someone with data suggesting possibilities for future growth as it is to change practice with school test scores alone.

Balancing local, state, and national interests in assessment. In a multi-level educational system, potentially competing interests may be invoked by the act of assessing leaders' performance. Local, state, and federal standards may not agree, for one thing: federal or state standards, for example, might insist that school leaders reduce the dropout rate while local standards might urge principals to keep students with discipline problems out of the building. The differences in standards imply different, even contradictory assessment measures. Whether or not the tension expresses itself directly, the many stakeholders for public education often want different things from it and hence

from those who lead it. Inevitably, these differences will show up in the kinds of assessment data that are collected and how they are interpreted.

Focusing on direct versus indirect effects on student achievement. Inevitably, audiences for leadership assessment results will want to know whether leaders have effected positive changes in student achievement directly, for example, by inspiring the student body to greater effort or by instituting a new curriculum with demonstrable pay-off in student learning. Much of the time, however, leadership exerts its influence indirectly (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003)—for example, by building the capacity of teacher leaders in the school or by changing the mission or morale of the district supervisory staff. Direct and indirect effects of leadership practice invite different forms of assessment, and debate is likely to continue regarding how much to interpret measures of student achievement, by themselves, as evidence of the leaders' capability or worth. The challenge for assessment is to balance reasonable measures of direct effect with sufficient attention to more proximate aspects of school or district functioning that represent the channels through which indirect influence is exerted.

Disregarding or taking account of leadership context. The fact that the needs of schools vary so widely raises fundamental questions about how much to interpret leaders' performance in light of the settings in which they work. An urban high school struggling to engage every student in meaningful learning presents different leadership challenges than the rural school facing an influx of immigrant students with a staff unprepared for linguistic diversity. A single assessment system may well focus on the wrong indicators of success—on leaders' contributions to the stability of staff, when change is needed, or on absolute measures of student performance, when evidence of incremental, value-added improvement is most appropriate. At the same time, regardless of setting, certain skills, competencies, and dispositions (e.g., skill at facilitating staff discussion, ability to manage fiscal resources) are arguably crucial for successful school leadership, and they imply standardized forms of assessment that take little account of the leader's working context. Assessment systems must balance these competing concerns.

Assessing individual versus collective effort. Finally, by focusing on individuals, leadership assessment runs the risk of overattributing leadership impacts to the actions of individuals. As emerging work on distributed leadership suggests, many individuals exercise leadership in educational organiza-

tions and are jointly responsible for the most significant effects on teaching and learning or other aspects of the organization's functioning. That said, there are still—and always will be—aspects of leadership that emanate from the individual, and what is more, individuals rather than groups are licensed to act in certain positions of formal leadership. In this spirit, leadership assessments need to attend to both individual and collective leadership effort. Sorting out when the one or the other is most appropriate is not easy to do.

While keeping these dilemmas in mind, educators and scholars have much to do as they investigate possibilities for leadership assessment and develop new approaches that serve the different functions that leadership assessment may play. Intelligently crafted assessment systems may do much to help leaders become more effectively focused on learning improvement, while avoiding the traps of premature judgment based on limited measures of leaders' effectiveness or the creation of systems that are complex and cumbersome.

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Endnotes

1 For example, a team headed by Andrew Porter, Joe Murphy, and Ellen Goldring at the Peabody College of Education in Vanderbilt University is currently developing a new generation of assessment instruments and systems, with support from The Wallace Foundation.

2 Among principals removed from their positions for lack of "fit" in this study, more than half found other leadership positions, sometimes in the same district, where they were successful. This study raises the possibility that assessments aimed at determining how well a leader fits a school may well work against innovation and diversification of the talent pool.

3 For more information about the NYC Leadership Academy visit www.wallacefoundation.org/GrantsPrograms/FocusAreasPrograms/EducationLeadership

4 For more information about the Iowa Leadership Assessment project visit www.wallacefoundation.org/GrantsPrograms/FocusAreasPrograms/EducationLeadership

5 For more information about the Delaware Leadership Assessment project visit www.wallacefoundation.org/GrantsPrograms/FocusAreasPrograms/EducationLeadership

6 For a fuller discussion of this notion of "coherence," see Knapp , M. S., & Associates (2003). *Leading for learning sourcebook: Concepts and examples* (p. 40). Seattle, WA: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, University of Washington, February.

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