The University of Washington District Leadership Design Lab’s (DL2) Principal Supervisor Performance Standards (PSPS) are designed to help district leaders understand and support the work of their principal supervisors, and are based on research about principal supervisors whose work has had a positive impact on school improvement.

Within these standards, we define principal supervisors’ practice along five levels of expertise to help district leaders assess their current performance and measure growth over time.

DL2 thanks the Wallace Foundation for their generous support for the development of these standards and much of the underlying research.
WHY ADOPT THE DL² PSPS?

As we work with districts across the country, we hear similar questions from district leaders.

Principal Supervisors ask ...

"Does research show how I can help support equitable outcomes for all students? How do I know if I'm on the right track?"

Superintendents and Chief Academic Officers ask ...

"How can we set clear expectations for what our principal supervisors should know and be able to do?"

Principals ask ...

"What kind of support should I expect from my supervisor?"
To help address these questions, we developed the PSPS to be:

**Research-based.** Research suggests principal supervisors who successfully increase support instructional improvement do so by helping school principals grow as instructional leaders. Their goal is to foster principals who cultivate improved teaching and learning for teachers and students. Our standards stem from this research base. As the research base grows, we will continue to revise the standards to reflect the latest knowledge and practice.

**Aspirational.** The standards aim to help principal supervisors continuously grow by offering images of progressively more challenging ways of working with their principals. Such images help principal supervisors see what they may need to do next to improve. Aspirational standards also help other central office staff think about how they might shift their work to reinforce principal supervisors' growth.

**Measurable.** Standards are not useful learning tools unless they are measurable. Leaders need to be able to assess how much they are growing along the standards. PSPS describes practices that can be measured in various ways, including surveys and observations over time. The standards do not describe attitudes or dispositions, which are generally harder to measure than observable practices. Also, research doesn’t associate principal supervisors’ attitudes or dispositions with improvements in principals’ growth as instructional leaders.

**Growth-focused.** Using research on how professionals develop expertise, we distinguish principal supervisor practice along five levels for each standard. In so doing, we emphasize the importance of principal supervisors seeing themselves as on a trajectory—growing progressively better in their roles.

**Usable.** We consulted with more than 100 educational leaders about the organization and wording of the standards who helped us ensure that principal supervisors and others would find the standards readable and usable.

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To learn more about how we developed the standards, please refer to the Appendix on page 17.

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) recommends that districts ready for aspirational, research-based principal supervisor standards adopt the PSPS. Other districts should consider adopting CCSSO’s Model Principal Supervisor Standards (based in part on PSPS) to help them start developing their principal supervisor role.

www.ccsso.org/Documents/2015/2015PrincipalSupervisorStandardsFinal1272015.pdf
Districts may find the PSPS helpful to:

- Develop their principal supervisor job descriptions to focus on research-based, results-oriented work practices
- Focus principal supervisors’ onboarding and ongoing professional development on helping principals grow as instructional leaders
- Evaluate principal supervisors on effective, measurable practices and growth

We recommend districts engage their principal supervisors and relevant stakeholders in a meaningful process of making sense of the standards. We recommend that districts ask what they truly look like in practice and how they compare to how principal supervisors currently work. This process will help districts decide whether and how to adopt standards their stakeholders value and will use to guide their work.
DL² PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR (PS) PERFORMANCE STANDARDS 2.0
STANDARD 1.
Dedicate their time to helping principals grow as instructional leaders.

STANDARD 2.
Engage in teaching practices in their one-on-one work with principals to help principals grow as instructional leaders.

STANDARD 3.
Engage in teaching practices while leading principal communities of practice (e.g., professional learning communities, networks) to help principals grow as instructional leaders.

STANDARD 4.
Systematically use multiple forms of evidence of each principal’s capacity for instructional leadership to differentiate or tailor their approach to helping their principals grow as instructional leaders.

STANDARD 5.
Engage principals in the formal district principal evaluation process in ways that help principals grow as instructional leaders.

STANDARD 6.
Selectively and strategically participate in other central office work processes to maximize the extent to which they and principals focus on principals’ growth as instructional leaders.

Level of practice: Not adopting
Does not yet talk about their practice or engage in leadership practices consistent with the standard.

Level of practice: Adopting the talk
Talks about their leadership practice in ways consistent with the standards, but actual practice does not yet reflect the standard.

Level of practice: Engaging at a surface level
Leadership practice begins to reflect the standard, but does not yet demonstrate deep understanding of which leadership practices are consistent with the standard or why to engage in those practices.

Level of practice: Engaging with understanding
Leadership practice often reflects the standard and demonstrates deepening understanding of what leadership practices are consistent with the standard and why to engage in them.

Leadership practices consistent with the standard are a regular part of the person’s overall work across multiple contexts.

Level of practice: Mastery
Leadership practice routinely reflects the standard at the level of Engaging with Understanding across multiple contexts and years.

Leadership practice across settings and over time demonstrates the person's ability to improvise—to use the standard as a jumping off point to develop new ways of working consistent with the standard and likely to contribute to progressively powerful results.

## STANDARD 1.
Dedicates their time to helping principals grow as instructional leaders

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| A PS who works at this level does not talk about their work as dedicated to helping principals grow as instructional leaders or spend time on such activities. | A PS who works at this level talks about their work as dedicated to helping principals grow as instructional leaders, but they do not actually spend time on such activities. | A PS who works at this level:  
• Occasionally focuses some of their time on principals’ growth as instructional leaders but does not yet fully dedicate their time to this focus. They frequently engage in work that does not obviously contribute to principals’ growth as instructional leaders.  
• Occasionally demonstrates that they understand what is involved in dedicating their time to helping principals grow as instructional leaders.  
• Occasionally demonstrates they understand why dedicating their time to principals’ growth as instructional leaders is important. | A PS who works at this level:  
• Maximizes their time on principals’ growth as instructional leaders.  
• Makes decisions about how to spend their time based on how much the activity will help their principals’ grow as instructional leaders.  
• Regularly demonstrates that they understand how to dedicate their time to helping principals grow as instructional leaders.  
• Regularly demonstrates that they understand why dedicating their time to principals’ growth as instructional leaders matters. | A PS who works at this level:  
• Demonstrates performance at the level of Engaging with Understanding across multiple contexts and years.  
• Improvises—uses the standards as a jumping off point to develop new strategies for maximizing their time on instructional leadership and accelerating principals’ growth as instructional leaders. |
### STANDARD 2.
**Engages in teaching practices in their one-on-one work with principals to help principals grow as instructional leaders**

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| A PS who works at this level typically directs principals, monitors' principals' compliance, or completes tasks that principals should be doing themselves. | A PS who works at this level talks about their one-on-one work with principals as teaching, but they do not yet take this approach in their actual practice. | A PS who works at this level:  
• Takes a teaching approach in some of their one-on-one time with principals. However, teaching is not yet their main approach.  
• Occasionally demonstrates they understand what taking a teaching approach with their principals entails.  
• Occasionally demonstrates that they understand why to take a teaching approach in their one-on-one work with principals, or why particular teaching moves in those settings may help principals grow as instructional leaders. | A PS who works at this level:  
• Regularly makes teaching moves in one-on-one settings to support principals’ growth as instructional leaders.  
• Demonstrates a deepening understanding of what is entailed in taking a teaching approach in their one-on-one work with principals.  
• Demonstrates a deepening understanding of why taking a teaching approach in their one-on-one work with principals matters, and why particular teaching moves may contribute to principals’ growth as instructional leaders. | A PS who works at this level:  
• Demonstrates performance at the level of Engaging with Understanding across multiple contexts and years.  
• Improvises—uses the standard as a jumping off point to develop new teaching strategies during their one-on-one work with principals to accelerate principals’ grow as instructional leaders. |

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**STANDARD 3.**  
Engages in teaching practices while leading principal communities of practice to help principals grow as instructional leaders

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| A PS who works at this level does not yet convene their principals in meetings that operate as communities of practice devoted to helping principals grow as instructional leaders. | A PS who works at this level convenes their principals and talks about their approach as teaching principals in those group settings, but does not yet take this approach in their actual practice. | A PS who works at this level:  
- Convenes their principals regularly and takes a teaching approach in those convenings. However, teaching is not yet their main approach in those settings.  
- Occasionally demonstrates that they understand what teaching moves in their principal convenings might help principals grow as instructional leaders.  
- Occasionally demonstrates that they understand why to take a teaching approach in their principal convenings or why particular teaching moves in those settings may help principals grow as instructional leaders. | A PS who works at this level:  
- Regularly convenes their principals and takes a teaching approach in those convenings to support principals’ growth as instructional leaders.  
- Demonstrates a deepening understanding of what taking a teaching approach in their principal convenings entails.  
- Demonstrates a deepening understanding of why taking a teaching approach in their one-on-one work with principals matters, and why particular teaching moves may contribute to principals’ growth as instructional leaders. | A PS who works at this level:  
- Demonstrates performance at the level of Engaging with Understanding across multiple contexts and years.  
- Improvises—uses the standard as a jumping-off point to develop new teaching strategies while leading principals’ communities of practice to accelerate principals’ growth as instructional leaders. |
**STANDARD 4.**
Systematically uses multiple forms of evidence of each principal’s capacity for instructional leadership to differentiate or tailor their approach to helping their principals grow as instructional leaders

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| A PS who works at this level does not systematically use evidence of each principal’s instructional leadership practice to differentiate how they work with each principal. | A PS who works at this level reports they routinely work with evidence about each principal’s instructional leadership practice to differentiate how they work with each principal. However, they do not yet take this approach in their actual practice. | PS who works at this level:  
• Collects some evidence about their principals’ capacity for instructional leadership and begins to use the evidence to differentiate how they work with each principal. However, their evidence collection is not systematic and their evidence does not come from multiple sources related to principals’ instructional leadership practice. Also, they do not demonstrate that they regularly use that evidence to differentiate how they work with each principal.  
• Occasionally demonstrates understanding of what is entailed in systematically using multiple forms of evidence to differentiate how they work with each principal.  
• Occasionally demonstrates understanding of why using multiple forms of evidence to differentiate their approach may contribute to principals’ growth as instructional leaders. | A PS who works at this level:  
• Systematically collects multiple forms of evidence about each principal’s instructional leadership practice. Uses this evidence to differentiate how they work with each principal.  
• Demonstrates a deepening understanding of what is entailed in systematically using multiple forms of evidence to differentiate their approach to supporting principals’ growth as instructional leaders.  
• Demonstrates a deepening understanding of why using multiple forms of evidence to differentiate their supports matters and why differentiation may contribute to principals’ growth as instructional leaders. | A PS who works at this level:  
• Demonstrates performance at the level of Engaging with Understanding across multiple contexts and years.  
• Improvises—uses the standards as a jumping-off point to develop new ways of using evidence of each principal’s capacity for instructional leadership to differentiate or tailor their approach to accelerate principals’ growth as instructional leaders. |
STANDARD 5.
Engages principals in the formal district principal evaluation process in ways that help principals grow as instructional leaders

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| A PS who works at this level engages with the formal district principal evaluation process from a compliance and supervisory stance inconsistent with supporting principals’ growth as instructional leaders. | A PS who works at this level says they engage principals in the formal district principal evaluation process in ways that support principals’ growth as instructional leaders. However, they do not yet take this approach in their actual practice. | A PS who works at this level:  
• Occasionally engages principals in the formal district principal evaluation process in ways that support principals’ growth as instructional leaders.  
• Occasionally demonstrates that they understand what is entailed in engaging principals in the formal district principal evaluation process in ways that support principals’ growth as instructional leaders.  
• Occasionally demonstrates that they understand why to engage principals in the formal district principal evaluation process in ways that support principals’ growth as instructional leaders. | A PS who works at this level:  
• Regularly engages principals in the formal district principal evaluation process in ways that support principals’ growth as instructional leaders; completes evaluation reports as a by-product of learning-focused engagements with principals.  
• Demonstrates a deepening understanding of what is entailed in engaging principals in the formal district principal evaluation process in ways that support principals’ growth as instructional leaders.  
• Demonstrates a deepening understanding of why to engage principals in the formal district principal evaluation process in ways that support principals’ growth as instructional leaders. | A PS who works at this level:  
• Demonstrates performance at the level of Engaging with Understanding across multiple contexts and years  
• Improvises—uses the standard as a jumping-off point to develop new ways of engaging principals in the formal district principal evaluation process to accelerate principals’ growth as instructional leaders. |
STANDARD 6.
Selectively and strategically participates in other central office work processes to maximize the extent to which they and principals focus on principals’ growth as instructional leaders

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| A PS who works at this level does not approach their work with the rest of the central office selectively or strategically. Instead, they engage with work processes that do not maximize their focus on principals’ growth as instructional leaders. | A PS who works at this level reports that they approach their work with the rest of the central office selectively and strategically. However, they do not yet take this approach in their actual practice. | A PS who works at this level:  
  • Approaches some of their work with the rest of the central office selectively and strategically. However, they still frequently engage in other central office work that does not demonstrably contribute to principals’ growth as instructional leaders.  
  • Does not yet consistently reflect that they understand what is entailed in participating in central office work processes selectively and strategically to maximize their focus on principals’ growth as instructional leaders.  
  • Does not yet consistently reflect that they understand why they should selectively and strategically participate in central office work processes to help them maximize their focus on principals’ growth as instructional leaders. | A PS who works at this level:  
  • Selectively and strategically participates in central office work processes to maximize their focus on principals’ growth as instructional leaders.  
  • Demonstrates a deepening understanding of what is entailed in selectively and strategically participating in central office work processes to maximize their focus on principals’ growth as instructional leaders.  
  • Demonstrates a deepening understanding of why they should selectively and strategically participate in central office work processes to help them maximize their focus on principals’ growth as instructional leaders. | A PS who works at this level:  
  • Demonstrates performance at the level of Engaging with Understanding across multiple contexts and years.  
  • Improvises—uses the standards as a jumping-off point to develop new ways of participating in other central office work processes that maximize the extent to which they and principals focus on principals’ growth as instructional leaders. |
APPENDIX:
HOW WE DEVELOPED THE STANDARDS

Consistent with the mission of DL2 to help district leaders understand and build from the latest knowledge in the field, these standards are research-based.

We started with a comprehensive review of research on the relationship between principal supervision and positive school outcomes. We also consulted research on the provision of supports for principals’ growth by people other than their supervisors, and reviewed the broader literature on the relationship between central office work and teaching-and-learning improvement.
This research review revealed the following:

Principal supervisors matter to improved student learning.
Principal supervisors do so by helping principals grow as instructional leaders who effectively help their teacher improve the quality of their classroom instruction, and, in turn, improve student learning.²

Two peer-reviewed journal articles from one research study associate particular work practices of principal supervisors with positive school results (Honig, et al., 2010; Honig, 2012; Honig & Rainey, 2014). These publications, based on research conducted by DL2 and funded by The Wallace Foundation, used the following indicators of principal instructional leadership growth:

- Principals’ engagement in progressively more challenging instructional leadership activities
- Principal and other professionals’ reports of principal supervisors’ work and efficacy
- Researchers’ analysis of the consistency between principal supervisors’ practices and practices identified in research as associated with helping adults deepen their professional practice (see for example, Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Collins, Brown, & Holum, 2003; Lave, 1998; Rogoff, Baker-Sennett, Lacas, & Goldsmith, 1995; Smagorinsky, Cook, &Johnson, 2003; Tharp & Gallimore, 1991; Wenger,1998).

Two other studies address principal supervisors but provided limited guides for the development of standards.

One involved a survey in which principal supervisors reported what they do and how their districts support them, but the report did not corroborate the self-reports with other evidence or connect the work of principal supervisors to results in schools (Council of Great City Schools, 2013).

The other study revealed how principal supervisors may inhibit positive school-level results such as the implementation of ambitious curricular reform (Hubbard, Mehan, & Stein, 2006). Our research findings reflect other studies on principal learning that likewise highlight how particular coaching relationships and work in principal learning communities relate to principals’ development as instructional leaders.³

² For more on the connection between principals’ instructional leadership and improved teaching and student outcomes, please see, for example: Blase & Blase, 1999; Grissom, Loeb, & Master, 2013; Heck, 1992; Heck, Larson, Marcoulides, 1990; Supovitz, Sirinides, & May, 2011; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008.

³ For more on how principals develop as instructional leaders, please see, for example: Barnes et al, 2010; City et al., 2009; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Fink & Resnick, 2001; Gallucci & Swanson, 2008; Hubbard et al., 2006; Marsh et al., 2005; Peterson, 2002.
The importance of identifying key practices or moves principal supervisors make when they support principals’ growth. The research on principal supervision and how central offices support instructional improvement is beginning to suggest that the moves leaders make day-to-day may matter more to school-level results than their broad activities like “creating a vision” or “providing professional development.” The latter conditions may be necessary but not sufficient for improved results. Likewise, particular dispositions such as “risk-taking” or “strengths-focused” leadership are notoriously hard to measure, and may or may not translate into actions that help improve results.

The importance of distinguishing principal supervision from other roles within the central office. Many studies of central offices and teaching-and-learning improvement call on the “school district” in general to engage in various broad activities such as creating an instructional vision and aligning resources to improved instruction. However, such findings obscure how different central office staff may need to work in different ways to realize improved results. Our own research reveals how distinct practices in different parts of the central office matter for improved school support (Honig, et al., 2010).

The success of principal supervisors may depend on specific changes in the rest of the central office. Supports for schools, and principals in particular, improve when principal supervisors engage in specific practices in the context of a central office that is also transforming in certain ways to better support schools (Honig, et al., 2010; Honig, 2013). Our current research shows how the work of principal supervisors can stall or derail outright when other central office units do not shift their work to align with the principal supervisors’ dedicated instructional focus. We also hypothesize that when principal supervisors take on the responsibilities of other central office departments or staff, they may impede central office change and improvement by enabling others in the central office to continue to perform in unproductive ways.
Based on these findings, in developing the DL2 PSPS, we:

• Drew heavily on our own research
• Focused only on observable practices of principal supervisors related to improvements in principals’ instructional leadership as the main relevant and realistic proximate outcome
• Resisted including standards for principal supervisors that actually relate to the work/responsibilities of other central office staff
• Developed materials (e.g., a background video on the development of the standards) and instruments (e.g., Annual Survey of Principal Supervisors) which reinforce that the principal supervisors’ ability to realize the standards depends on significant aligned changes in the rest of the central office

We then worked with practitioners from districts of different sizes who had been engaged for some time in building out the role of principal supervisors as a learning support for principals. We asked them to provide input on the scope, wording, and relevance of the standards and incorporated their suggestions into a subsequent version of the standards.

To develop the levels of practice to measure growth along our vetted standards, we then reviewed how other scholars use theory to explain how various professionals deepen their practice. Most relevant to our standards were Grossman, Smagorinsky, and Valencia’s (1999) framework that uses Activity Theory, a strand of Sociocultural Theory (e.g., Wertsch, 1991) to understand the process teachers undergo when learning to teach. This framework was particularly apt for adaptation to principal supervisors because of its focus on learning a practice in a particular context (Grossman et al., 1999)—in our case, the context of school district central offices, as highlighted in Standard 6. We adapted the “five degrees of appropriation” Grossman and colleagues use to explain how teachers adopt various tools for teaching into “levels of practice” that describe the adoption of our standards, which are themselves a tool.

We then consulted extensively with policymakers, practitioners and other members of the Principal Supervisors Performance Standards Working Group of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Refresh process. This process, convened by the Council of Chief State School Officers, aimed to update a part of the ISLLC standards related specifically to central office leaders who supervise school principals. To inform their process, this group conducted focus groups and other outreach efforts including careful reviews of DL2’s then-draft Principal Supervisor Performance Standards. As part of their review, work group members made important suggestions to improve the emphasis and wording of the DL2 PSPS.

Through these processes, we produced version 1.0 and 2.0 of the standards. We will continue to revise and refine the standards as available research expands and we learn from how districts use the standards.
REFERENCES


