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PRINCIPAL

LEADERSHIP

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VIEWPOINT

Professional Standards for Educational Leaders

BY JACQUELYN O. WILSON

In 2002, I had the opportunity to leave the schoolhouse after 28 years and move to a position at the Delaware Department of Education. I had served on many state committees as a teacher, reading specialist, and principal, but no district position or graduate coursework prepared me for the world of state policy.

Stepping out of a school where I worked with dedicated teachers, supportive parents, and hard-working students was very different from the world of licensure and certification, program approval for teacher- and leader-preparation programs, performance evaluation systems, and professional development. I found myself in learning mode every day to understand the state law and regulations that govern our public school system in Delaware.

One of the reasons I went to the Department of Education was to help with the implementation of new regulations around student and professional accountability. It was during those learning years that I began to understand the importance of professional standards for educational leaders. I was managing a Wallace Foundation grant on behalf of the department, and the focus was state policy to support standards, training, and working conditions for school leaders. What I learned was that there were few state policies in 2002 that supported a cohesive leadership system for school leaders. For the last 15 years, I have worked hard to change that reality.

Leadership Role

After leaving the Department of Education, I took on a leadership role at the Delaware Academy for School

Leadership—a center in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Delaware in Georgetown, DE. I continued to lead the Delaware Department of Education's work, which focused on six primary areas related to school leadership: standards for educational leaders, principal pipeline programs in school districts, university preparation programs, licensure and certification, performance evaluation, and professional development.

For a decade, and with the support of The Wallace Foundation and Race to the Top funding, the state of Delaware developed a cohesive leadership system that improved state and district policies related to standards, training, and evaluation of school leaders. The foundation for the work was a set of state standards for school leaders that articulate the leadership that our schools need and our students deserve.

Quality of Teaching

As a former principal, I knew the influence I had to create conditions conducive to each student's learning. I was very aware that it was my responsibility to develop and support teachers, create a positive working environment, and allocate resources in an equitable manner.

I also understood that my focus had to be on the quality of teaching in each classroom and the learning of each child in my school. I was also deeply committed to creating an atmosphere where children felt safe and happy, and where parents shared the responsibility for their child's education. You see, as a principal I knew and understood that

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERS 2015

Standard 1. Mission, Vision, and Core Values

Effective educational leaders develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high-quality education and academic success and well-being of each student.

Standard 2. Ethics and Professional Norms

Effective educational leaders act ethically and according to professional norms to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Standard 3. Equity and Cultural Responsiveness

Effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Standard 4. Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

Effective educational leaders develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Standard 5. Community of Care and Support for Students

Effective educational leaders cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community that promotes the academic success and well-being of each student.

Standard 6. Professional Capacity of School Personnel

Effective educational leaders develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Standard 7. Professional Community for Teachers and Staff

Effective educational leaders foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Standard 8. Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community

Effective educational leaders engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Standard 9. Operations and Management

Effective educational leaders manage school operations and resources to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

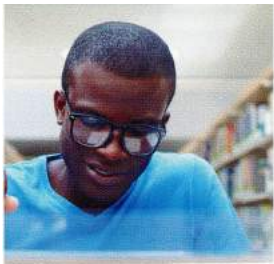
my responsibility was to bring the standards to life for the children I served. As a policy leader, I knew that the standards could be a key lever for improving the quality of preservice preparation, principal pipeline programs, state licensure and certification, performance appraisals systems, and the quality of professional development.

What are leadership standards? According to the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders at the American Institutes for Research: "State standards and policies communicate expectations for school leaders' practices and inform efforts to support leadership talent development, including preparation, licensure,

professional development, performance evaluation, and professional advancement." (Learn more at www.principalstandards.gtcenter.org/node/57).

Adapting National Standards

States often adapt national standards for school leaders, or they develop their own set of state standards that engage practitioners in the process. Standards are never static, and as the job responsibilities change for school leaders, so does the need to revise the standards. Most recently, we have experienced a third revision to the national standards for school leaders, which changed from the Interstate



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School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) to the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders 2015. It was my goal to see the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders 2015 adopted by the Delaware Professional Standards Board and the State Board of Education. Why was this so important to me? I understood the importance of standards for school leaders as the foundation for state policy.


Dedicated Researchers

In serving on committees to revamp the standards for educational leaders, I observed dedicated researchers who read hundreds of research studies on the work of school leadership. I also participated in discussions with committee members who reviewed the recommendations from focus groups and hundreds of practitioners who responded to surveys about the work they do in schools to support children, families, teachers, and communities. I found myself in awe of how the research and the world of practice were aligning and validating what those of us who work in schools every day know—that the work of principals has changed significantly since 2008.

What is different about the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders 2015? I believe that the committee demanded that the standards put a greater emphasis on students and student learning and the actions of school leaders in making sure each child is well-educated and prepared for the 21st century. We also realized that curriculum, instruction, and assessment are important and contribute to student learning, but they are not enough. We wanted the standards to emphasize the importance of academic rigor and academic publications, coupled with the care and attention school leaders provide to students. We demanded standards that recognize the importance of human relationships and that develop

a culture focused on school improvement. The standards recognize the role school leaders play in teacher supervision and evaluation, as well as the development of teachers as leaders.

The state of Delaware adopted the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) 2015 (see sidebar, page 23) in 2016. I am very proud that our state is one of the first states to approve PSEL 2015 as the foundation for state policy for school leaders. We are beginning the tasks of working with stakeholders to align all professional development, performance appraisal systems, and school leader preparation programs to the new standards, just as we did with ISLLC in 2008. These standards are the foundation and define our expectations for school leadership in Delaware.

I believe our parents want principals who balance academic rigor and genuine care, support, and concern for the overall lives of their students. They also want principals who recruit, supervise, and support great teachers and provide them with opportunities to grow professionally. Parents also want principals who care about their children as individuals and demonstrate it by knowing their names, whether or not they have a pet, or if they won the ball game on Friday night. The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders communicate our expectations to practitioners, policy leaders, and the public about the qualities and values of effective educational leadership. They also describe the expectations for the job. I hope your state or district takes action and adopts the PSEL 2015. 

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