



Photo by MICHAEL KOSTEL

Tulsa principal supervisor Kayla Robinson leads a principal portfolio meeting, where all principals in a supervisor's cluster of schools to come together for training and sharing under the guidance of their principal supervisor.

TRAINING the TRAINERS

BY AMY SALTZMAN

LEARNING TO
BE A PRINCIPAL
SUPERVISOR

While most principal supervisors are former principals themselves, few come

to the role with specific training in how to do the job effectively. For this reason, both the Washington, D.C., and Tulsa, Oklahoma, principal supervisor programs include a strong professional development component.

In D.C., principal supervisors meet every Tuesday to receive training on topics such as leadership development and coaching. Once a month, they also participate in school walk-throughs with each other to observe their colleagues in action and provide feedback. They are typically accompanied by one of two deputy chiefs responsible for supervising the principal supervisors. “The walk-throughs give me a sense of how well they are pushing a principal on a critical issue. Are they providing actionable feedback, or just saying, ‘Everything’s great,’ or, ‘You need to improve,’ but not being specific in what needs to happen?” says Amanda Alexander, deputy chief for elementary schools in D.C.

In the past, a lack of standards for

gauging principal supervisors’ work made it difficult to measure success. That changed in December 2015, when the Council of Chief State School Officers released the first-ever standards for principal supervisors crafted by a team of educators from across the nation. Developed with support from The Wallace Foundation, the standards provide a clear definition of what principal supervisors should know and be able to do, shifting the focus of the job from bureaucratic compliance to helping principals improve instruction (CCSSO, 2015).

The principal supervisors interviewed for this report all agreed that being a strong principal does not automatically translate into success as a

principal supervisor. And all considered ongoing training invaluable. “Overall, our team is exceptionally well-versed in instruction and pedagogy. But there are other areas, such as coaching, that warrant more attention,” says Alexander.

At a Tuesday professional development session in D.C., the principal supervisors began the day by discussing an assigned book, *Masterful Coaching*, by Robert Hargrove. They divided into small groups to share insights about the book and grapple with difficult problems, such as how best to manage underperforming principals.

The supervisors were also eager to discuss worrisome new testing data showing a continuing wide achievement gap between students of color and other students. Together, they pondered strategies to motivate principals to work more aggressively with teachers to significantly improve results. Several suggested that principals often rate teachers too high. “How do we empower our principals to have honest conversations with teachers about their performance?” wondered Harry Hughes, an elementary school principal supervisor in D.C.



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CULTIVATING FUTURE PRINCIPAL SUPERVISORS

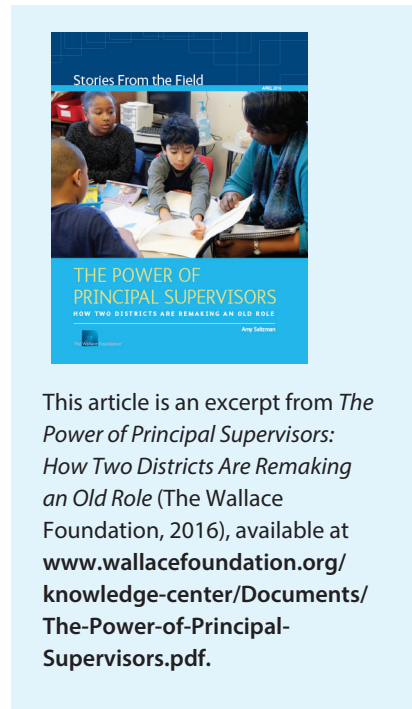
The hope is that consistent training, as well as support from other principal supervisors, will lead to greater stability in a position historically characterized by high turnover and unclear professional standards. A 2013 study by the Council of the Great City Schools found that educators in these positions lacked access to the instructionally focused professional development needed to help strengthen principals as instructional leaders. What's more, few had enough time to grow in the job. The study found that the average tenure for the position in urban districts was just three years (Corcoran, Casserly, Price-Baugh, Walston, Hall, & Simon, 2013).

Tulsa Public Schools hopes that by cultivating a pipeline of principals interested in becoming supervisors, it will be able to create a more seamless transition when turnover inevitably occurs. Seven Tulsa principals and two former principals who now hold central office positions are participating in the district's two-year Learning Leaders program. The program identifies high-performing principals and pays them stipends for successful completion of training covering topics such as

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coaching techniques and tools.

Principals who had been exceptionally strong teachers are often the best fit for the program. "Being able to work with a principal and provide effective coaching and mentoring really comes down to being an effective



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teacher," says Jennifer Gripado, who helped create and manage the Instructional Leadership Director program in Tulsa and is now a principal supervisor herself.

LEARNING FROM OTHER PRINCIPALS

Both the Tulsa and D.C. programs also provide a more formal structure for principals to learn from each

other. Monthly "principal portfolio" meetings in Tulsa, for example, allow all principals in a supervisor's cluster of schools to come together for training and sharing under the guidance of their principal supervisor. "My portfolio group is a real blessing for all of us.

We're a tight group, and we collaborate a lot," says Candace Stine, principal of Robertson Elementary in Tulsa.

A recent principal portfolio session at Robertson, led by principal supervisor Kayla Robinson, began with each principal discussing important successes during the past month. One principal talked about how a previously struggling 1st-grade teacher was "really taking off." Another discussed improvements in the "culture of the building." Robinson then had them break into smaller groups for classroom walk-throughs, instructing the principals to "look closely at what teachers and students are doing and what the level of learning is." After the visits, they regrouped and presented "immediate action steps" teachers could take to improve instruction. They also participated in role-playing exercises to practice effective ways to talk to teachers about weak elements in their instructional approach.

"I work really hard to bring the principals together to problem solve and support each other. They should never feel like they have to figure all of this out by themselves," says Robinson.

REFERENCES

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