Vignette One:

Principal Jones is a fifth-year principal in District Suburban. Principal Jones is primarily responsible for evaluating all staff. Principal Jones has a close relationship with his thirty-five-member staff participating in professional and social relationships. Principal Jones has an assistant principal who oversees discipline and does some teacher evaluations. The principal evaluates all tenured teachers. Principal Jones is visible in the hallways, extra-curricular activities, and community events/social gatherings.

Jones believes in the practice of “fly-by” evaluations. Principal Jones walks the hallways and without entering classrooms feels as though he can get a good read about what is happening in the classrooms. Principal Jones eats lunch with the teachers every day and claims the ability to differentiate between the exemplar, good, fair and poor teachers through this practice.

Principal Jones does follow the basic PERA requirements and conducts one informal and one formal observation for each tenured teacher and one informal and two formal observations for non-tenured teachers. During the informal observation, the tenured teacher provides a lesson plan for the pre-observation conference and the principal always asks the teacher what the teacher would like the principal to look for.

The principal attempts to script what is happening in the lesson but does not align the scripted material to the Danielson Domains and Components. The principal does not structure the post observation conference to allow the teacher to reflect on his/her own teaching. The principal does the majority of the talking during the post conference and teachers are most interested in their “rating” and not in feedback and reflection to improve their own teaching.

Principal Jones believes that observing in his colleagues’ classroom is intimidating, threatening, and a distraction to their lesson delivery. Principal Jones is an advocate that formal classroom observations are just “dog and pony” demonstrations and he gets more legitimate evaluation observations by walking the hallways and briefly viewing behavior in the classrooms. Principal Jones truly believes evidence from walking the hallways and engagement with staff in multiple settings gathers more valid and reliable information than formal classroom observations. Principal Jones has a sound record of completing all evaluations in a timely manner. Principal Jones has no teacher complaints on the teacher evaluation process or ratings, and the teachers appreciate his support.
Teachers are not required to submit lesson plans except for the pre-observation conference as part of the formal evaluation procedure. The evaluation plan requires no documentation of curriculum scope and sequence. School improvement planning is done by a volunteer team of teachers who complete the document and present annually to the school board. However, Principal Jones does not attend School Improvement planning meetings but designates a SIP lead teacher.

Almost all the classrooms are designed in traditional seating with rows and columns. Most teacher presentations are lecture format with student compliance required. Students have daily access to Chromebooks for classroom use which is primarily powerpoints, notes, and Google searches. Student assessment consists of evaluating student learning in the traditional daily homework, weekly quizzes and textbook unit tests. Daily work and weekly assessments are graded and returned to students in a timely matter. No other student feedback is provided to students on an individual basis. The teachers continue to go on to the next lessons regardless of students’ performance on assignments and assessments.

Teachers do not use data for making decisions about their teaching or the curriculum. Differentiation of instruction mostly occurs with special education students and the principal feels the differentiated strategies are spelled out in the IEP document. Regular education teachers work closely with the Reading and Math Title I teachers making referrals for students needing Tier II and III RtI interventions.

The community, Board of Education and staff have often been recognized for student performance on state assessment. Annually students perform above state average on the state assessment.
Teachers responded in the 5Essentials Survey that they are very happy about the climate and working conditions in the school district.

No professional development needs assessment has been conducted for planning district-wide professional. Professional development is planned according to what the local Regional Office of Education can offer for institute and in-service days.

When interviewing and recommending teachers for hire the principal strongly feels that prospective teachers from the same geographic area of the school district will be best suited for employment. Relatives and friends of board members and other teachers are guaranteed interviews with the principal for vacant positions. There is very little teacher turnover and there is no survey of employees who leave the school district.
Vignette 3

Dr. Smith has been serving as principal of a 6-8th grade middle school in a rural residential community for the past four years. When she entered the position, curriculum and assessment were textbook driven and not state-standards driven. Dr. Smith created a middle school curriculum committee her first two years as a principal. Besides having middle school staff members on the committee, Dr. Smith included two fifth grade teachers from the elementary school and two teachers from the high school who taught English and math. There was resistance from the middle school staff on having to “standardize” their curriculum.

After the curriculum alignment work was completed, Dr. Smith had the committee work on common assessments for measuring student performance on the newly developed set learning standards. There was less resistance in completing this work because the district purchased a curriculum software system for managing the standards and assessments that integrated with the student management system, particularly the grade book. The web-based software is a site for teachers to generate lesson plans with tagging the standards being taught. Teachers can print off the assessments with student identification numbers, administer the assessment aligned with specific learning standards, have the assessment graded by the software with grades uploaded into the grade book, and get an analysis on how each student performed on each designated standard.

The teachers have a scheduled late start date every Wednesday to work in PLCs to analyze student performance, create flex groups for learning during RtI period, and collaborate on best practices for improving student learning. Dr. Smith makes it her purpose to sit in on two PLC meetings each week to observe teacher collaboration, plan professional development in areas that teachers struggled in teaching, and assist teachers in creating a plan for improvement.

The middle school has active participation on the district’s School Improvement Planning committee. The superintendent has each school in the district generate a companion school-based improvement plan setting goals for improvement. The committee meets during the summer months and bases their district/school improvement plan on student assessment results received from spring testing and parent/staff survey results from Illinois 5Essentials. Parent representatives from each school in the district are on the committee. Dr. Smith’s school improvement team presents the plan to the staff at the first institute day. Copies are made for each teacher to guide their planning, instruction and professional development plan for the school year.

Dr. Smith commits to observing teachers on a regular basis. She schedules time in her daily calendar to spend in classrooms. Dr. Smith manages to stay on her schedule for many school student attendance days. Dr. Smith observes teachers regardless if they are in the “on or off year” of teacher evaluation. Dr. Smith schedules reflective conversations with teachers following her visits. Her informal visits are separate from her “formal observation” visits. Students and teachers are very comfortable having Dr. Smith in the classrooms.

Dr. Smith’s building has four Chromebook carts that teachers can check-out when needed. Dr. Smith understands and encourage implementation of technology in the lesson design to enhance student growth. The reality of teacher use is limited by the number of Chromebook carts and the lack of financial resources to support an infrastructure for multiple use of Chromebooks at one time.
Dr. Smith distributes the formal observation evaluation schedule to her staff at the first day of teacher institute each year. This schedule defines the formal observation processes for all teachers. Informal observations are conducted on a flexible schedule without teacher knowledge of the date of these observations.

Dr. Smith provides the staff not only a copy of with the Danielson rubric but also has conducted training sessions for the faculty to understand and reflect on the frameworks. Dr. Smith usually plans a staff activity in which they must use the rubric for participation just to “refresh” their thinking on the teacher evaluation plan. After the activity, teachers are to write down their annual goals and submit to Dr. Smith by the end of the week. Dr. Smith follows up individually with each teacher within the second week of the school year on their annual goals.

Dr. Smith sticks with the teacher evaluation schedule throughout the year. She individually meets with the staff members who are on the schedule holding a pre-conference meeting. During this meeting, Dr. Smith has the staff member describe his/her lesson, provide any useful information for her to conduct a fair and impartial observation, and share previous work students have done related to the observed lesson and follow-up work related to the lesson.

Shortly after the formal observation, Dr. Smith follows up with the observed teacher with a lunch meeting where she provides the lunch and both the teacher and the principal tentatively rate each of the components in Domains 2 & 3. They jointly discuss each rating of each component and come to a common understanding of the principal’s final rating. In some instances, the principal does change the rating based on feedback provided by the teacher and works with the teacher on filling out Danielson’s rubric. The teacher and principal jointly determine through reflective conversation what areas the teacher will work on to improve his/her instruction.

Within ten school days from the formal observation, Dr. Smith meets with the teacher going through a written evaluation and gathers signatures. As part of this process the teacher writes reflective strategies to improve any/or all components that were scored less than a (4).

Dr. Smith does not use data to any great extent in her evaluation of teachers. She does require the teachers to use student data in creating student growth goals to abide by the evaluation rules. However, the district uses an “All In” philosophy for evaluating teachers on student growth. This method assures each teacher will receive a “proficient” for student growth for teacher evaluation purposes. Student growth counts for 30% of the final teacher’s summative evaluation rating.

Dr. Smith conducts all interviews of teachers to her school alone. She does not include other teachers or administrators in the process. There is no defined retention plan or survey of teachers as they leave the school district.

Dr. Smith meets all district and evaluation required timelines. While Dr. Smith does require each teacher to offer strategies for improvement for all components rated less than a (4) she does not use any faculty aggregated or disaggregated data to help plan overall staff development for her teachers.
Vignette 2

Mrs. Thurman is an elementary principal in a downstate elementary district. Her school is one of three elementary schools in the district housing neighborhood students in grades Pre-K through 8. Mrs. Thurman has been assigned to this elementary school for ten years. She has worked with four different superintendents.

Mrs. Thurman’s school is an underperforming school in the district. Mrs. Thurman blames the impoverished neighborhood and uneducated parents for the low-test scores. Mrs. Thurman also believes that when the district reorganized staff, her school was assigned many poor performing teachers. For the past two years, the most recent superintendent has filled staff vacancies with a process where the Central Office conducts interviews and assigns the teachers to the schools. In otherwords, the superintendent does not conduct grade-level or school specific interviews but rather “elementary teaching assignment” interviews. Principals are not involved in the interview process.

In 2012 the school qualified for a federal school-improvement grant. The grant funded new instructional materials, 1:1 technology, a variety of professional development program with coaching for implementation, and new Common-Core aligned instructional materials. The morale of teachers was greatly enhanced during the process of implementing the school-improvement grant.

Each year the School Improvement team continues to meet and update the School Improvement plan and keeps it very detailed. Teachers are supportive of the team’s work because of the follow-through with materials, technology support, and professional development.

Curriculum and assessment alignment is a priority at the district level. Each principal was asked to create a curriculum team at his/her building and align the grade level curriculum and assessments. The teacher teams meet as grade-level teams. On an early release day, Mrs. Thurman has the grade-level teams meet with the grade level below each grade (e.g. third grade met with second grade) and the grade-level above (e.g. third grade met with fourth grade). All the elementary schools never worked together on this project - only as building grade level teams. The principals feel there is too much diversity between the student populations at each elementary school for district-wide grade levels to meet.

Mrs. Thurman spends most of her day attending meetings with the superintendent and managing student discipline. She is visible in the halls at the beginning and end of the day. Mrs. Thurman is visible during lunch hours in the cafeteria. Because of Mrs. Thurman’s busy schedule, typically her conversations with staff members are when they pop in her office to ask a question or share a concern. Mrs. Thurman is good about following up with teacher concerns in a timely manner when necessary.

Mrs. Thurman has “conduct teacher evaluations” on her list of projects to get accomplished between October and March. She does complete the teacher evaluations of teachers who are “on” for teacher evaluation. For teachers in the “on year” of teacher evaluation, Mrs. Thurman tries to conduct two informal observations during each quarter. Mrs. Thurman conducts her teacher evaluations using the traditional format: pre-conference, formal observation, written write-up, and post-conference meeting. Mrs. Thurman asks teachers for their lesson planning
book during the pre-conference meeting. This is the only time Mrs. Thurman reviews teachers’ lesson planning books. She also asks teachers to identify the components of the grade level scope and the assessments for the lesson she plans on observing. Mrs. Thurman is thorough in looking for evidence in domains 2 and 3 during her formal classroom observation.

The superintendent expects each school to present student performance results at the October Board of Education meeting. Mrs. Thurman assigns the task to a team of teachers and provides them with copies of the test results. The teachers usually use the previous year’s PowerPoint and updates the performance scores. The scores are reported in aggregate grouping and do not show any cohort comparisons. The PowerPoint shows the third grade classes performance from two years ago compared to last year’s third grade classes performance.

In 2014 due to some significant crises in her building, Mrs. Thurman organized a “first-responder” committee with city and county participants to rewrite the district’s Emergency Response plan. The committee continues to meet two times per school year with all administrators. The current superintendent shares a lot of pride in Mrs. Thurman’s work through frequent acknowledgement. Parent involvement continues to be a challenge at Mrs. Thurman’s school. The most recent Illinois 5Essentials survey indicates Mrs. Thurman’s school as performing well in most areas: collaborative teachers, supportive environment. Students and teachers rate the school highly in these two areas. There is no Illinois 5Essentials score given by parents due to the lack of parents completing they survey.

Commented [4]: Of course, the teacher advocate in me worries about the inference that can be drawn here that we are encouraging cohort comparisons when we don’t know whether that would protect anonymity of the individual teacher (ex. if a cohort contained only one ELA teacher and the ELA data was shown…)