**New School Leaders' Standards Emphasize Instruction, Culture and Managing Talent** By Denisa R. Superville on May 11, 2015 9:49 AM

New professional standards for school leaders—released Monday by the Council of Chief State School Officers—emphasize instruction, culture, and supporting and grooming leaders in schools.

The standards, known as the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium standards, are used as the basis for many school leader preparation programs, licensing, professional development, evaluations, and in decisions about hiring and retention. They apply to all school leaders, including principals, teacher-leaders, and superintendents.

The standards were last updated in 2008. And for the last 18 months or so, various committees of academics, researchers, principals, superintendents, education officials, and organizations that represents and train school leaders have been working to update the standards to reflect what principals and other school leaders need to know and demonstrate for today's job.

Based on [**Monday's draft**](http://www.ccsso.org/Documents/2015/RevisedDraftISLLCStandards2015.pdf), school leaders are expected to do the following:

• **Build a shared vision of student academic success and well-being.** School leaders are expected to work with the community to determine what students need to know and do to succeed in school and life. This includes fostering "an open, tolerant and trusting" culture that values diversity; encouraging discussions on current and future expectations for students, along with ways to improve; and constantly evaluating the progress schools are making toward their goals and making appropriate revisions along the way.

• **Champion and support instruction and assessment that maximize student learning and achievement.** Actions include examining the effectiveness of current instructional approaches; identifying evidence-based instructional strategies to improve teaching methods or add new ones; and appropriately using technology in teaching and learning.

• **Manage and develop staff members' professional skills and practices in order to drive student learning and achievement.** School leaders are expected to be actively engaged in hiring staff and providing them with the right kinds of professional development; using research-based evaluations; and supporting individual staff member's growth.

• **Cultivate a caring and inclusive school community dedicated to student learning, academic success, and personal well-being of every student**. School leaders are responsible for creating environments that not only support children's academic needs, but also their social and emotional needs. This includes supporting students in ways that are culturally appropriate and creating a trusting environment inside the school and between the school and the community.

• **Effectively coordinate resources, time, structures, and roles to build the instructional capacity of teachers and other staff.** Actions include examining resources to determine their impact on student achievement and learning and developing mechanisms to ensure that school resources are allocated and used effectively by teachers and staff.

• **Engage families and the outside community to promote and support student success.** Actions involve school leaders working with the community—parents, government, nonprofits, and the private sector—in ways that lead to positive impacts on student achievement; developing partnerships with families and other external partners; and advocating on the school's behalf to the public and to policymakers.

• **Administer and manage operations efficiently and effectively.** Actions involve ensuring that school functions, including staffing, budget, school discipline and safety, are handled in an equitable, effective, and efficient manner and determining how management systems align with the district's visions and goals.

The new standards, according to the document, "can ensure that education leaders are equipped with the vital knowledge, skills, and dispositions to transform our schools into places that empower students to take ownership of their learning, emphasize the learning of content and the application of knowledge to real-world problems, and value the differences each student brings to the classroom."

**Revisions guided by feedback**

An earlier draft of the standards was [**released for public comment last fall.**](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/District_Dossier/2014/09/new_school_leaders_standards_f.html) That version had 11 standards—an increase over the six from the 2008 version—and included three standards that separately addressed "ethical principles and professional norms," "equity and cultural responsiveness," and "curriculum and assessment."  Those sections are among those missing as standalone standards in the new version; but some of the functions that fell under those categories, including those addressing equity and inclusiveness, were folded into the standards that remained.

Chris Minnich, the executive director of the Council of Chief State School Officers, said in an interview that those concerns about equity and cultural responsiveness were still addressed in the new version.

"I don't think anything too much has gone away," he said. "We felt like the equity conversation was so important that we wanted to make sure we infused it across every standard, rather than having it [as] a standalone standard on its own that could either be ignored or isolated.  Equity has to be part of the principal's mindset."

The version that was released Monday is by no means the final say on the standards, he said.

CCSSO was soliciting a second round of public comment to ensure more opportunity for people to comment on the standards, he said.  Feedback collected last year indicated that some of the standards and actions were repetitive, that they were too many of them, and that they should include what transformational leaders should be able to know and do, Minnich said.

The new standards are prefaced by a section on their intended goals, how the standards are expected to be used, and a new section on the eight characteristics of "transformational" leaders. Transformational leaders should be growth-orientated, collaborative, innovative, analytical, ethical, perseverant, reflective, and equity-minded, according to the document.

Those themes are woven throughout the seven standards, Minnich said.

Minnich said the latest version of the standards were informed by the results of a public survey last year, along with focus-group testing conducted afterward. The focus groups included an informal group called the Education Leaders Network, a Wallace Foundation-funded group of education leaders, government representatives, some academies and other groups like New Leaders. (The Wallace Foundation supports coverage of leadership at *Education Week*.)

**Process criticized**

Last week, some who had worked on the standards over the last 18 months said [**they had been sidelined from the process**](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2015/05/08/new-school-leader-standards-stir-dissent.html) after the public comment period ended last year.

In that nearly four-week-long comment period, 723 individuals responded to the online public survey. Four groups/individuals submitted comments directly to CCSSO, according to a report analyzing the public feedback.  Eighty percent of those who responded to the online survey rated "the quality of the standards as a whole as excellent or good," according to the report.

Of those that answered questions directly relating to the individual standards, 85 to 90 percent thought each standard clearly represented that domain of leadership they represented.

The report also found that answers to some questions were the same, meaning that the same person could have entered the same response multiple times or different people could have entered the same response. Of those who answered the question on the number of standards, 50 percent said they were just right; 47 percent said they were too many.

Joseph Murphy, a professor of educational leadership at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn., and who wrote the original standards in 1996, led the 2008 rewrite, and headed the umbrella committee that put together last year's draft, was heavily critical of the new standards and the CCSSO's process in the final review.

Murphy, who is in charge of the rewriting committee, did not see the newest set of standards until last week, when his feedback was solicited, he said.  And officials with the National Association of Secondary Schools Principals, who were also heavily involved until the public comment period last year, also said they had been left out of the final revision and feared that principals were being left in the creation of professional standards that apply to their profession.

"I am sorry they felt that way," Minnich said.  "We are trying to work very hard to include as many constituencies as possible, and that's hard to do in a situation where you have so many leaders in our schools. We tried not to give any one more or less access. ...If the associations feel like they were sidelined, we are going to work really hard to make sure that doesn't happen in the final version."

Murphy said he couldn't support the new set of standards as written.

"They are deficient, they are inadequate, and they marginalize important things," Murphy said.

Murphy took particular issue with the removal of explicit language dealing with social justice and student marginalization, as well as the truncated section on teaching and learning. He said principals must care not only for the academic needs of students, but also the social and emotional ones. And Murphy worried that once the language was removed from the standards, it would not be included or addressed when states and districts make policies or take actions based on the standards.

Minnich, pointing toward standard 4, said he did not think that the newest version left out the diverse communities in schools or issues of equity.

"I don't think we've removed the focus on being able to teach and lead in an environment that's increasingly diverse," he said.  "I do think that if there is some question about that, we would get feedback on it, and we would make sure we are clear in future versions that's an important part of the standards."

Margaret Terry Orr, an education leadership professor at Bank Street College of Education in New York City, was also critical of the standards.

Orr headed up a committee that consisted of practitioners. She said the standards released last year were expanded to include the many concerns and responsibilities principals reported having to deal with in their schools. Issues relating to teaching, curriculum, and assessment were spread over three separate standards in 2014, and the social justice components were added based on principals' feedback.

Orr said the standards now appeared confusing; some were too broad, while others appeared as "checklist" items for principals.

The proposed new standards ended up "muddling things together instead of providing more clarity and direction," Orr said.

Clearly, some in the leadership community felt that the standards released last year needed revisions. And those who worked on them said they expected some tweaks not a major rewrite.

Among the organizations that provided feedback last year were the National Governors Association and New Leaders, the New York City-based nonprofit that trains school leaders to work in high-poverty schools.

The National Governors Association wrote that the increase in the number of standards reinforced the idea that the principals' job was impossible and obscured the role they played in talent management and instructional leadership. The group suggested paring down the standards to focus on just the core functions of the job—instructional leadership and talent management—cleaning up the language, and separating standards for principals from those of other district leaders such as superintendents.

New Leaders nodded at some aspects of the 2014 revisions, including the heavy emphasis on instructional leadership and the principals' role in building a strong school culture, both of which were improvements on the 2008 version. Like the National Governors Association, it also asked for deeper revisions and clarity and a reduction in the number of standards altogether.

Benjamin Fenton, the chief strategy officer at New Leaders, said that when the group reviewed the draft last year, it looked for language that would clearly articulate the standards' real purpose and set clear priorities for the most important aspects of the job. It was also looking for an emphasis on principals' responsibility to reach all students in their buildings by focusing on instructional leadership, talent development and management, and leading strong school cultures for students.

Fenton said the outline of the new standards that he had seen seemed to name the right set of priorities for states, policymakers, and practitioners to focus on when thinking about principal selection and development. And he thought the inclusion of the section on transformational leadership was important.

The standards "show the priorities for principals that align with that we've seen from the research in the field and in our own experience and practice with principals—that real focus on instructional leadership, on talent development and management, on school culture leadership for students," he said. "Those aspects seem like they are much stronger than they were in the 2008 version."

Given all of this, Minnich stressed that the standards were nowhere near finished and that the organization was certainly not ready to stamp "final" on them.

In fact, Minnich declined to provide a date for when the final version would be released, saying that it was more important to ensure that the standards were correct.

"The biggest thing is that we get them right," he said. "The timeline is less important...It' s a big deal, and we want to make sure that principals have clear guidance about what we're expecting of them."