

MEMORANDUM

Date: January 19, 2012
To: Minnesota Principal Evaluation Work Group
From: Vallay Varro, executive director for MinnCAN

Ann Mulholland, vice president of grants and program for The Saint Paul Foundation and former deputy mayor for the City of Saint Paul

Sandra L. Vargas, president and CEO of The Minneapolis Foundation

Subject: Minnesota must cultivate dynamic principals

Leadership matters a lot. We know that any organization's success stems from its leaders' ability to set the vision, goals, organizational culture and, most importantly, to support the people that they lead. It's not just the Targets and Medtronics of the world that need great leaders. It's not even just the small businesses or city hall and the governor's mansion. Minnesota runs more than 2,100 vital organizations desperately in need of fantastic leadership to steer the future of our state: our public schools.

As the instructional leaders of their schools, principals are critical. Parents trust principals to help prepare their children for college and careers by creating a safe, fair and academically enriching environment. Teachers look to principals for the support they need to realize every child's potential. Academic research repeatedly proves that after teachers, the principal is the second most influential factor within a school for improving a student's education.¹

The Minnesota Legislature called for the annual evaluation of principals in 2011, due in great part to the work and leadership of the Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association and the Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals. We applaud these efforts. Principals are vital to our children's education, and their capacity and know-how are necessary to solving our biggest challenges, including Minnesota's staggering achievement gaps.

To make sure that every Minnesota public school has a great principal monitoring the halls, supporting teachers and advancing student learning, our state is counting on your group to create the principal evaluation system. The evaluations will help assess which principals are thriving and which are faltering and make sure that principals get the help that they need or the recognition that they deserve.

We recognize that the work group is committed to elevating the principal profession and providing further structure for principal-teacher collaboration on classroom instruction. We praise Minnesota Education Commissioner Brenda Cassellius and her staff for prioritizing this conversation and developing a robust evaluation system. The work group benefits from their guidance and expertise.

¹ New Leaders for New Schools (2010)

This system must include student and teacher performance as explicit components of a principal's evaluation so that we develop and support strong principals.

The Saint Paul Foundation, The Minneapolis Foundation and MinnCAN call for a system that supports and recognizes our state's high-performing principals. We ask that the Department of Education and the work group abide by these provisions:

- Student achievement gains as the predominant factor in evaluating a principal's effectiveness, including, but not limited to, state-approved assessments.
- As the school's instructional leader, the principal exercises effective and greater autonomy that guides teachers to elevate student achievement.
- Measurement of a principal's ability to recruit, develop and retain teachers rated as "effective" by a reliable and rigorous teacher-evaluation system.
- Structure for principals to receive constructive feedback from superintendents and their teachers.
- Development of principal instructional leadership skills that align with explicit leadership actions: creating a positive school culture, setting a clear vision for the organization, and allocating appropriate time and resources to operations².
- Distinguish between principals at different schools to create attainable benchmarks.
- Consideration of a principal's ability to create and sustain parent and community involvement.

It is paramount that Minnesota seizes the parameters we outlined above. Minnesota is home to some of the largest achievement gaps in the United States. Our schools, our teachers, and most importantly, our students need principals capable of growing learning environments that close the achievement gaps and ensure that all kids achieve at the highest levels.

As Principal Evaluation Work Group members, you carry a heavy responsibility. Your leadership matters a lot, too.

cc: Commissioner Brenda Cassellius
