

## Using the Schools to Watch Rubric as a Tool to Assist Middle School Administrators with School Improvement and Leadership Performance Evaluations

By Nicholas Bernice, Ed.D.

Many middle school administrators have been confounded by the requirements of AchieveNJ: how to develop leadership goals, improve their schools, and meet the expectations of the performance evaluation. However, there is a middle school reform model that both addresses components of principal evaluation models, including assisting in the creation and implementation of leadership goals, and enriches the middle school academic environment. The National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform developed the Schools to Watch rubric, which is a method of gathering data based on a school reform model, intended to assist middle school educators who are trying to improve their schools. The rubric is not an evaluation system, and should not be used to evaluate a school leader; however, administrators may find the Schools to Watch rubric helpful in supporting their own evaluations and improving their schools.

The Schools to Watch rubric is a simple design of Likert scale questions, grouped into categories that have emerged as critical aspects of successful middle schools. Teachers are to complete the rubrics (often in small groups to foster discussion about the topics) and submit them for tabulation and analysis. Administrators can use these baseline data to assist in the creation of goals, which leverage the strengths found in the analysis in order to address the deficits. Staff can be surveyed once or twice a year to determine the efficacy the actions plans, using the same methodology to ensure validity. The efforts of staff committees are an important part of the school reform process.

Schools to Watch is a national organization that includes middle schools from 19 states and has determined that a quality middle school possesses the following components:

- *Academic Excellence (AE)* – The school challenges all students to use their minds well.
- *Developmental Responsiveness (DR)* – The school is sensitive to the unique developmental challenges of early adolescence.
- *Social Equity (SE)* - The school is democratic and fair, providing every student with high-quality teachers, resources, learning opportunities, and supports.
- *Organizational Structures and Processes (OSP)* – A high-performing school establishes norms, structures, and organizational arrangements to support and sustain its trajectory toward excellence.

In order to make the Schools to Watch rubric an effective tool in assisting school leaders with their performance evaluation, leadership goals, and school improvement, the rubric was carefully compared to the six most common, New Jersey Department of Education-approved principal evaluation models. The charts below demonstrate the relationship between the Schools to Watch rubric and the performance evaluation models used in many districts throughout New Jersey. More importantly, the tables show where the Schools to Watch rubric contains a question or topic that relates to the elements of the particular evaluation model.

Table 1 - Focal Point Rubric

Domains	STW Category
Leadership	OSP
Instructional Program	AE, OSP, SE
Staff Development	AE, DR, OSP, SE
Effective Management	AE, DR, OSP, SE
Professional Responsibilities	AE, DR, OSP

Table 2 - Marshall Principal Evaluation

Rubrics	STW Category
Diagnosis & Planning	AE, DR, OSP
Priority Management & Communication	DR, OSP
Curriculum & Data	AE, DR, OSP, SE
Supervision, Evaluation, and Professional Development	AE, DR, OSP, SE
Discipline and Parent Involvement	DR, OSP, SE
Management & External Relations	AE, DR, OSP

Table 3 - Marzano Leadership Evaluation

Domains	STW Category
Data Driven Focus on Student Achievement	AE, DR, OSP, SE
Continuous Improvement of Instruction	AE, DR, OSP, SE
Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum	AE, DR, OSP, SE
Cooperation and Collaboration	AE, DR, OSP
School Climate	DR, OSP, SE

Table 4 - McREL Principal Evaluation

Components	STW Category
Managing Change	DR, OSP
Focus of Leadership	AE, OSP
Purposeful Community	AE, DR, OSP

Table 5- Multidimensional Principal Performance Rubric

Domains	STW Category
School Vision of Learning	AE, DR, OSP, SE
School Culture and Instructional Program	AE, DR
Safe, Efficient, and Effective Learning Environment	AE, DR, SE
Community	AE, DR, SE
Integrity, Fairness, and Ethics	DR, OSP, SE
Political, Social, Economic, Legal, and Cultural Context	DR, OSP, SE

Table 6- Stronge Principal Standards

Components	STW Category
Instructional Leadership	AE, DR, OSP
Organizational Management	OSP, SE
School Climate	DR, OSP, SE
Human Resource Management	OSP, SE
Communication and Community Relations	DR, OSP, SE
Professionalism	AE, DR, OSP, SE
Student Progress	AE, DR, SE

Of the six principal evaluation models analyzed above, there are a total of 31 components to consider. In every case, there are at least one or more survey items that the Schools to Watch rubric addresses, which can gather quantitative data on the school's performance. This data can be used to assist school leaders, and their stakeholder committees, in focusing their efforts to make their school a "School to Watch." A school leader's goals, evaluations, and surveying staff can and should be linked together by the common thread of reforming schools to be the best they can possibly be.

If you think that the Schools to Watch rubric can serve your school and you need advice or assistance on how to employ the rubric, then contact the New Jersey State Co-Chairs: Dr. Gail Hillard-Nelson at [gnelson@drew.edu](mailto:gnelson@drew.edu) or Mr. Frank Corrado at <mailto:corrado@njschoolstowatch.org>. You can also contact any N.J. Schools to Watch principal. You can find designated schools in New Jersey on their website at <http://www.njschoolstowatch.org/>.

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