

Principals Want to Know

A tip sheet for principals that focuses on practical issues faced in schools.

Drawn from existing resources, these tips are designed to support instructional leadership practice.

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Annual Learning Plans and Teacher Performance Appraisal

The Question:

“How can I augment the learning culture of my school by effectively engaging teachers in their Annual Learning Plans (ALP) and Teacher Performance Appraisal (TPA)?”

The Answer:

Here are five Tips for Success:

1. Embed learning-focused conversations in your daily interactions with teachers
2. Collaborate with teachers
3. Build coherence between ALP/TPA and other school, board and ministry initiatives and priorities
4. Align professional learning and resources with teachers' ALPs
5. Use the TPA as a growth-oriented opportunity

1. EMBED LEARNING-FOCUSED CONVERSATIONS IN YOUR DAILY INTERACTIONS WITH TEACHERS

Engaging teachers in conversations about teaching and learning is one of the most important roles of the principal that can have the greatest impact on student outcomes. Learning-focused conversations are not limited to an annual meeting about a teacher's ALP goal or the Pre- and Post-Observation Meetings during an appraisal year but, rather, they should occur regularly: a follow-up to a walk-through, a team or staff meeting, a PLC meeting or simply an informal conversation in the staff room.

“The more leaders focus their relationships, their work and their learning on the core business of teaching and learning, the greater their influence on student outcomes.”

Viviane Robinson (2007)

By regularly engaging with teachers in discussions about teaching and learning, you build credibility and a trusting relationship that effectively prepares you and the teacher for the learning-focused conversations throughout the

ALP and TPA processes. You and the teacher are more likely to feel comfortable openly discussing his or her practice, goals and growth-oriented feedback if the ALP/TPA discussions are simply one of many professional conversations between you both.

2. COLLABORATE WITH TEACHERS

Collaborating with teachers is a vital element to both the learning culture of your school and to ALP/TPA as effective growth-oriented opportunities. Viviane Robinson states the role of the principal must be more than “just supporting or sponsoring staff in their learning.” In promoting and participating in teacher learning and development, “[t]he leader participates in the learning as leader, learner or both.”

Friedkin & Slater (1994) believe that “[t]he principal is also more likely to be seen by staff as a source of instructional advice, which suggests that they are both more accessible and more knowledgeable about instructional matters...”

Viviane Robinson (2007)

Here are a few easy ways to build collaboration in the ALP with your staff:

- Engage staff in the collaborative development of the School Improvement Plan (SIP); they will be more likely to be motivated to connect their own learning goals to something they have invested in creating;
- Build professional learning networks among teachers with common learning goals – foster these networks and connections during staff meetings, grade/division/department meetings and PA days; and
- Create opportunities throughout the year for teachers to discuss their learning goals and progress with each other (e.g., mingle at a staff meeting or a team discussion at a department/division/grade meeting). Get involved in the collaborative and reflective discussions; these discussions on the ALP do not always have to be one-to-one.

Nurturing a collaborative culture, when it comes to teacher growth and appraisal, involves reaching and



empowering all staff members according to their individual needs and strengths. Through collaboration, you can recognize successes, access expertise, and acknowledge and support growth and learning needs.

Look for: ALP/TPA Effective Practices Strategy Harvest (collated from regional networking sessions with boards and federations) at:

<http://mentoringmoments.ning.com/group/alp-tpa-networked-learning>

3. BUILD COHERENCE BETWEEN ALP/TPA AND OTHER SCHOOL, BOARD AND MINISTRY INITIATIVES AND PRIORITIES

Coherence can be found in one overarching goal: to improve student achievement. There are many competing priorities in your school and district; a focus on teaching is essential to reach all of these priorities. It is, therefore, important that you align your work as it relates to these priorities with the annual learning plans and teacher performance appraisal.

Here are a few simple ways to build coherence between ALP/TPA and school, board and ministry initiatives:

- Ask questions to guide the discussion in the Pre-Observation Meeting that make explicit connections between the teacher's practice and the SIP and other school, board and ministry priorities;
- Throughout staff learning sessions, model the use of success criteria to highlight what that practice would look like in a classroom and connect to what you would be looking for during formal and informal classroom visits;
- During staff learning sessions or meetings, use reflective questions to engage teachers in discussions about teaching and learning. Use the same questions throughout the ALP and TPA processes to generate discussion on the teacher's practice and goals.

4. ALIGN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND RESOURCES WITH TEACHERS' ANNUAL LEARNING PLANS

The teacher's ALP gives you another opportunity to create and model a collaborative working culture. The value you place on the ALP by meeting with the teacher to discuss goals and strategies, suggest resources and offer support will heighten the value the teacher gives the ALP.

The value a principal demonstrates towards the ALP process is very significant; it is a reflection of his or her respect for teaching professionalism through recognition and support for a teacher's professional development.

Teacher Focus Group on ALP/ TPA

You can further build value into the ALP by aligning professional learning and resources with your staff's goals. For instance, you can:

- Analyze and collate the learning goals outlined in the ALPs into common themes;
- Use the themes to connect, formally or informally, teachers with common learning goals;
- Design differentiated staff learning based on the themes of learning goals; and
- Support learning goals by accessing school, board or ministry resources.

5. USE TPA AS A GROWTH-ORIENTED OPPORTUNITY

The TPA process is designed to engage in collaborative growth-oriented discussions about teaching and learning. Embedded in the broader learning culture of the school, TPA can profoundly motivate and stimulate teacher growth and instructional improvement. It is both an opportunity to formally acknowledge what the teacher is doing well and to provide forward-looking feedback for support and growth.

The broadest function of the appraisal meetings is to "improve or enhance job performance by engaging a reflective conversation on the complexities of teaching and learning."

Stronge and Tucker, 2003

Annual learning plans and teacher performance appraisal provide a strategy for teachers and school leaders to focus on instructional practice and ongoing professional learning. They provide opportunities to engage in professional dialogue about these priorities and the teacher's practice, to motivate further growth and direct or access support. It is important, however, that ALP and TPA are situated within the learning culture of the school, not in isolation.

You can learn much more by reading the original source listed in the reference that follows. We welcome you to add your own thoughts by joining the Ontario Education Leaders network:

<http://ontarioeducationleaders.ning.com>

REFERENCE

Robinson, Viviane (2007). *The impact of leadership on student outcomes: Making sense of the evidence*. Melbourne: Australian Council for Educational Research

Stronge, J. and P. Tucker (2003). *Handbook on Teacher Evaluation: Assessing and Improving Performance*. Eye on Education Publications

