

New Requirements for Evaluating Principals

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Recent legislation added new requirements for evaluating principals. The changes are very significant and the failure to strictly follow them may lead to unintended employment consequences. For this reason, the respective associations of these school leaders jointly developed this concise guidance material describing the new requirements for evaluating principals. The new law is reprinted at the end of this document.

I. Annual Evaluations/Automatic Extensions

The new law is specific in that principals on one-year contracts must be evaluated annually by February 1 and principals on multi-year contracts must be evaluated by February 1 of the final year of their contract. If the principal is not evaluated prior to February 1, the employment contract will automatically extend for one additional year under the same terms and conditions as the prior year's contract. School leaders should immediately plan a process to comply with the new requirements.

II. Principal Evaluation Plans, New Requirements for 2006-2007 School Year

The law requires principal evaluation plans to be developed for this school year and thereafter; it details the minimum elements that must be contained in the evaluation plan, that is, the plan must:

1. Be performed by the superintendent or designee, or an individual appointed by the school board who holds a registered Type 75 State administrative certificate;
2. Be in writing;
3. Take place by February 1 of each year for a building principal on a single-year contract and by February 1 of the final year of a contract for a building principal on a multi-year contract;
4. Include a description of the building principal's duties and responsibilities and the standards to which the building principal is expected to conform;
5. Consider the building principal's specific duties, responsibilities, management, and competence as a building principal;
6. Specify the building principal's strengths and weaknesses with supporting reasons;

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7. Align with the Illinois Professional Standards for School Leaders or research-based district standards; and
8. Provide that one copy of the evaluation must be included in the building principal's personnel file and one copy of the evaluation must be given to the building principal.

Note that not only must the evaluation be in writing and meet all of the specific content requirements, if the evaluation is not completed by February 1, the employment contract will automatically extend for one additional year by operation of law.

III. Evaluators Must Have a Type 75

The new law states that "The evaluation must be performed by the district superintendent, the superintendent's designee, or, in the absence of the superintendent or his or her designee, an individual appointed by the school board who holds a registered Type 75 State administrative certificate."

With respect to those individuals who serve as both a superintendent and a principal, this requirement creates a potential dilemma as to who will evaluate individuals holding dual positions.

It would be illogical to have a school district employee who happens to hold a Type 75 certificate evaluate his or her boss on their duties as principal. And the statute is clear that the legislature did not intend to allow the board to directly evaluate the principal.

It would also be unwise, for liability purposes, to have a person who is not a district employee perform evaluations as it is questionable whether or not a district's insurance would cover a non-employee performing an evaluation function.

A board member who happens to hold a Type 75 could do the evaluation but would place themselves in a conflict position in the event the superintendent/principal were dismissed or non-renewed after the evaluation.

Accordingly, the IASA, IASB, and IPA suggest that the superintendent conduct a formative evaluation of his or her own performance as principal and provide the same to the board. The board's evaluation of the individual would focus on the performance as superintendent and take into account his or her formative evaluation of the principal duties. Obviously the board is the entity that decides whether or not to retain the individual.

IV. The New Law

(105 ILCS 5/24A-15) Sec. 24A-15. Development and submission of evaluation plan for principals.

- (a) Beginning with the 2006-2007 school year and each school year thereafter, each school district, except for a school district organized under Article 34 of this Code, shall establish a principal evaluation plan in accordance with this Section. The plan must ensure that each principal is evaluated as follows:
 - (1) For a principal on a single-year contract, the evaluation must take place by February 1 of each year.
 - (2) For a principal on a multi-year contract under Section 10-23.8a of this Code, the evaluation must take place by February 1 of the final year of the contract.

Nothing in this Section prohibits a school district from conducting additional evaluations of principals.

- (b) The evaluation shall include a description of the principal's duties and responsibilities and the standards to which the principal is expected to conform.
- (c) The evaluation must be performed by the district superintendent, the superintendent's designee, or, in the absence of the superintendent or his or her designee, an individual appointed by the school board who holds a registered Type 75 State administrative certificate. The evaluation must be in writing and must at least do all of the following:
 - (1) Consider the principal's specific duties, responsibilities, management, and competence as a principal.
 - (2) Specify the principal's strengths and weaknesses, with supporting reasons.
 - (3) Align with the Illinois Professional Standards for School Leaders or research-based district standards.
- (d) One copy of the evaluation must be included in the principal's personnel file and one copy of the evaluation must be provided to the principal.
- (e) Failure by a district to evaluate a principal and to provide the principal with a copy of the evaluation at least once during the term of the principal's contract, in accordance with this Section, is evidence that the principal is performing duties and responsibilities in at least a satisfactory manner and shall serve to automatically extend the principal's contract for a period of one year after the contract would otherwise expire, under the same terms and conditions as the prior year's contract. The requirements in this Section are in addition to the right of a school board to reclassify a principal pursuant to Section 10-23.8b of this Code.
- (f) Nothing in this Section prohibits a school board from ordering lateral transfers of principals to positions of similar rank and salary.

Source: P.A. 94-1039, eff. 7-20-06.)