

DEVELOPING THE 21ST CENTURY PRINCIPAL

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
OF SECONDARY SCHOOL
PRINCIPALS
promoting excellence in school leadership



NASSP ASSESSMENT CENTERS

A Diagnostic – Prescriptive Approach to Professional Development

WHAT IS AN ASSESSMENT CENTER?

An assessment center is a diagnostic tool for determining the presence and strength of leadership skills of current and prospective school principals. An assessment center is a process, not a location. Participants engage in an integrated system of realistic, school-based simulations designed to generate behaviors similar to those required for success in K-12 principal positions.

The assessment center generates data regarding strengths and improvement needs that can be used to:

- Help identify **prospective principals** and provide focused developmental activities for them. (We must go beyond small pool of current assistant principals for our future leaders.)
- Provide focused professional development for **new principal** induction
- Help **experienced principals** plan their own professional growth strategies.

WHY ARE ASSESSMENT CENTERS VALUABLE?

NASSP's 25-year history of work with assessment centers has been a factor in strengthening principal preparation programs across the country. NASSP's work substantially influenced the collaborative development of the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) 21 Domains, and the subsequent development of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards. One of the major results of these efforts is that principal preparation programs are combining the knowledge base with the skills essential to performance to create more effective preparation programs.

Specifically, NASSP's Assessment Center programs:

- Provide diagnosis prior to "treatment" for more effective, highly targeted professional development
- Base professional development on data about strengths and improvement needs.
- Help districts develop potential principals to fill future vacancies with qualified individuals
- Address the shortage of qualified principals by determining the leadership potential of prospective and aspiring leaders and tailoring developmental programs on the basis of data about their skills and development

WHAT ARE ADDITIONAL BENEFITS OF AN ASSESSMENT CENTER?

NASSP's Assessment Centers:

- Objectively identify assessees' strengths and developmental needs and indicate pertinent training needs
- Offer developmentally based succession planning
- Provide a strong feedback component and a structure for individual development
- Provide a focus for continued mentoring and coaching
- Guide program design in developing effective programs for aspiring as well as practicing principals

WHO CONDUCTS NASSP ASSESSMENT CENTERS?

NASSP works with individual school districts, consortia of school districts, regional service agencies, state departments of education, boards of cooperative services, universities, associations, other providers of programs and services to establish locally operated assessment centers. NASSP provides local/regional assessors with the knowledge and skills to conduct assessment centers. Centers are conducted as local demand dictates. NASSP does not conduct assessment centers; rather, NASSP provides initial and on-going training and assistance to assessment center directors and assessors.

WHO ARE THE ASSESSORS?

Assessors are selected from a pool of talented individuals who have school leadership experience and training in the assessment process. The assessors have a broad familiarity with the principalship and have demonstrated outstanding performance and success in school leadership positions. Generally, assessors have supervised principals or have held or currently hold that position. Assessors must be very familiar with the principalship. They also need excellent group-interaction skills, must be keen observers of behavior, and be able to record behavior accurately. They need to write well. They need to possess stamina and energy, and they certainly need patience.

During the three-day assessor training, candidates experience the entire assessment center process. They study all the materials used in the center. They learn to gather data and practice data collection during demonstration activities. They learn to perform the various roles that are assigned to assessors during the center, and they learn to report behavior in terms of specific skills. The focus of assessor training is careful observation, accurate behavior recording, analysis of observed behavior, and concise reporting of demonstrated skills.

WHAT ASSESSMENT MODELS ARE AVAILABLE FROM NASSP?

The National Association of Secondary School Principals currently offers five assessment center models: *Developing the 21st Century Principal (S&D)*; *Developing the 21st Century Principal*; *Advanced Leaders Developmental Assessment Center*; *Developmental Assessment Center (DAC)*; and *Superintendents Leadership Development Program (SLDP)*.

DEVELOPING THE 21ST CENTURY PRINCIPAL:

NASSP's *Developing the 21st Century Principal* Assessment Center is a process for measuring participants' potential success in K–12 school leadership positions. The assessment center is an effective method for providing a “diagnosis” prior to “treatment,” resulting in more effective and highly targeted professional development for school leaders. In addition, the assessment center improves the soundness of placement and selection decisions by diagnosing participants' behavioral strengths and improvement needs. The assessment center is a valuable tool for identifying leadership potential, diagnosing strengths and weaknesses, and assisting in planning appropriate professional development strategies.

RESEARCH BASE FOR *Developing the 21st Century Principal* ASSESSMENT CENTER:

NASSP's *Developing the 21st Century Principal* Assessment Center is based on a set of skill dimensions derived from the practice of successful principals by means of an extensive job analysis. These skill dimensions reflect the challenges of today's principalship.

The skills that form NASSP's *Developing the 21st Century Principal* Assessment Center reflect the original NASSP 12 skill dimensions, the 21 domains developed by the National Professional Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA), the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) *Standards for School Leaders*, and the guidelines for school administration developed by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE).

In addition, NASSP called upon the knowledge and experience of successful practitioners in every region of the country (secondary school principals, assessment and development center directors, professors of secondary school administration, and psychologists) in establishing this set of skill dimensions.

NASSP's *Developing the 21st Century Principal* ASSESSMENT CENTER SKILL DIMENSIONS ARE:

Educational Leadership

✓ **Setting Instructional Direction**

Implementing strategies for improving teaching and learning including putting programs and improvement efforts into action. Developing a vision and establishing clear goals; providing direction in achieving stated goals; encouraging others to contribute to goal achievement; securing commitment to a course of action from individuals and groups.

✓ **Teamwork**

Seeking and encouraging involvement of team members. Modeling and encouraging the behaviors that move the group to task completion. Supporting group accomplishment.

✓ **Sensitivity**

Perceiving the needs and concerns of others; dealing tactfully with others in emotionally stressful situations or in conflict. Knowing what information to communicate and to whom. Relating to people of varying ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds.

✓ **Development of Others**

Teaching, coaching, and helping others. Providing specific feedback based on observations and data.

Resolving Complex Problems

✓ **Judgment**

Reaching logical conclusions and making high quality decisions based on available information. Giving priority and caution to significant issues. Seeking out relevant data, facts, and impressions. Analyzing and interpreting complex information.

✓ **Results Orientation**

Assuming responsibility. Recognizing when a decision is required. Taking prompt action as issues emerge. Resolving short-term issues while balancing them against long-term objectives.

✓ **Organizational Ability**

Planning and scheduling one's own and the work of others so that resources are used appropriately. Scheduling flow of activities; establishing procedures to monitor projects. Practicing time and task management; knowing what to delegate and to whom.

Communication

✓ **Oral Communication**

Clearly communicating. Making oral presentations that are clear and easy to understand.

✓ **Written Communication**

Expressing ideas clearly in writing; demonstrating technical proficiency. Writing appropriately for different audiences.

Developing the 21st Century Principal Assessment Center Design:

The half-day assessment center consists of challenging simulations that provide a realistic job preview of the principalship. The assessment center experience consists of three to five inter-related simulations. Participants engage in an in-basket exercise that provides context for each of the subsequent exercises. Participants confer with a teacher to discuss instructional issues, meet with a parent to resolve parental complaints, and have the option to participate in a group meeting to discuss new design features for a district-wide teacher performance appraisal system. They may also be given the opportunity to provide a formal oral presentation or writing sample. In addition, participants supply biographical information that is used in suggesting appropriate developmental strategies.

INFORMATION PARTICIPANTS RECEIVE FROM THE *Developing the 21st Century Principal Assessment Center*:

Each assessment center participant receives a report describing his or her strengths and improvement needs in each of the nine skill dimensions, as well as detailed suggestions for improvement and growth. The assessment center report is delivered in a face-to-face feedback sessions with the director of the center. This valuable feedback session allows the director to provide and interpret the results and help the participant think about his or her own career progress and future professional development.

THE VALUE OF AN ASSESSMENT REPORT:

The assessment report provides the assessment center participant with the basis for further reflection on their strengths and improvement needs. This reflection assists them in planning specific professional growth strategies. The participant should feel comfortable sharing an assessment report with anyone who might provide suggestions, assignments, or opportunities to practice and develop skills; who might give feedback on progress as practice and development occur; and who might provide support and encouragement. For example, a principal might share an assessment report with a mentor. An assistant principal might share the assessment report with the principal.

The organization as a whole benefits from assessment reports by receiving objective data about the training and developmental needs of the participants. Assessment reports also provide individual and group skill diagnosis that help an organization move from a “one size fits all” approach to personnel development to a highly prescriptive approach to individual and group professional development.

HOW PARTICIPATION IN AN ASSESSMENT CENTER BENEFITS EXPERIENCED PRINCIPALS:

All principals may be served by developmental assessment regardless of their experience. Developmental assessment provides an essential ingredient for growth. In too many cases, the experienced principal receives little meaningful feedback about performance on the job. The feedback provided in developmental assessment is specific and is focused on skills essential to effective school leadership. Developmental assessment provides collegial interaction as the individual develops professional growth plans, and it leads the participant to reexamine best practices.

TIME REQUIRED FOR PARTICIPATION IN NASSP’s *Developing the 21st Century Principal Assessment Center*:

The *Developing the 21st Century Principal Assessment Center* is a half-day experience for participants that includes multiple, inter-related activities. The activities are strongly correlated to tasks principals perform daily. Examples of activities include an in-basket and a meeting with a teacher and a parent. Optional activities offered at the discretion of the local center are a group activity, a formal oral presentation, and/or a formal writing sample. For assessors, the assessment center is a two to two-and-a-half day commitment.

VALIDITY OF *Developing the 21st Century Principal* ASSESSMENT CENTER:

The Guidelines and Ethical Considerations for Assessment Center Operations endorsed by the 28th International Congress on the Assessment Center Method (2000) states, “A major factor in the widespread acceptance and use of assessment centers is related directly to an emphasis on sound validation research. Ascertaining the validity of an assessment center program is a complicated technical process, and it is important that validation research meet both professional and legal standards. Validity generalization studies of assessment center research suggests that overall assessment ratings derived in a manner conforming to these guidelines show considerable predicative validity.”

To ensure a content-valid process, NASSP’s Office of Leadership Development and Assessment included the following steps in building *Developing the 21st Century Principal* Assessment Center.

- NASSP hired Applied Research, Inc., headed by Dr. Joel Moses, a respected leader in the field of executive selection and development, to develop the process. Dr. Moses, leader of the assessment center movement, has published many books and articles on this topic, including the definitive book on executive assessment, *Applying the Assessment Center Method*.
- Applied Research conducted a job analysis of the principalship. This job analysis consisted of interviewing principals, assistant principals, superintendents, community leaders, school board members, parents, and college professors to identify the critical elements of the principalship. In addition, Applied Research consulted the two major validity studies conducted on the original NASSP Assessment Center. These studies, conducted by Dr. Neal Schmidt at Michigan State University, provided insight in the selection of the skill dimensions to be chosen for the new process.
- Applied Research combined the job analysis with the review of data from the 21 Domains developed by the National Professional Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA), The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) *Standards for School Leaders*, and the guidelines for school administration developed by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and developed a preliminary list of skill dimensions to be included in *Developing the 21st Century Principal* Assessment Center. These proposed skills were subjected to wide review and scrutiny by experts in assessment as well as those knowledgeable about the principalship. This proposed list of skill dimensions were sent for review and comments to assessment center directors in 50 centers located in 23 states, NASSP’s state executive directors, members of NASSP’s Professors of Secondary School Administration Committee, and other interested parties. The responses from these groups and individuals were used to make the final determination of the skill lists. From the skill dimensions, the assessment exercises were developed and piloted.
- The scoring process utilized in the assessment procedure was developed through more than 20 years of work in assessment. Proven scoring rubrics have been tested and shown successful through the assessment of more than 15,000 participants in the original NASSP Assessment Center. The two validity studies – 1979 and 1991 – have indicated that the NASSP Assessment Center is valid. The 1991 study stated, “In conclusion, we see the assessment center as a content valid procedure for the selection of school administrators.”

HOW *Developing the 21st Century Principal* ASSESSMENT CENTER DIFFERS FROM THE ORIGINAL NASSP *Principal Assessment Center*:

Developing the 21st Century Principal is a newly developed process, not a revision of the old assessment center program. While *Developing the 21st Century Principal* Assessment Center builds on the successes of the original assessment center, it has significant differences, including a focus on the nine skill dimensions that accurately reflect the role of today’s principal as an instructional leader rather than just a manager, and a major reduction in the time commitment for assessment center participants and for assessors.

HOW *Developing the 21st Century Principal* ASSESSMENT CENTER COMPARES TO THE ISLLC *School Leaders Licensure Assessment* (SLLA):

Developing the 21st Century Principal Assessment Center is substantially different from the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) *School Leaders Licensure Assessment* (SLLA) process. The ISLLC/SLLA process is a paper and pencil test that measures a participant's knowledge and ability to write. While knowledge and written ability are important for school leadership, they don't ensure competence. Much of a principal's work involves verbal interactions and working directly with people.

Developing the 21st Century Principal Assessment Center provides a higher degree of fidelity than the ISLLC *School Leaders Licensure Assessment*. Fidelity is the extent to which the assessment situation is similar to or duplicates the target job situation. NASSP's *Developing the 21st Century Principal* Assessment Center provides a realistic job preview and measures participants' skills as they actually engage in the tasks of the principalship.

The assessment center experience is also a valuable developmental experience for the assessors. Practicing principals who are trained and serve as assessors experience dramatic skill enhancement and skill improvement from their participation. Because assessment activities reflect job-like situations and job-related tasks, the training process sharpens the assessors' on-the-job skills. In fact, many assessors say they have relearned some valuable skills during the training process.

USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN THE ASSESSMENT CENTER:

A computer software application assists the work of assessors. The program is available in a PC format. The technology helps assessors generate the individual reports for integration. The participant's final report is generated entirely by the software. Use of this tool greatly reduces the labor intensity of analyzing and reporting assessment data.

HOW TO CREATE AN ASSESSMENT CENTER:

1. Establish contact with NASSP to get additional information and materials
2. Identify a local director and commit time and resources to ensure success
3. Identify potential local assessors (experienced principals, former principals, superintendents, professors of school leadership, district office personnel) to participate in a three-day assessor training

When the local assessors have been trained by NASSP, NASSP assigns a coach to help the local director during first assessment center. After the assessor training and initial assessment center, NASSP continues to provide assessment materials and continuous support to the program.