Indicator: The LEA/School has established and communicated clear goals and measures for employees' performance that reflect the established evaluation system and provide targeted training or assistance for an employee receiving an unsatisfactory evaluation or warning. (5154)

Explanation: The evidence review indicates that performance appraisal systems and tools are critically important in assisting decision makers to document employee performance problems over time. A well-constructed performance appraisal system ensures fairness and timely notice to affected staff. It allows stakeholders within and outside the organization to examine an individual's work history which may lead to a remediation plan, voluntary departure, or termination. Most important, it allows leaders to make time-sensitive decisions regarding staff performance. Those decisions may include plans for a supportive remediation process for those individuals not meeting performance goals.

Questions: What process will the district/school use to develop, establish, and communicate performance goals and expectations? What process will the district/school use to develop targeted training for those staff that receive unsatisfactory performance reviews? What process will the district and school use to deliver targeted training supports for those with unsatisfactory performance ratings? What time-bound measures will accompany remediation supports? What data will be reviewed to determine the success of remediation supports?

The literature from across sectors makes clear that one of the bedrocks underlying sound personnel decisions is a strong performance appraisal system. In any organization, employees benefit greatly from knowing what is expected of them and where they need to improve. Leaders rely upon information about the strengths and weaknesses of their staff to guide the organization. In the context of staff dismissals, performance appraisal systems and tools are even more important—to document performance problems over time, ensure fairness and notice to affected staff, and allow stakeholders within and outside the organization to examine the work history that leads to termination (Bock, 2006; Cadena, 2007; Daley, 2008; Gross, n.d.; Guthridge, 2008; Thomas, 2005).

A more subtle benefit of performance evaluation systems is to create greater will and motivation for leaders to actively contend with their underperforming employees (Corporate University Xchange, 2007; Daley, 2008; U.S. General Accounting Office, 1990). The cross-sector literature is replete with anecdotes of supervisors and executives who fail to terminate even the most ineffective employees, choosing instead to ignore the problem and focus their energies on higher-performing members of their staff (Colvin, 2001a; Colvin, 2001b; Daley, 2008; Hammer, 2007; U.S. General Accounting Office, 1990). Strong performance appraisal systems empower organizational leaders with useful information, leading them to more fully examine their employees' performance, give staff members an opportunity to reflect on their own achievement, and help to build a case that supports their dismissal when necessary (Corporate University Xchange, 2007; Daley, 2008; Roche, 2008; Thomas, 2005; U.S. General Accounting Office, 1990).

An in-depth discussion of performance appraisal systems is outside the scope of this report; here, we examine only those elements that are critical specifically for informing decisions about

dismissal. The literature makes clear that in any organizational setting, strong evaluation systems share several common elements:

- Expectations are aligned with organizational goals. Supervisors need to know how each employee contributes to the organization's objectives—not whether they have skills that contribute to irrelevant tasks or an outdated mission (Bock, 2006; Cadena, 2007; Corporate University Xchange, 2007; Daley, 2008; Gross, n.d.; Kraack & Kissack, 2009; Guthridge, 2008; Roche, 2008; Thomas, 2005; U.S. General Accounting Office, 1990). The evaluation process should give both leaders and employees information about the specific skills and talents that the employee is able to offer for the current initiatives and goals of the organization.

- Leaders communicate clear expectations for performance. Organizational policies that set out specific performance expectations for each employee provide both leaders and employees a definition of "satisfactory" work. When expectations are clear and an employee still fails to meet them, it is less likely to be due to a misunderstanding than to true lack of ability or will. Clear expectations make it possible for leaders to recognize an employee's specific strengths and shortcomings and make evidence-based decisions about dismissal (Bock, 2006; Cadena, 2007; Corporate University Xchange, 2007; Daley, 2008; Gross, n.d.; Guthridge, 2008; Roche, 2008; Thomas, 2005; U.S. General Accounting Office, 1990).

- Evaluations are based on relevant actions and skills for each employee's role. Supervisors who are faced with a decision about whether to dismiss an underperforming employee are ideally able to rely upon evaluations that judge the employee's performance specifically within the realm of his or her job role. This enables leaders to be more confident that unsatisfactory performance in any position is relevant both to what the employee has been asked to do and to the ultimate success of the organization (Bock, 2006; Cadena, 2007; Daley, 2008; Gross, n.d.; Guthridge, 2008; Thomas, 2005; U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 1998).

- Evaluation tools and procedures are accurate and fair. Regardless of the precision with which performance is defined or the specific consequences linked to evaluations of performance, leaders and employees alike are more likely to use and trust a system that has built-in checks and balances (Cadena, 2007; Daley, 2008; Scullen, Bergey, & Aiman-Smith, 2005). Systems that include objective performance data and feedback from various levels of an organization can help minimize subjectivity and bias. In addition, evaluation procedures that result in thorough documentation—more than a pat on the back or check marks on a boilerplate form—help ensure transparency and accountability while building the case for and justifying necessary dismissals (Bock, 2006; Cadena, 2007; Daley, 2008; Gross, n.d.; Human Links, 2001; Thomas, 2005). As one expert explains, "it is often supervisors themselves who bear much of the blame when [the Human Resources office] says [an employee] can't be shown the door… because most fail to give the kind of regular and candid evaluations that will allow a company to prove poor performance. Frequently, the work that the manager suddenly claims is intolerable is accompanied by years of performance evaluations that say 'meets expectations'" (Orey, 2007).

- Performance reviews are transparently linked to consequences. In strong management systems, employees and organization leaders are aware from the beginning that evaluations are not merely a formality, but meaningful assessments of

contributions and progress that will impact their employment in real ways (Guthridge, 2008; Orey, 2007; Welch & Welch, 2006; Bock, 2006; Corporate University Xchange, 2007; U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 1998). These consequences might include rewards such as bonuses, salary increases, or promotions for employees who exceed expectations. A handful of large US corporations use a "forced rating" system, through which managers evaluate employees' performance against other employees, reward the top 10 or 20%, and automatically dismiss those at the bottom (Grote, 2005; Levinson, 2003; Corporate University Xchange, 2007; Coursey & Rainey, 1990; Guthridge, 2008). Whether through forced ranking or another system, meaningful evaluations impact leaders as well: when consequences are real, supervisors are required to think more deeply about the quality of their talent than rote appraisal systems would require. The ability to conduct accurate and thorough assessments becomes a critical leadership skill (Grote, 2005).

In a failing organization, the types of systems described above may not exist at all, and as part of the turnaround initiative, the leader will have to communicate expectations and carry out evaluations in a more rapid and targeted manner. In the turnaround context, the literature suggests that performance appraisals tend to play out in three particular ways:

- Clear communication about the organization's new goals and expectations can spur desirable staff turnover. As described above, a critical element of a performance appraisal system in any organization is providing clear expectations for employees' performance. In the turnaround setting, this type of communication is especially critical. In many cases, the organization undergoing a turnaround is entirely remaking itself, becoming a very different place for employees to work. When the old ways of doing business have clearly been ineffective, it is incumbent upon the leader to institute new goals and strategies—and make clear to their staff that making the necessary changes to carry out those strategies will not be optional (Public Impact, 2007).

    One of the leader's most important initial actions in a turnaround is to clarify for all employees what "success" will be and what is needed to get there (Kowal & Hassel, 2007; Public Impact, 2007). In organizations on the brink of failure, up-front communication about the organization's new goals not only informs employees about what is expected of them; it also serves as a highly effective starting point for building a capable and committed staff. With clear expectations from the start, employees are able to judge for themselves if they are willing or able to meet the new standards. Many of those who cannot will leave voluntarily (Gadiesh, 2003; Welch & Welch, 2006).

(Kowal, Rosch, Hassel, & Hassel, 2011, p. 11–12)

For their paper *Can Evaluation Promote Teacher Development? Principals' Views and Experiences Implementing Observation and Feedback Cycles*, Kraft & Gilmour (2015) interviewed a stratified random sample of 24 principals in an urban district. While they found that most principals viewed professional growth as the primary purpose of evaluation, observing all teachers multiple times undercut the depth of feedback principals could provide and resulted in infrequent in-person conversations, and expectations to provide feedback across grade levels

and content areas led to a narrow focus on general pedagogical practices. The principals they interviewed proposed four broad solutions to these challenges: strategically targeting evaluations, reducing operational responsibilities, hiring instructional coaches, and providing principal training.

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