

The P.O.L.E. 360—A tool for reflection

A successful pro cert experience depends on the ability to accurately assess your professional development needs. In turn, your self-assessment can benefit from knowing how *others* perceive your leadership. For this reason, all administrator professional certificate programs ask candidates to use the Profile of Leadership Effectiveness, a 360° survey that provides structured feedback aligned with the ISLLC standards. This section answers some of the most commonly asked questions about this instrument.

What is the P.O.L.E. 360?

The P.O.L.E. 360 is designed to provide school leaders with a “360°” view of their leadership skills by surveying teachers, supervisors, and others familiar with the administrator’s work. This survey was initially developed by the Center for Educational Effectiveness in collaboration with the Association of Washington School Principals, and has been used extensively in the school improvement process.

Each person responding to the survey is asked to provide feedback on the leader’s performance by answering a series of questions such as:

Select the ONE statement that BEST describes the performance level of the subject:

- Uses effective problem solving and conflict resolution skills*
- Problem solving and conflict resolution skills are somewhat effective*
- Problem solving and conflict resolution skills are ineffective*
- Avoids problems and conflict*
- Don’t know or does not apply*

A key feature of the P.O.L.E. is that items are aligned with the ISLLC standards, allowing feedback that provides information related to each of the six ISLLC standards.

What is the purpose of the P.O.L.E. 360?

The survey can be used for various purposes, but in administrator pro cert programs its main role is to provide insight into your leadership skills and style. No matter how well you know yourself, your self-understanding will be enriched by knowing how others see you. What you learn from the survey will enrich your self-assessment and help you design an appropriate Professional Growth Plan.

What is the cost of the survey?

A one-time administration of the survey costs \$99.

How do I initiate the survey?

Contact your university program advisor.

Who should I ask to participate?

Two of the participants are automatic: you will take the survey yourself, and your supervisor will also take it. Your supervisor is generally the person responsible for evaluating your job performance. In many cases, this will be the superintendent; in some districts, it may be another central office administrator. If you are an assistant principal, it is likely to be the principal. In addition, you may invite 8-12 teachers and 1-5 peers to take the survey (a peer is usually defined as someone serving in the same role who is familiar with your work; however, it may also include other administrators with whom you work).

In selecting teacher participants, you can follow two basic strategies:

1. If you have a relatively small staff (12 or fewer teachers) the best strategy may be to invite all of them to participate.
2. Another approach is to randomly choose (as by picking names from a hat) half a dozen teachers in the school. This approach is objective and impartial and will usually give you a good cross-section of the teachers in your school. However, the smaller the sample size, the greater the possibility that the responses will not be representative of your staff.
3. Alternatively, you could choose the kind of cross-section you're most interested in. For example, you may want to be sure that you have teachers from both primary and upper grade levels, or representation from different departments, or representatives of experienced and newer teachers. Note: When you make other than random choices, you need to keep in mind that the results may not be completely representative.

In the end, the choice of who to ask will depend on your individual circumstances—the context in which you work and what you hope to learn. If you are uncertain of what approach to take, your university advisor may be able to offer guidance. Whichever strategy you choose, you should approach the selected respondents beforehand to explain the purpose of the survey. Survey responses are anonymous.

Who will see the results?

Survey results will come to you at whatever e-mail address you specify. (To ensure complete confidentiality, you should provide a personal e-mail address, as school e-mail may be subject to public disclosure laws.) The only people who will see your results are you and your university adviser. However, you may, at your discretion, choose to share results with peers, supervisors,

or mentors as you feel appropriate. Your individual results do not appear on your university record or remain in university files.

Does the P.O.L.E. tell me how well I'm performing?

The P.O.L.E. is designed as a formative professional development tool, not a summative evaluation of leadership performance. It would not be appropriate, for example, for districts to use the instrument to make decisions about employment, promotion, or compensation. The instrument measures *perceptions*, which are always based on the parts of your performance that are visible to others. For examples, teachers may be able to provide extremely valuable feedback about your interactions with them, but may not be aware of the behind-the-scenes work you do with the central office to make sure that the school receives adequate resources. Additionally, of course, perceptions are always subjective, based in part on the experiences, beliefs, and biases that people bring with them. The real value of the survey lies in the questions it raises and the reflection that it leads to.

How do I use the results?

Results of the surveys are electronically analyzed and summarized in a personalized report. The Center for Educational Effectiveness also provides a user's guide to help interpret your results. In general, results may support or challenge your own analysis of your leadership. If all respondents agree on strength and weaknesses, you will have greater confidence in your needs for the Professional Growth Plan. However, gaps between your perceptions and those of others can be equally helpful, not because one set of perceptions is more correct, but because the discrepancy tends to stimulate deeper thinking about why your leadership is perceived differently by others. It's quite possible that conflicting perceptions may be equally accurate. In a 360° assessment, respondents are simply viewing leadership from different angles—others may be aware of aspects of your leadership that you aren't (and vice-versa).

See the scenario on the next page for a hypothetical example of the survey in action.

Using the P.O.L.E. 360—An Example

Melissa Ayala is in her 2nd year as principal at Red Cedar High School, the sole high school in a district that also has a middle school and two K-6 elementary schools. Prior to this job, she served for a year as assistant principal in a suburban high school.

Just after enrolling in a Pro Cert program, she is asked to complete the 360° leadership assessment. She will take the survey, and a copy will go to her superintendent, but she is uncertain about which teachers she should ask to participate. Red Cedar has 25 teachers, so asking 6-7 to complete the survey sounds about right. But which teachers? She knows that not all faculty are happy with her. When she arrived at the school, she saw a lot of instruction that was not aligned with the curriculum, and had pushed pretty hard on that issue. While some teachers appreciated her leadership in this area, a small nucleus of veteran teachers were disgruntled. She predicts that their ratings of her leadership will be low. She wonders if she would get more meaningful feedback from the teachers who understand what she's trying to do.

However, after consultation with her advisor and several peers, she decides that a random sampling would give her a clearer picture of where she stood and would be seen as more credible. Her advisor also assures her that no one at the school will see her results unless she chooses to share them.

When Ayala receives the results of the survey, she finds that in most areas there is considerable agreement across raters. What she viewed as strengths were also rated strongly by teachers and the superintendent. Likewise, the areas in which she rated herself as needing improvement were viewed the same way by the teachers and superintendents. This broad agreement gave her greater confidence in her ability to assess her professional development needs.

Nonetheless, there were several surprises:

> Teachers rated her much higher on vision than she herself did. After reflection, she concluded that her strong stand on instructional alignment, while not universally popular, was perceived as evidence of a clear vision. She also began to recognize other areas in which she had established a strong vision.

> On the other hand, both the teachers and the superintendent rated her lower than she expected on family and community involvement. She wasn't aware of any unusual problems with parents or community members, but after some reflection and consultation with her advisor, she realized that most of her energy the past two years had been focused on getting established within the building; community outreach was on the back burner. She decided this might be one area to concentrate on in her professional growth plan.