



In his book *The Principal*, Michael Fullan stated, “Principals’ responsibilities have increased enormously over the past two decades. They are expected to run a smooth school; manage health, safety, and the building; innovate without upsetting anyone; connect with students and teachers; be responsive to parents and the community; answer to their districts; and above all deliver results.” At Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) in Virginia, Dr. Brendan Menuey and Evangeline Petrich both serve as executive principals; supporting, developing, and supervising principals whose responsibilities are as enormous as Fullan aptly describes.

Dr. Menuey became an executive principal for school improvement at FCPS in Virginia in 2015 after starting his fifth year as principal at Lake Anne Elementary School. He started his career in education teaching at Forestville Elementary School, then moved to Colvin Run Elementary School when it opened in 2003. Dr. Menuey served as assistant principal at Lake Anne and at Lutie Lewis Coates Elementary School and became principal at Lake Anne in 2011. He holds a bachelor’s degree in foreign affairs, a master’s degree in elementary education, and a doctorate in school administration and supervision, all from the University of Virginia.

Evangeline Petrich currently serves as Executive Principal of Region 3 of FCPS. She joined FCPS in 2012 as the director of Cluster 4. As Executive Principal, she supports 45 schools, providing assistance and mentoring to principals, monitoring school improvement plans, and working with the region leadership teams. She also works closely with the Region 3 assistant principals, guiding them through their professional development. Prior to working for FCPS, Petrich was an 18-year veteran of the Virginia Beach City Public Schools. She began her career teaching

mathematics in middle and high schools, then served as an assistant principal and instructional technology coordinator. In 2008, she became principal of Kempsville High School where she remained until joining FCPS. As principal, she led 175 faculty and staff members in the continuous improvement cycle through data analysis, common formative and summative assessments, and collaboration in professional learning teams. Kempsville High School achieved full accreditation during her tenure. Petrich earned her bachelor of science degree in mathematics from the College of William and Mary. She received her master of education degree in curriculum and instruction from the University of Virginia.

The following Q and A dialogue with Executive Principals Dr. Brendan Menuey and Evangeline Petrich describes their roles in building capacity in school principals within the Fairfax County Public School system in Virginia.

**Q1: How important is the principal to a school's success?**

EP: A principal influences his or her staff and the teaching and learning that takes place in the school. Effective school leadership matters. In our Project Momentum Intensive schools (schools in our district that did not meet a state accreditation benchmark) that have a new principal, one of the things we notice immediately is the positive change in organizational culture. These principals build relationships with students, staff, and parents immediately so that a focus on high quality instruction, teamwork, and collaboration exists.

BM: When I was a principal, and I would receive compliments about my leadership skills, I really believed it was the entire staff that made the school what it is and that my leadership was only a very small part

of the success. Once I moved to the central office and began to supervise principals, I can absolutely recognize what I was being told all along--that the principal is the person most responsible for school climate and for student achievement. I have seen historically struggling schools dramatically improve when a new principal is hired. I can sense the improvements as soon as I approach the school, enter the office, and see what the school puts on display.

**Q2: What are some key traits you look for in a prospective principal and how do you evaluate those traits during selection?**

EP: In our work with schools that are at risk of not meeting state accreditation, we look for a leader who has had leadership experiences in turnaround schools. We look for someone who has a solid understanding of instructional pedagogy, who can build and communicate a shared vision of high expectations for all stakeholders, who can develop strong collaborative learning teams, and who knows how to analyze and use data. When we advertise for a principal vacancy in our district, we gather input from parents, staff, and students regarding the desired traits in the next principal and the needs of the school. Questions are developed around these desired traits and staff and community members listen to candidates' responses during a panel interview. Additional rounds of interviews are held with finalists that allow for more in-depth inquiry of the candidate's ability to successfully lead a building.

BM: We refer to the applicant's "body of work," almost like we would for an artist. I want to see a history of strong student achievement and positive change over time on some of our many measures (working conditions survey, discipline incidents recorded, etc.). I am particularly interested in observing and learning more about an applicant's people skills, confidence, presentation, and professionalism. I need to be able to see the person as the principal before he or she gets the job.

**Q3: If a principal lacked a certain trait that you believed was critical to their success how would you go about fostering that trait in them?**

EP: Our role as executive principals allows us to work closely with principals in our region. When working with a principal, I often ask the questions, "How will you know that it is being done?" and "What feedback does the teacher receive?" For example, I have been working with a principal who wants his fourth-grade team to use "number talks" in instruction. However, we identified that he (the principal) would also benefit

from the job-embedded professional development that his teachers are receiving. Not only would they all share common language, but they would also be able to identify what number talks look like when it is successfully implemented in the classroom.

BM: The part I like best about my job is the coaching of principals, particularly novice principals. In working with them, sometimes it is evident that they can improve certain skills such as managing their PTAs, communicating with their staff, providing feedback to teachers, or handling school finances. Once the principal and I identify this area for growth together, we can create a plan to move forward. This often involves my observing and providing feedback to them in these areas, or calling in additional resources to help us both learn more. It is essential that the principal desire to improve so that lasting change can be achieved.

**Q4: Explain how you support principals directly and indirectly in the day to day and the long term in your role as a principal supervisor.**

EP: As a principal supervisor, I work directly with 15 of the 45 schools in my region. I am responsible for the performance evaluation of these 15 principals. Our principals develop a personal goal and each school develops a "School Innovation and Improvement Plan." I monitor, collaborate, and provide feedback throughout the year. Day to day, a principal may reach out to me for consultation or I may be in a building observing a collaborative team with the principal.

BM: Most of my time in any week is spent in schools, working with leaders there. We typically work on goals set at the beginning of the year, aiming to improve their skills and knowledge in particular areas. All of our school visits involve classroom observations with debriefing afterwards. In this manner, we can norm ourselves with the school leaders about effective instruction and provide growth-producing feedback to staff members. Overall, I believe this is one of the most important tasks we can accomplish with our principals, which will result in better teaching and learning for all.

**Q5: What measures do you use to evaluate schools and/or principals you supervise?**

EP: Our district uses an evaluation process that aligns with the state's Principal Performance Standards & Criteria. Student academic growth is a component of the process as well as the areas of instructional leadership, school climate, human resources management,

organizational management, communication and community relations, and professionalism.

BM: We meet with all principals at the beginning of each school year to discuss their goals with them, and to set SMARTR goals for the year (strategic and specific, measurable, attainable, results-oriented, time bound, and rigorous). We check in with principals about these goals midyear and at the end of the year, reflecting on data at those times. Those on summative evaluation also complete a self-assessment, which we discuss during a conference at the start of the school year. In addition, we administer a staff opinion survey and a parent opinion survey at the schools where the principal is on summative evaluation, then review these findings with the principals in the spring. Overall, it is a fairly comprehensive way to evaluate principals and yields some excellent information to help them better lead their schools.

**Q6: Describe some of the successes you have seen in the schools where you provide development and support to principals you supervise.**

EP: In a district with 200 schools and centers, 40 are identified as either intensive or targeted because they are at greatest risk of State Accreditation Warning status or have been identified as Title I Focus Schools. Instructional support is provided to these schools in the form of an instructional coach for each area of warning in math and/or English; access to instructional rounds; direct support from a team of assigned resource teachers to a school; and a monthly interdisciplinary meeting of both school and central office staff. It is amazing to see a principal's leadership growth and consequently, his or her school's growth after receiving these supports. A measure of success is when a school that started as an intensive school steps down to targeted status (with fewer instructional supports) and then eventually steps down to universal status. This universal status means that a school can sustain high quality teaching and learning on its own!

BM: Many of our schools needed a little bit of a "push" to gather enough momentum to overcome obstacles and improve their schools. This is where the name of our school improvement model came from -- "Project Momentum." Once we focus the assistance and provide the right kind of differentiated support, the schools make progress. With regular visits from central office staff, monthly data dialogues, extended contracts and extra funding to help with professional development, the principals at our most at-risk schools are able to transform their entire school community to become one that meets and eventually ex-

ceeds expectations.

### Conclusion

Dr. Brendan Menuey and Evangeline Petrich provided insight into principal support, development and evaluation in their role as executive principals at FCPS. They also provided insight into principal selection—Specifically, the traits they look for and how they assess those traits during selection. Experience with turnaround schools and the ability to raise student achievement were high among the traits sought after in school-site principals. Improving schools through a comprehensive model called *Project Momentum* is also a key element of their role as executive principals. *Project Momentum* provides targeted schools with focused assistance and differentiated support to improve leadership, teaching, and learning. At FCPS it is clear that student achievement is a critical priority and building capacity in school leaders is paramount in providing its students with high-quality leadership and education.

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