

Module 1 Principal Interview:
The Duality of Coaching and Compliance

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To understand the practical realities of instructional supervision, I interviewed "Dave," a building principal with 20 years of administrative experience. The interview took place on January 14, 2026, and focused on his daily responsibilities, his transition from the classroom, and his perspective on the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES) as a tool for both professional growth and employment decisions.

Description of Participant

Dave currently serves as a building principal in the Kent City School District, having previously served in the Stow-Munroe Falls City School District. With two decades of administrative experience, he manages a building that includes general education and diverse learner needs. His daily responsibilities span human resources management (securing substitutes), instructional leadership (observations and feedback), and operational management (school safety and scheduling). Notably, Dave operates with a high degree of autonomy, which he identified as a key factor in his job satisfaction. He describes his leadership style as relationship-based, prioritizing visibility during unstructured times like lunch and recess over administrative paperwork. He is married to a current teacher, which he credits for keeping him grounded in the "front-line" perspective of educators.

Summary of Interview

The Daily Reality of Administration

When asked to describe a typical day, Dave emphasized that his role begins long before school starts. His day starts at 5:00 AM monitoring "Red Rover" to manage substitute shortages. Upon arrival, he prioritizes visibility—greeting students, leading announcements to "set the tone," and conducting classroom observations. A significant portion of his day is dedicated to student management during lunch and recess, which

he views not as a chore but as a critical opportunity for relationship building. When asked how he would structure his day if he had complete freedom, Dave admitted he wouldn't change much; he values the autonomy he currently has to prioritize student interactions over micromanagement from the central office. However, he noted that the workload has evolved significantly over time due to the increasing "severity of needs," citing a rise in students and adults in crisis that often derails scheduled tasks.

Transitioning to Leadership

Dave described his transition from teaching to administration as a jarring "Friday to Monday" shift where he went from being a peer to a supervisor overnight. This transition was complicated by the fact that he was selected for the position over a colleague on staff. He navigated this by extending grace and relying on mutual respect, though he noted the difficulty of having to discipline the child of a former colleague who was unhappy about his promotion.

Perspectives on OTES

A significant portion of the interview focused on the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System. Dave offered a nuanced critique of OTES, acknowledging its value in forcing deeper dialogue about teaching while warning against its potential to become a "deficit model." He recalled the early days of OTES 1.0, where the culture was "you suck, prove you don't," leading to high anxiety and teachers bringing stacks of physical evidence to defend their ratings. He has since pivoted to a coaching mindset, viewing the rubric as a shared language rather than a checklist.

However, Dave identified several flaws in the current system. He noted that the rubric is often biased against special educators, whose instructional delivery does not always align with the descriptions of "Skilled" or "Accomplished" in the standard rubric.

He also criticized the "High Quality Student Data" (HQSD) component, calling it "troubled waters" when administrators are forced to judge 184 days of instruction based on two testing data points. Ultimately, Dave views OTES as highly dependent on implementation: if it is done to teachers, it destroys morale; if done with them, it can foster growth.

Employment and Due Process

The interview concluded with a detailed discussion on the legalities of teacher contracts. Dave distinguished between the "coaching" aspect of OTES and its function as a tool for non-renewal. He explained the rigorous procedural steps required by the Ohio Revised Code (ORC) to non-renew limited contracts or terminate continuing contracts (tenure). He stressed that while he prefers to be a cheerleader, he must meticulously "dot his I's and cross his T's" to ensure due process is followed if an adverse employment action becomes necessary.

Analysis and Reflection Implications for Personal Practice

As an aspiring administrator with a background in music education, I entered this interview with a specific insecurity: How can I effectively evaluate and coach teachers in content areas where I lack expertise, such as the "Science of Reading"? Dave's response provided a crucial pivot in my thinking. He argued that content expertise is secondary to observational discipline and systems thinking—traits he believes music teachers possess in abundance. His advice was to approach supervision with "vulnerability and curiosity." He admitted that he was a "whole language" teacher and would likely be considered ineffective by modern reading standards. By openly acknowledging what he doesn't know and asking teachers to explain their pedagogical choices, he builds trust rather than pretending to be an omniscient expert. For my

personal practice, this implies that my goal in an OTES conference is not to be the content expert, but to be the expert in noticing—identifying alignment, engagement, and climate, and then asking the right questions to prompt reflection.

Furthermore, Dave's emphasis on the "Friday to Monday" transition highlighted the importance of emotional intelligence during the shift to leadership. His experience suggests that I must be prepared for the isolation that comes with the role.

Relationships with former peers will fundamentally change, and maintaining professional boundaries while extending grace will be essential for survival.

Implications for Educational Policy and Practice

The interview illuminated a stark disconnect between educational policy (OTES as written) and educational practice (OTES as lived). Policy aims to standardize teaching quality through a universal rubric, but Dave's experience reveals that this standardization often marginalizes specific roles, such as special education teachers. This suggests a need for policy reform that allows for differentiated evaluation frameworks—a "Universal Design for Evaluation"—that respects the nuances of different educational settings.

Additionally, the conversation regarding non-renewal and tenure highlighted the tension between accountability and protection. Dave argued that the high bar for terminating a continuing contract is necessary to protect teachers from "agenda-driven" administrators, even if it sometimes makes it difficult to remove ineffective educators. This has profound implications for how principals view documentation. It reinforces that documentation is not just bureaucratic busywork; it is the legal ethical safeguard for both the district and the employee. In practice, this means that "coaching" cannot be informal; it must be documented within the system (OhioES) to ensure that if coaching

fails, the district has the legal standing to prioritize student needs over adult employment.

Ultimately, Dave's perspective confirms that the effectiveness of any evaluation policy rests entirely on the trust established by the building leader. A principal who treats OTES as a compliance checklist will receive compliance; a principal who treats it as a framework for growth may actually achieve improvement. As I move into administration, my challenge will be to navigate the "evil administrator" legal requirements without losing the "cheerleader" heart that drives school culture.

References

Ohio Department of Education. (2020). Ohio Teacher Evaluation System 2.0 Model.