Building Capacity for Instructional Leadership Focused on Learning:

The Role of the District

A Dissertation

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To my mom and dad, Georgia and Harold Redman, thank you for instilling in me the value of education. Your high expectations and steadfast belief in my ability to achieve them, has not only encouraged me but has shaped me to be a resilient and courageous learner and leader. I am forever grateful!

To my family, for your patience, understanding, support, and encouragement as I dedicated my time and effort to this pursuit. With special thanks to Lukas and Lauren, who consistently put in the "extra" that was needed from them throughout this journey!

Finally, to my husband, Shaun LaDue, for your unwavering and selfless support during this journey, and in all that I do. Thank you for believing in me, for encouraging me, and for walking alongside me. I am grateful for your partnership and your love!

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my children, Lukas, Lauren, Owen, Ryan, and Morgan. The five of you have been my reason, my motivation, and my inspiration! In return, I hope I have inspired you to invest in yourself, and to always continue to be a learner as a means to be and become the best version of you! I love you each!

Abstract

The role of principal as instructional leader is one that is not only vital to student outcomes but requires support from district level leaders to develop. This study investigated how practicing administrators understand the meaning of being an instructional leader focused on learning and how district leaders can support principals to develop their capacity. The purpose of the study was to examine principals' learning needs and to gain a broad understanding of the structures, supports, and resources districts and district level leaders should provide to effectively support principal growth and development. To understand this, this study used an embedded comparative case study approach designed to investigate beliefs, viewpoints, practices, and experiences of principals and district level leaders who are responsible for principal development, supervision, and evaluation. Interviews with multiple administrators in four medium-sized suburban districts provided the data to conduct within-role, across-role, and between-district analysis. Findings from the study revealed a limited common definition for instructional leadership focused on learning, with consistency only centering on one element: *understands the instructional practices being implemented* in classrooms. Respondents identified providing a system-wide *structure for principal and leadership learning* as a key district support. Finally, there was broad agreement among participants regarding how principal supervisors support principal growth and development. Both principals and their supervisors identified *mentoring and partnership practices* along with *creating a culture of adult learning*, as most effective. Some *system processes* and *coaching approaches* were also identified as beneficial. These findings equip principal supervisors with a starting point for providing effective support to principals to guide and

enhance growth and development. However, these findings also suggest districts may

have additional work to do to establish a common understanding of leadership for

learning.

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Chapter 1

Influencing Learning: Leadership Significance

The role of the school principal is often overlooked in discussions about learning, which often focus on teachers and classrooms. However, principals are uniquely positioned to influence teachers, families, and the entire school community. To many, this influence is most visible in how they foster a welcoming, nurturing, safe, and collaborative environment. Yet, more significant, and essential, is how they influence their school to be or become a learning centered community, one focused on adult and student learning.

Background: A Rapidly Shifting World for School Leaders

Over the past several decades result driven accountability for schools and school districts has become a key issue for education. The standards-based movement, reinforced by the Federal No Child Left Beyond (NCLB) Act, identified the role of principals and school districts as responsible for ensuring school quality, and ultimately resulted in profound change in the roles for school leaders. The focus on schools and subsequently districts, led to an emphasis on the importance of strong principal leadership (Heck, 1992), which eventually centered on instruction and learning, and the role of districts to support schools (Louis & Robinson, 2012). This changing role resulted in districts being seen as the vehicle to build principal capacity aimed at improving instruction and therefore, results (Lee, Louis, & Anderson, 2012). This study examines what it means for principals to be an instructional leader whose focus is on learning and how districts and principal supervisors can support principals to develop and grow in their capacity for this essential aspect of leadership.

Accompanying the evolution in what policy makers expect of school leaders is an increased emphasis on the specific types of leadership needed to improve student learning. This effectively changed the role of leadership from one of ensuring the smooth operations of schools, with an emphasis on finances, policy, resource allocation, and maintaining an orderly environment, to one of instructional leadership (Louis & Robinson, 2012). Early research on effective schools (Purkey & Smith, 1983) emphasized administration and management, but scholars identified quickly instructional leadership as an additional factor and identified the role of principal as the key source for such leadership (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986).

Although early research on effective schools identified instructional leadership, this concept was only in its infancy. Instructional leadership was initially loosely defined as supporting effective teaching but has increasingly centered on the principal's role as more directly engaged in the educational process and student outcomes (Elmore, 2000; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Only recently has instructional leadership come to be seen as an essential element of educational leadership, one requiring active attention from leaders at all levels.

The literature on principal instructional leadership identifies principals as having an impact on student learning that is second only to classroom instruction, although this impact is indirect (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). This finding has resulted in a focus on the importance of the role and function of school principals (Grissom, Egalite, & Lindsay, 2021).

But the inclusion of instructional leadership as a focus did not supplant but only added to earlier expectations. While recent emphasis has been placed on principals as

instructional leaders, in order for principals to be effective, balanced leadership within a school requires attention to management as well as instructional leadership (Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Kruse & Louis, 2009). The job of the principal in successful schools does not focus on a singular type of leadership (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Tan, 2018).

The shifting role and expectations for principals resulted in new expectations for districts. Central office staff also needed to shift to a focus on teaching and learning by supporting the building level. This encompassed leveraging district level leaders to become agents for principal development as instructional leaders. Although district level leaders are identified as critical to building capacity in principals, district support and existence of coherent structures for this professional learning are often limited. However, when district support for principals is combined with expectations for accountability, student achievement is higher (Lee, Louis, & Anderson, 2012).

With the evolving role of principals and a common expectation for instructional leadership, a shift from more hands-on instructional leadership to leadership for learning is emerging (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Leithwood & Louis, 2011). A difficult challenge to understanding the meaning of the principal's role as learning leader, is that there is no common definition, much less an understanding of the relationship it has with instructional leadership. However, the focus for leaders shifts toward creating a school culture in which all members, adults as well as students, are learning. As such, it incorporates instructional leadership but is (ambiguously) broader.

Creating a Learning Environment: Conceptual Underpinnings

Collective efficacy of central office administrators and principals has been found to be a key factor in school improvement (Leithwood, et al., 2004; Neumerski, 2013;

Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010) and collective efficacy is reinforced by experience of success, organizational learning, and social persuasion (Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2004). District leaders in successful school systems believe in and reinforce the capacity of staff and their ability to foster high levels of learning for all students (Leithwood, et al., 2004). Districts that emphasize principal and teacher professional learning and growth along with providing supportive conditions were found to have the greatest impact (Wahlstrom, et al., 2010). Positive leadership behaviors, which persuade others of their capacities, are also identified as a key contributor to collective efficacy and have been found to be a strong predictor of student achievement (Murphy & Louis, 2018). In other words, districts are asked to assume a critical role in developing the cadre of their school-based leaders as effective leaders for learning.

This conceptual framework suggests that interweaving instructional leadership and learning leadership is essential to creating a learning environment leading to collective efficacy and improved student results. The graphic aims to depict the essential reciprocal relationship, which includes feedback and input loops, between district focus, district leaders, school leaders, teachers and ultimately students to create a learner centered culture.
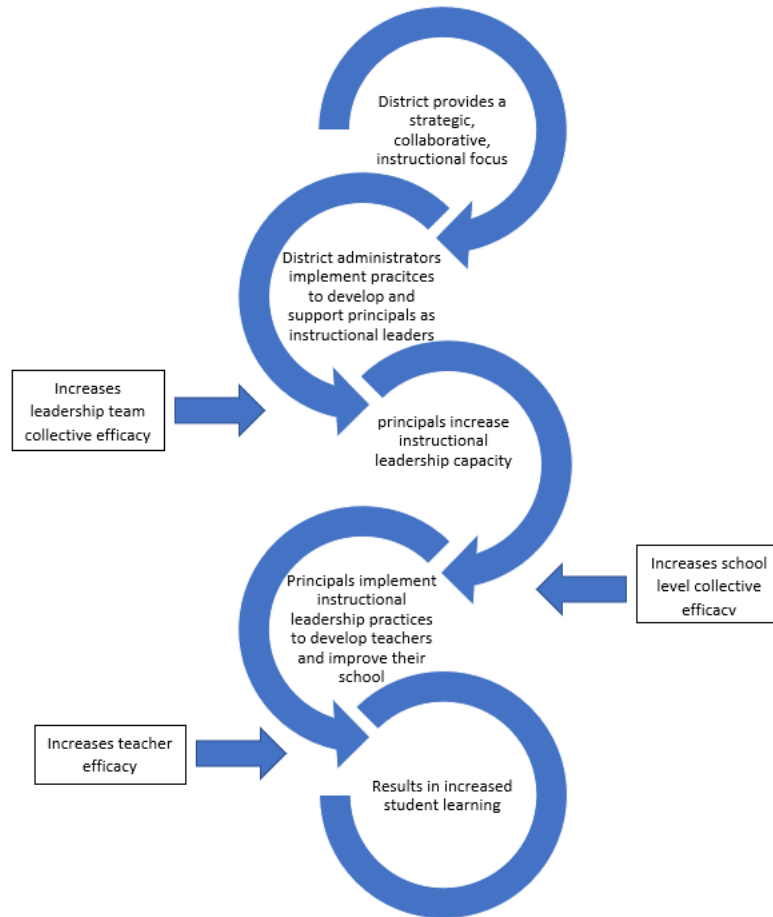
Figure 1.1: Overview of Conceptual Framework

How are Districts Supporting Principals as Leaders of Learning?

The research questions guiding this study were designed to explore how practicing administrators understand the meaning of being an instructional leader whose focus is on learning and how district leaders can support principals in developing the capacity to be an instructional leader whose focus is on learning in their school. This study will focus on the specific needs to build principals' capacity and to continue developing balanced leadership which includes being an instructional leader whose focus is on learning in their school. The following research question and sub-questions were used to guide this study:

How can districts support principals to grow and develop their capacity to provide instructional leadership, focused on learning, for their school?

Sub-question 1: How do principals and principal supervisors define instructional leadership, focused on learning?

Sub-question 2: How do districts, as a system, support principal growth and development as an instructional leader, focused on learning?

Sub-question 3: How do principal supervisors support principal growth and development as an instructional leader, focused on learning?

Sub-question 4: How do districts, as a system, or principal supervisors, impede or hinder principal growth and development as an instructional leader, focused on learning?

Significance of the Study

Improving schools is about learning: adult collaborative learning (organizational learning), individual teacher and leader learning, and ultimately student learning. Principals are key players in creating a school environment that is characterized by all three (Louis, Hord & Von Frank, 2016). The need to grow the capacity of principals to serve as instructional leaders whose focus is on learning is essential to this process. Relatively little is known about this area of study and few significant papers have been authored in the past five years to increase this knowledge base.

This study is significant because there is a limited body of research and literature regarding what supports principals in developing as instructional leaders or how district office leaders "might provide [those supports] regularly and at a high level of quality"

(Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton, & Newton, 2010, p. 6). Furthermore, little is known

about what central office staff do when they provide support and if what they do is more

or less supportive of principals in developing or improving as instructional leaders,

particularly those located outside of large, urban districts (Honig, 2012; Honig, 2013;

Honig & Rainey, 2014; Miller, et al., 2016). To expand on the limited knowledge base,

this study focuses on more typical medium-sized suburban districts and uses exploratory

comparative case study methods to capture district and school-based administrators'

understanding of what is needed at a time when administrator accountability and the

importance of instructional leadership are well-established and virtually unchallenged.

Learning more about what principals need to grow and improve as learning

leaders, and the interplay this has with instructional leadership, is critical to informing

what resources, structures, and supports districts and district level leaders could and

should provide principals, or facilitate, as a means to support principal growth that results

in improved student outcomes. This study identifies and begins to develop an

understanding of what structures and practices impact principal's practice, therefore

informing how districts could organize their supports for and work with principals to

meet these needs. This study was intended to provide foundational learning in this area.

Limitations

Subjectivity of the research is a limitation of this type of study (Corbin & Strauss,

2015), as the researcher has personal background knowledge and experiences in the roles

being studied. An additional limitation of this study is that only leaders who were willing

to participate in an interview offered their perspectives. Finally, the relatively small

convenience sample, which is constrained to medium-sized suburban districts in one

metropolitan area, means that generalizability to other districts, principal supervisors, and principals will be limited.

Key Definitions

The following terms are used throughout the study.

District level or central office leader – central office administrator, usually the superintendent, an assistant superintendent or an executive district director.

Principal supervisor – district level leader who is responsible for development, supervision and evaluation of principals.

Principal – leader at the school level, responsible for teacher development and evaluation and ultimately student learning results.

Instructional leadership – engagement in the educational process and student outcomes as the focus for one's work.

Organizational manager – one who allocates resources, manages budgets and staff, hires personnel, and keeps a school running smoothly.

Learning leader – an evolving type of leadership that encompasses a combination of embedding, prioritizing, and/or engaging in ongoing professional learning as well as creating a culture of learning within a school or overall organization.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

To date, a great deal of research has emerged regarding the impact of principal level leadership on improving schools. There are fewer investigations of the role of the superintendent in improving schools and even less attention has been paid to the role of other central office leaders. As accountability for schools, and more specifically school districts, became a key issue in education, the need to understand how district leadership and leadership teams function to support school leaders has become more important. This includes, in addition to the superintendent, the roles of other central office leaders who directly or indirectly support principals.

This review investigates several bodies of research to support research questions that explore how to leverage existing central office administrators to support principals in growing as instructional leaders. First, a focus on the evolving role of school districts will be reviewed. Next, the role and impact of instructional leadership will be considered. Finally, how districts can reorganize and interact with principals to support them in improving their practice will be examined.

The Evolving Role of School Districts

A Focus on Districts

This section will review the evolution of the role of the school district in education. Factors that contributed to and in some cases caused this evolution will be addressed. The impact on the role of leaders at central office will also be discussed. Early in the emergence of public school systems in the United States, school districts were designed to be local bureaucracies governed by elected boards (Elmore, 2000). A

district office and superintendent professionalized the "management" of districts that increasingly included more than one school and provided some accountability and oversight for the expenditure of public funds (Tyack & Hansot, 1982). As the scale of the educational system grew, systems became more complex. Education remained a local affair, with local school boards directly controlling their schools and employing administrative expertise to assure appropriate management (Elmore, 2000; Gamson, McDermott, & Reed, 2015). Through the 1980s, the role of school districts continued to focus primarily on regulatory or business functions to provide support to schools within a system (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012; Honig, 2012; Honig & Rainey, 2014; Lee, Louis, & Anderson, 2012).

  Loose Coupling. During the 1960s and 1970s, the relationship between schools and their governing districts was often described as one of loose coupling (Elmore, 2000; Fullan, 2005; Louis, Thomas, & Anderson, 2010; Murphy & Hallinger, 1988). Weick (1976), introduced the model, as one where coupled components are responsive, yet still maintain their own identity and display separation. He further states that "the two most commonly discussed coupling mechanisms are the technical core of the organization and the authority of office" (Weick, 1976, p. 4). Applying this model to education, the technical core resided at the classroom level and the authority of office was the function of the school district and administration (Elmore, 2000). However, as Weick (1976) pointed out, one of the functions of loose coupling was to preserve opportunities for experimentation and innovation within the technical core, since only modest coordination between units was expected.

Teacher role. Under the loose-coupling model, the technical core of education was defined as the work of teachers at the classroom level which included the decisions and responsibilities related to teaching and learning (Elmore, 2000; Fullan, 2005). Classroom teachers determined what students would be taught, how they would be taught, and how student learning would be assessed and evaluated (Elmore, 2000). Under this model the teachers' role was autonomous and this discretion, as it related to instruction, made it nearly impossible to reliably evaluate instructional effectiveness from the outside (Elmore, 2000; Fullan, 2005). However, this was not expected as the common measure of effectiveness centered on public satisfaction rather than objective measures of student learning outcomes (Elmore, 2000).

As a result of this highly autonomous structure for classroom instruction, promising or effective teaching practices were difficult to replicate (Elmore, 2000; Fullan, 2005). Fullan asserts that while there were some excellent teachers, there was no culture to systematically extend or deepen quality instruction as identified through research or practice (2005). Replication of improvements happened only on a voluntary basis (Elmore, 2000). It is important to note that initial studies aimed at examining individual teacher performance and motivation were just emerging, such as a study by Warren (1968) that considered how various principal power structures paired with visibility influenced teacher conformity.

District role. Under the loose coupling model, the authority of office was defined as the actions of the school board and central office administrators responsible for overseeing the structures and processes around instruction, not instruction itself (Elmore, 2000). The role of districts related to instruction was to buffer the instructional core,

teachers and their work, from outside influences that might interfere (Thompson, 1967). The role was not to directly support teaching and learning nor to support the principal in developing as an instructional leader (Honig, 2012). Nonetheless, buffering was necessary as education became more political (Ravitch, 2000) and competing agendas sought to influence education (Corcoran, Fuhrman, & Belcher, 2001).

Buffering of teachers from outside inspection and interference created a logic of confidence in the instructional structure, the logic of confidence is described as the ability to diminish any outside concerns about the technical core (Elmore, 2000). School leaders were often hired and retained based on their ability to maintain the logic of confidence between school systems and the public they served (Elmore, 2000). This created a focus on the logic of confidence rather than on improvement of the system. School districts were not responsible to provide stability or direction for the long-term improvement of school performance (Elmore, 2000). Murphy and Hallinger reinforce this by claiming that "almost no research is available that shows how districts, in their efforts to promote organizational goals, coordinate the work of school-level personnel" (1988, p. 175).

Under a loose coupling model, teachers worked in relative isolation with high levels of autonomy and the expertise contributed by administrators focused on management and administration skills, not pedagogy (Elmore, 2000). Thus, prior to the 1990s only limited expectations for school districts related to the organization's role in instructional improvement existed (Honig & Copland, 2008).

The Role of Federal Policy in Educational Reform

State reform. State interest and involvement in education began increasing in the 1950s along with state funding for education (Fuhrman & Elmore, 1990). This increase in

state funding was accompanied by an increase in laws, regulations and structures (Fuhrman & Elmore, 1990). The expansion of state authority culminated in a reform movement in the 1980s that led to extensive policy initiatives (Murphy & Louis, 2018) which had significant influence over fundamental processes of schooling (Elmore & Fuhrman, 1990; Fuhrman & Elmore, 1990). This ensued a debate on national goals for education and a call for an increase in national activity which was intended to add momentum to the already intense state effort (Elmore & Fuhrman, 1990).

Early federal policy. Over the past fifty years the role of the federal government in education has continued to evolve. This began with the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. Early iterations of federal policy reflected awareness of the role of local control typically afforded in school district governance and policy. This initial education policy aimed at utilizing education as the vehicle to alleviate poverty as defined by the Johnson Administration (Gamson, et al., 2015). Further, these early iterations did not speak to any roles or responsibilities for local school districts related to expectations for student outcomes.

However, the introduction of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act marked the movement from a decentralized education system toward a more centralized system (Cooper, Cibulka, & Fusarelli, 2015). The federal government's attempt to address poverty through education, raised two questions about the education system, should the focus be on excellence or equal opportunity, yet more important than this conflict was the implied expectation that the federal government should do something (Gamson, et al., 2015).

1980s and 1990s. The publishing of the report *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 brought

lingering concerns from the previous half-century regarding American Education to the forefront (Cooper, et al., 2015; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). This guided future policies toward standards-based education reform (Gamson, et al., 2015). Goals 2000: Educate America Act passed by Congress in 1994, began the practice of utilizing ESEA as leverage to require states to establish challenging standards in math and reading as well as implementation of tests to monitor progress toward these standards (Cooper, et al., 2015; Gamson, et al., 2015). For the first time funding was linked to these requirements as a means to hold schools and districts accountable for student learning (Gamson, et al., 2015). With this, standards-based reform was positioned to become a "fundamental part of the architecture of policy and governance in American Education" (Elmore, 2000, p. 4).

A *Nation at Risk* had a profound impact on how people thought about education (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Education had become a political element, as policy makers and the general public became more interested in educational successes (Cooper, et al., 2015). Further, emerging consensus among researchers reinforced the idea that state and federal initiatives were having an impact on local practice (Cooper, et al., 2015).

This report and the subsequent introduction of standards resulted in the concept of high stakes in education policy (Leithwood, et al., 2004). Clearer standards meant increased rigor and were viewed by some as a way to provide minority students higher quality education and ensure an opportunity to learn (Gamson, et al., 2015; Leithwood, et al., 2004). Others viewed standards as a means to create higher levels of professional practice and teacher accountability (Leithwood, et al., 2004). Accountability based on

results was receiving support by the public along with many educators, although the scholarly community expressed concerns about the effects on students, teachers and schools (Leithwood, et al., 2004).

  2000 and beyond. The role of government in education reform peaked with the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which fully shifted the setting of the education policy agenda from local to state and federal government (Cooper, et al., 2015; Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010). The most recent version of ESEA, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, strove to reinstate more local control by including more opportunity for states and local districts to interpret and shape the policy, but the role of accountability, at least as it related to assessment, remained intact (Minnesota state plan, 2017). Policymakers have continued to use ESEA as the "centerpiece of an expanded federal presence in K-12 education," allowing a federal program to leverage improvements by impacting teaching and learning at the classroom level (Gamson, et al., 2015, p. 27).

  The authorization of No Child Left Behind brought with it a change in the role and function of State Education Agencies (SEAs) (Leithwood, et al., 2004). Although these agencies maintained regulatory oversight and responsibility to monitor district accountability, their role was expanded to include a new role of assisting districts with capacity building, leadership training, and use of technology (Leithwood, et al., 2004). Nonetheless, there remained a significant difference between states as each had discretion to choose standards, benchmarks, assessments, and strategies (Leithwood, et al., 2004).

  NCLB also resulted in a profound change in roles for leaders (Louis, Thomas, & Anderson, 2010; Louis & Robinson, 2012). However, high performing schools and

districts leveraged the new legislation and mandates to propell local initiatives forward (Leithwood, et al., 2004).

The inability to reauthorize NCLB followed by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 brought about a new competitive grant process for educational reform, Race to the Top (RTTT). In order to qualify for these funds states needed to meet newly outlined requirements, resulting in many states changing laws to meet criteria to be eligible for the grant (Cooper, et al., 2015). The two most contenctious requirements were the adoption of the common core state standards (CCSS) and changes in the teacher evaluation systems to include student learning and growth data (Cooper, et al., 2015; Gamson, et al., 2015). These mandates were viewed as a violation of states rights as it was considered institution of a national curriculum (Gamson, et al., 2015). Further, Race to the Top (RTTT) created an opportunity to promote the president's educaton reform agenda (Cooper, et al., 2015).

Among the public, education moved from a bottom area of voter concern in the 1960s to being ranked as the number one concern for voters in 2000 (Cooper, et al. 2015). Regardless of the increased public interest, federal education inititiatives are subject to the political climate and presidential administration conflicting agendas, therefore, limited results have been realized (Cooper, et al. 2015).

Standards-based Reform and the Accountability Movement

The standards movement began a shift in expectations for schools and school districts. By the 1990s, standards-based reform was changing the landscape of K-12 education. The standards movement, later reinforced with the policies of the federal

NCLB Act and mandated standardized testing, changed the role of districts (Louis & Robinson, 2012).

Standards-based Reform

Standards-based reform aimed to improve teaching and learning as measured through achievement outcomes (Elmore, 2000). Standards-based reform was based on the premise that "society should communicate expectations for what students should know and be able to do in the form of standards, both for what should be taught and for what students should be able to demonstrate about their learning" (Elmore, 2000, p. 4). Further, school administrators and policy makers at all levels were expected to employ systems to ensure teachers taught what was expected and that students could demonstrate having learned (Elmore, 2000).

The standards-based movement initially identified schools and later school districts as critical players responsible for student outcomes (Daly & Finnigan, 2011; Elmore, 2000; Louis & Robinson, 2012). This notion is reinforced by Elmore (2000) when he asserts that "standards-based reform has a deceptively simple logic: schools and school systems should be held accountable for their contributions to student learning" (p. 12). However, standards-based reform was in direct conflict with the previously recognized model known as loose coupling. Loose coupling posits that the role of school districts is to buffer the technical core from outside interference, but standards-based reform violates this by identifying what must be taught and learned at the classroom level (Elmore, 2000). It also interferes with the fundamental structure of local governance, as state and federal policy required the identification and implementation of state standards

in all schools across the United States; therefore, crossing into institutional practice (Elmore, 2000).

Accountability

Early accountability. With the standards-based reform movement came increased expectations regarding accountability for student learning (Elmore, 2000). States and school districts were in the forefront of these changes with new expectations "to promote coherence and accountability on the loosely-coupled U.S. school system" (Louis, 2008, p. 681).

By the late 1980s and early 1990s the public's desire for educational accountability had increased (Heck, 1992; Lee, et al., 2012; Louis & Robinson, 2012). Initially, states focused on schools and subsequently, turned their attention to include districts (Honig & Copland, 2008). Concern about achievement outcomes affirmed the importance of assessment data as a means to evaluate instruction (Heck, 1992). Additionally, the effective schools research promoted strategic school organization and strong principal leadership as strategies for improvement (Heck, 1992).

Growing role of policy. The NCLB Act of 2001 established goals for schools and districts related to Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) and imposed sanctions for schools and districts not meeting these targets (Daly & Finnigan, 2011). The growing role of federal and state policies aimed to stimulate local school districts to implement reform focused on improving teaching (Louis, et al., 2010; Wahlstrom, et al., 2010). Further, the NCLB policy "created the expectation that states would assist districts in becoming better at supporting schools" (Louis & Robinson, 2012, p. 630). With this, scholars shifted from

examining the role of schools in reform to studying the relationship between school

district central offices and school sites (Daly & Finnigan, 2011; Honig, 2006).

Changing role of the district. Policy expectations resulted in school districts

being elevated to key players in school improvement (Honig & Copland, 2008). Louis

(2008) asserts that "the district is responsible for making change happen – even when

policy emanates from federal or state legislatures" (p. 682). These policies, focused on

standards and accountability, were intended to influence school districts as they set

student learning goals and identified direction for improvement efforts (Anderson &

Rodway-Macri, 2009). Although districts had previously been seen as obstacles to

improvement, central offices were now being seen as the vehicle to build capacity for

reform that was aimed at improving instruction and therefore, student learning (Honig &

Copland, 2008; Stein & Coburn, 2007). This resulted in an expanded role for districts,

one no longer centered on management; instead, districts were "asked to become shapers

of school culture and performance" (Lee, et al., 2012, p. 134).

Systemic reform was introduced in the early 1990s by a small group of scholars

who boded this as a promising avenue to improve schools (Ravitch, 2010). According to

Fuhrman (1993), systemic reform called for "developing coordinated educational policies

around ambitious outcome expectations" (p. 1). This encompassed three major elements:

curriculum frameworks that establish ambitious outcome expectations for all students,

alignment of key education policies to support expected outcomes, and a governance

system that afforded a balance between centralization of learning outcomes and

decentralization to afford schools flexibility in decisions regarding practice (Fuhrman,

1993; O'Day & Smith, 1993). These ideas shifted the work of reform from schools to

districts as coordinators of systemic curriculum and instruction development and implementation with the intent to create focus on ambitious learning goals and greater school level accountability for results (Elmore, 1993).

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Why Focus on Instructional Leadership?

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The next body of literature centers on this shift from management to a focus on instructional leadership. Instructional leadership has been defined by scholars including Fullan (2014), Elmore (2000) and Heck (1992). Many studies focus on identifying what aspects of leadership positively influence school improvement. This section outlines the research about the impacts of such aspects of leadership both at the building and district-level.

Defining Instructional Leadership

History. Instructional leadership is not a new term. This concept originated in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a part of the effective schools' movement (Marks & Printy, 2003; Neumerski, 2013; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Empirical origins for instructional leadership theory emerged from studies of schools in urban settings "where students succeeded despite the odds" (Robinson, et al., 2008, p. 638).

The effective schools research identified key characteristics of effective schools: one was instructional leadership (Neumerski, 2013). This translated to the role of the principal as the primary source for such leadership (Marks & Printy, 2003; Neumerski, 2013). However, "what did not emerge was exactly what instructional leadership was" (Neumerski, 2013, p. 318). Therefore, initially the focus became personal traits of leaders rather than their mastery of professional knowledge (Elmore, 2000; Neumerski, 2013).

Definition. Many scholars have utilized the term instructional leadership, yet this

term has not been clearly defined and there is no agreed upon definition (Heck, 1992; Leithwood, et al., 2004; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). In spite of that, commonly identified key tenets for instructional leadership can be discerned across the literature. These include an emphasis on teaching and learning, specifically focusing on instructional practices and the instructional program, aimed at positively influencing student learning outcomes and growth (Elmore, 2000; Fullan, 2014; Leithwood, et al., 2004; Marks & Printy, 2003; Neumerski, 2013; Robinson, et al., 2008; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Neumerski summarizes these ideas in her statement, "instructional leadership practices must include the connection between instructional leadership and instruction itself" (2013, p. 316). Additionally, several scholars highlight improvement and change around instructional practices as core elements of their definitions (Elmore, 2000; Leithwood, et al., 2004; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

While the term instructional leadership is not universally defined, it clearly emphasizes an important role for principals and leaders, and it is one of engagement in the educational process and student outcomes as the focus for their work. This solidifies the premise that administration is not just a function of management, but rather critical to the core purpose of schools which should be student learning outcomes.

Principal Leadership

Studies have turned toward assessing the impact of principals on student achievement (Fullan, 2014; Grissom, et al., 2021; Leithwood & Riehl., 2003; Leithwood, et al., 2004; Marks & Printy, 2003; Robinson, et al., 2008; Wahlstrom, et al., 2010). The literature on principal instructional leadership has been consistent, with principals being identified as having an impact on student learning second only to classroom instruction,

though their role is that of an indirect influence (Day & Sammons, 2013; Grissom, et al., 2021; Leithwood, et al., 2004). Further, leadership has been proven to have the most significant impact on schools with the greatest needs, (Robinson, et al., 2008; Wahlstrom, et al., 2010) with "no evidence of effective schools with weak leadership" (Neumerski, 2013, p. 317) and "virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around without intervention by a powerful leader" (Leithwood, et al., 2004, p. 5).

Several comprehensive reviews of educational literature have discerned the relationship between school leadership and student outcomes (Grissom, et al., 2021; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2006; Murphy & Louis, 2018; Robinson, et al., 2008; Supovitz, Sirinides, & May, 2010). These reviews have considered both direct and indirect effects using quantitative and qualitative research methods. Findings identified little evidence of direct effects while most evidence points toward indirect effects. Subsequent research has focused more on the indirect relationship between leadership and student learning with an emphasis on leadership setting conditions for teachers to directly affect student outcomes (Robinson, et al., 2008). Nonetheless, when considering the effects, both direct and indirect, of leadership on student learning it is broadly accepted that leadership accounts for one-quarter of total school effects (Leithwood, et al., 2004; Leithwood & Riehl., 2003).

Leadership has been defined as encompassing two core functions, providing direction and exercising influence (Leithwood & Riehl., 2003; Wahlstrom, et al., 2010). This implies that leadership is more of a function than a role, and one must work through and with others to achieve goals (Leithwood & Riehl., 2003). Murphy and Louis (2018) emphasize that leadership goes beyond a function and that relationships are the

foundation. It is also believed that instructional leadership, based on Hallinger's well-researched model, consists of three core dimensions: defining mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive learning climate (Leithwood, et al., 2004). These key practices encapsulate many earlier scholars' findings. This, however, is still very general and provides limited guidelines to shape principal behavior.

Reviewing the literature more holistically, four key themes regarding positive effects of principal leadership on student outcomes emerge. These findings align closely with those highlighted by Wahlstrom, et al. (2010). The first theme, development of a vision and mission, encompasses setting direction and establishing goals and expectations as well as providing communication that creates clarity and focus (Heck, 1992; Leithwood, et al., 2004; Leithwood & Riehl., 2003; Marks & Printy, 2003; Robinson, et al., 2008; Supovitz, et al., 2010; Wahlstrom, et al., 2010). The second theme, development of people, incorporates building capacity towards skills, knowledge, and dispositions based on identified beliefs and best practices (Leithwood, et al., 2004; Leithwood & Riehl., 2003; Wahlstrom, et al., 2010). This practice also integrates awareness of teacher needs, providing feedback to support growth, and leaders both supporting and participating in teacher professional learning and development (Fullan, 2014; Heck, 1992; Robinson, et al., 2008; Supovitz, et al., 2010). The third theme is the ongoing development and modification of the organizaton, centering on a culture of learning, collaborative processes, collective ownership, and trust (Leithwood, et al., 2004; Leithwood & Riehl., 2003; Robinson, et al., 2010; Wahlstrom, et al., 2010). Finally, the fourth theme, oversight of the instructional program with a focus on teaching and learning, threads throughout the literature. This generally includes planning, monitoring,

and evaluation of curriculum, resources, assessment results, and conducting program reviews (Heck, 1992; Marks & Printy, 2003; Robinson, et al., 2008; Supovitz, et al., 2010; Wahlstrom, et al., 2010).

Differences do exist in the literature, indicating that some findings have not been broadly identified as having positive effects on principal leadership. These include areas such as responding productively to an accountability-oriented policy context or opportunities and challenges of educating diverse students (Leithwood & Riehl., 2003). While ensuring a supportive culture was identified as having favorable results, an orderly and supportive environment was only noted by one researcher and did not prove to have a large effect when considering principal impact on student outcomes (Robinson, et al., 2008). This premise was further reinforced by the finding that staff in lower performing schools valued back-up from principals as opposed to instructional support (Wahlstrom, et al., 2010).

Additionally, when reviewing more recent literature on instructional leadership, new priorities emerge. Many of these have roots in earlier literature and previously identified practices but have been reframed and expanded. These essential principal practices encompass "instructional climate" and "instructional action" (Wahlstrom, et al., 2010). Instructional climate is defined as a focus on goals that maintain high expectations for staff and student achievement, emphasis on the value and application of research-based instructional strategies, and a climate for continual professional learning (Wahlstrom, et al., 2010). Instructional action centers on "principal engagement with individual teachers about their own growth" and incorporates principal awareness of individual professional learning needs while also promoting professional community

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using structures for teacher collaboration (Wahlstrom, et al., 2010, p. 13).

Many aspects of principal leadership need further study. The research has identified what principals do to positively influence student learning and outcomes; however, much is still to be learned about how to execute these practices most effectively.

Instructional Leadership Beyond Principals

It is also important to note that principals are not the only source of instructional leadership in schools. Shared leadership through the inclusion of teacher leaders also plays an important role in instructional improvement (Marks & Printy, 2003; Murphy & Louis, 2018; Neumerski, 2013; Supovitz, et al., 2010; Wahlstrom, et al., 2010; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Shared leadership is described as teachers' opportunity to work alongside principals in order to influence school-wide decisions (Wahlstrom, et al., 2010).

Teacher leadership is still being defined and understood. York-Barr and Duke (2004) offer the following description for teacher leadership, "the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement" (p. 287). Teacher leaders can serve in both formal and informal capacities and target efforts at either the organization or classroom level (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Principals play a key role in the success of teacher leaders, both through development (Leithwood, et al., 2004; York-Barr & Duke, 2004) and by supporting and promoting their work with teacher colleagues (Neumerski, 2013).

Teacher leadership is considered essential to successful schools, as the "work of improving teaching not only rests in the hands of the principal, but also is distributed across a host of leaders such as teacher leaders and instructional coaches" (Neumerski, 2013, p. 311). Successful leaders count on teacher contributions, (Leithwood, et al., 2004) as the frequency of instructional leadership practices was found to be more important than who performed the particular role (Robinson, et al., 2008).

Teacher leaders lead among colleagues by focusing on instructional practices to improve student outcomes (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Instructional coaching is one way teacher leaders influence peers' practice (Supovitz, et al., 2010). This broader base of leadership is known to improve both culture and instructional practices (York-Barr & Duke, 2004) and teacher leadership and instructional coaching have been positively linked to instructional improvement (Neumerski, 2013). Marks and Printy (2003) and York-Barr and Duke (2004) assert that educational reform and instructional improvement have a greater chance for success when teachers are engaged in providing instructional leadership.

Organization Management

The most commonly studied and highlighted form of principal leadership is instructional leadership which has been identified as the main focus for principal action and school improvement (Grissom & Loeb, 2011). However, studies by Grissom and Loeb (2011) and Horng, Klasik and Loeb (2009) have identified that organization management is a key compliment to instructional leadership. This small but distinct line of research addresses the value of organization management as an essential element of principal leadership.

Organization management is defined as allocating resources, managing budgets and staff, hiring personnel, and keeping the school running smoothly (Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Horng, et al., 2009). Based on this defintion, there are many implications for how organization management supports effective instructional leadership. For example, hiring staff is often considered one of the most significant ways that a principal impacts instruction (Horng, et al., 2009).

Principal time spent on organization management tasks was associated with both high performing schools and school improvement as measured by student performance and gains in student achievement (Horng, et al., 2009). In addition, organization management is associated with positive school outcomes that include positive relationships with teachers and parents.

In contrast, day to day instructional tasks, an element of instructional leadership, are associated with high performing schools and only marginally or not at all related to improving student performance (Horng, et al., 2009). Further, in this study, day to day instructional tasks often showed a negative relationship with teachers and parents (Horng, et al., 2009).

"This paper provides evidence that a single minded focus on principals as instruction leaders, operationalized as direct contact with teachers, may be detrimental if it foresakes the important role of principals as organizational leaders" (Horng, et al., 2009, p. 26). These studies call for a broader view of instructional leadership to include organization management as an essential compliment to instructional leadership (Grissom & Loeb, 2011).

Other Leadership Models

Beyond roles that are identified to provide leadership in schools, there are many other leadership models or theories identified throughout the literature. Leithwood et al. (2004) cautions that the various adjectives used to describe leadership style, however, may mask the important aspects of leadership. Beyond instructional leadership and organization management, which were discussed previously, shared, transformational, and distributed leadership are among some of the most commonly identified models that warrant a brief review. Additionally, a more recent synthesis of literature by Murphy and Louis (2018) suggests that positive leadership cuts across all of these models as each is fundamentally based on positive psychology, the foundation for positive school leadership which is grounded in trust and relationship building.

Shared leadership is defined as "teachers influence over and participation in school-wide decisions with principals" (Wahlstrom, et al., 2010). This view elevates the important role of teachers acting in formal and informal capacities, particularly as it relates to creating a culture of professional community, as a means to improve instructional practice (Wahlstrom, et al., 2010). It is important to note, that shared leadership should not be confused with shared instructional leadership, as defined by Marks and Printy (2003), as the role and impact of strengthening professional community among teachers and leaders is minimized in their model.

Transformational leadership is defined as being "focused on the relationship between leader and followers" (Robinson, et al., 2008, p. 665; Marks & Printy, 2003, p. 375), as opposed to the work of educational leadership (Robinson, et al., 2008). Transformational leadership studies tend to focus on social outcomes, compared to instructional leadership research which tends to focus on academic outcomes (Robinson,

et al., 2008). Further, transformational leadership was found to be three to four times less impactful than instructional leadership on student outcomes (Robinson, et al., 2008). Marks and Printy (2003) concluded that transformational leadership was about change not about teaching and learning.

Distributed leadership refers to multiple individuals distributing leadership responsibility among informal and formal roles within an organization (Elmore, 2000; Neumerski, 2013). The underlying idea is that no one individual should provide all the leadership for an organization (Leithwood, et al., 2004), rather a broad-based team approach tends to be more effective (Leithwood & Riehl., 2003). However, it is important not to confuse distributed leadership with delegation of management tasks (Leithwood, et al., 2004).

Central Office Leadership

The role of central office leadership is to set clear direction and build the capacity of those within the system to deliver on that direction (Waters & Marzano, 2006). Central office leadership is being defined as the superintendent and other administrators who support principal development, typically assistant superintendents and directors of teaching and learning. Evidence suggests that strong leadership at both the district and school level positively affect student learning. However, the impact of central office leadership, including superintendents, is less conclusive (Chingos, Whitehurst, & Lindquist, 2014; Waters & Marzano, 2006).

Superintendent leadership. Waters and Marzano (2006), through Mid-continental Research for Education and Learning (McREL), conducted a meta-analysis that examined 27 studies conducted since 1970, using rigorous quantitative methods to

study the influence of school district leaders on student achievement. The largest

quantitative study of superintendents conducted to date, this study concluded that

superintendents make a positive difference (Marzano & Waters, 2009; Waters &

Marzano, 2006). Findings included the following: effective superintendents focus their

efforts on creating goal-oriented districts; superintendent tenure is positively correlated

with student achievement; and a surprising finding regarding the function of "defined

autonomy" (Marzano & Waters, 2009; Waters & Marzano, 2006).

The finding regarding superintendent leadership responsibilities centered on

creating goal-oriented districts (Waters & Marzano, 2006). The following five areas were

identified as the most salient: 1) collaborative goal setting, defined as stakeholders

actively engaged in the goal-setting process; 2) non-negotiable goals for achievement and

instruction centered on achievement targets to be enacted system-wide; 3) board

alignment with and support of district non-negotiable goals; 4) monitoring achievement

and instruction goals by maintaining a focus on district actions and continuous progress;

5) use of resources to support the goals for instruction and achievement ensuring

allocation is aligned to priorities (Marzano & Waters, 2009; Waters & Marzano, 2006).

The finding regarding superintendent tenure, although not a focus of the study by Waters

and Marzano (2006), identified a correlation between superintendent longevity and

positive student achievement outcomes, confirming the value of stability (Marzano &

Waters, 2009; Waters & Marzano, 2006). Further, through conflicting results from the

study, the finding of defined autonomy was identified (Waters & Marzano, 2006). This

concept, also referred to as loose-tight leadership, defines the relationship between the

district and schools as one where superintendents provide principals latitude to lead their

school within boundaries that ensure alignment with district priorities and goals (DuFour & Fullan, 2013; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Elmore, 2000; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Waters & Marzano, 2006).

In a study by Murphy and Hallinger (1988), superintendents who displayed strong instructional leadership were found to be a factor that positively affected school districts. Practices of superintendents who provided leadership in curriculum and instruction incorporated setting system goals, identifying district-wide professional development activities, promoting goal alignment between district and schools, and supervising and evaluating principals (Murphy & Hallinger, 1988). However, the authors of this study suggested caution in the use of these findings due to small sample size and variation in the identified themes (Murphy & Hallinger, 1988). Leithwood, et al. (2004), noted that there is little research or further studies that extend beyond these findings.

The Brown Center report on School Superintendents (Chingos, Whitehurst, & Lindquist, 2014) refuted many of the findings from the earlier Waters and Marzano (2006) study on the effects of the superintendent on student achievement. Moreover, Chingos, Whitehurst, and Lindquist claim there is nearly no quantitative research addressing the impact of superintendents on student achievement; instead, much of the research is qualitative and aimed at identifying characteristics of effective central office leaders (2014). In this quantitative study, the relationship between superintendents and student achievement was examined using data on public school systems and student achievement, resulting in the conclusion, "school district superintendents have very little influence on student achievement in the districts in which they serve" (Chingos, et al., 2014, p. 13). In addition, as it relates to longevity, the Chingos, et al. study disagreed

with the previously cited apparent correlation of superintendent stability to positive

student achievement outcomes cited in the Waters and Marzano (2006) study with the

conclusion that there appears to be no association between the length of service of the

superintendent and positive impact on student learning outcomes. It should be noted that

in this study, school districts as a collective organization were identified as having a more

significant positive impact on student achievement than that of the superintendent

(Chingos, et al., 2014). This finding warrants more investigation to further understand.

District practices. It has been suggested that districts and central office leaders

have needed to shift to a focus on instructional leadership and how to support teaching

and learning (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012), but there is only limited information about how

this recommendation has affected most districts. In addition, research on the effects of

district-level activities has been limited (Murphy & Hallinger, 1988), and more recent

research on district practices that affect schools is largely unpublished (McLaughlin &

Talbert, 2003; Waters & Marzano, 2006) or is not focused on instruction (Daly &

Finnigan, 2010).

Murphy and Hallinger (1988) conducted a study that focused on identifying the

characteristics of districts that are more instructionally effective. Beyond a strong

superintendent who provided instructional leadership, key district-level activities focused

on improving student learning were identified (Murphy & Hallinger, 1988). A priority on

curriculum content and instructional practice, consistency in classroom instruction, an

emphasis on examination of processes and outcomes, and a high degree of coordination

between classroom, school and district set them apart (Murphy & Hallinger, 1988).

District practices that affect schools and promote improvement have also been a

focus of both published and unpublished studies. Leithwood, et al. (2004), McLaughlin and Talbert (2003), Togneri and Anderson (2003), and Waters and Marzano (2006) identify consistent themes related to successful district reform. These include district direction and shared vision centered on student learning and instructional improvement, a focus on student achievement and quality instruction, curriculum aligned to standards and assessment, system-wide use of data to inform instruction and improve the system, and purposeful, aligned professional development for teachers and leaders (Leithwood, et al., 2004; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003; Togneri & Anderson, 2003; Waters & Marzano, 2006).

Much of the more recent literature on school districts, such as studies by Daly and Finnigan, do not focus on improving instructional outcomes. Instead, it focuses on auxiliary topics, such as the informal relations between and among school and central office leaders aiming to create communication networks that support reform (Daly & Finnigan, 2011). While this may impact system improvement, there is no evidence that it informs the instructional leadership practices of central office leaders as they strive to improve student learning outcomes.

Collective efficacy of central office administrators and principals has also been found to be a key factor in school improvement (Leithwood, et al., 2004; Neumerski, 2013; Wahlstrom, et al., 2010). District leaders in successful school systems believed in the capacity of staff and their ability to foster high levels of learning for all students (Leithwood, et al., 2004). Districts that emphasized principal and teacher professional learning and growth along with providing supportive conditions were found to have the greatest impact (Wahlstrom, et al., 2010). Positive leadership behaviors were also

identified as a key contributor to collective efficacy which has been found to be a strong predictor of student achievement (Murphy & Louis, 2018).

The role of district office. The role of district office and the design of the work of central office administrators to support instructional leadership is the focus of research by Louis (2008) and Honig (2012) (Honig, et al., 2010; Leithwood, et al., 2004; Louis & Robinson, 2012; Louis, et al., 2010). District-level research often focuses on the role of the superintendent rather than on the relationship between the central office leaders and schools (Louis K. S., 2008). This section considers this relationship.

The role of district office to shape school culture to focus continuously on student learning represents a major shift, expanding the role of districts from the typical framework of policy and practices to shaping culture and performance (Lee, et al., 2012). This shift to a focus on teaching and learning is the most difficult yet the most important function for central office leaders (Lee, et al., 2012), as there is a correlation between principals demonstrating strong instructional leadership and district offices that promote a strong and collaborative instructional focus (Louis & Robinson, 2012).

The design of district office work shifted not only to strive to be more efficient, but to be more effective by transforming the work of the district office to focus on improving teaching and learning by supporting the building level (Honig & Copland, 2008; Honig & Rainey, 2014; Honig, et al., 2010). This transformation was based on district-level administrators becoming key supporters for principal development as instructional leaders (Honig, 2012). This new relationship focuses on developing principal capacity through sustained, job-embedded professional development delivered by central office leaders (Honig, 2012; Honig & Copland, 2008; Honig & Rainey, 2014;

Honig, et al., 2010). A study cited by Honig (2012) found a statistically significant

relationship between district provided, job-embedded professional development with time

principals spent on instructional leadership tasks. This reinforces the idea that district

office support is integral to increasing principals' instructional leadership capacity

(Honig, 2012; Honig & Copland, 2008; Honig & Rainey, 2014; Honig, et al., 2010;

Thessin, 2019).

How Do Districts Reorganize and Interact with Principals to Support Them in Improving Their Practice?

Central office administrators are called to engage in a partnership with principals

aimed at strengthening principal's instructional leadership (Honig, et al., 2010).

Literature on the relationship between central office leadership and improvements in

teaching and learning identifies the importance of district-level participation but does not

define what this involves (Honig M. I., 2012). "The capacity of districts to support the

development of relevant leadership capacities of principals has been very limited until

quite recently" (Lee, et al., 2012, p. 137). Findings from a study on transforming district

office to improve district-wide teaching and learning by Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton

and Newton (2010) demonstrate that central office administrators can exercise essential

leadership, by teaming with principals to build capacity to improve teaching and learning

throughout the system. Further, the literature on positive leadership emphasizes the

importance of employing positive, growth-based leadership practices that are focused on

ongoing learning and development and are grounded in meaningful relationships

(Murphy & Louis, 2018).

Professional Development

Developing people through targeted professional development has been identified as an essential element of school and district improvement throughout the literature (Heck, 1992; Leithwood, et al., 2004; Leithwood & Riehl., 2003; Marks & Printy, 2003; Robinson, et al., 2008; Supovitz, et al., 2010; Wahlstrom, et al., 2010). Though principal development is spoken of often by district leaders, there is little evidence of extant district systems for coherent principal professional development, and principals rank district support in this area lower than other areas of district support (Wahlstrom, et al., 2010). In a study of one structured principal professional development program, findings demonstrated that while principals experienced growth, their growth was related more to a change in perceptions than to that of practices related to improving instructional leadership (Miller, et al., 2016). Contrary to this finding, another large-scale study found that increased principal leadership skills were associated with consistent district professional development (Lee, et al., 2012). These contradictory findings support the need to explore how to effectively build the capacity of principals to lead for instructional improvement.

District Practices that Impact Principal Instructional Leadership Practices

Literature on effective district practices to develop principals as instructional leaders is limited. The structures that have been identified are based on sociocultural learning and include learning-focused partnership practices and implementation of professional community (Honig, 2012; Honig, et al., 2010). Implementation of these ongoing, job-embedded practices has been identified by scholars as effective support to improve individual quality of practice (Honig, 2012; Honig, et al., 2010; Honig & Rainey, 2014; Leithwood, et al., 2004; Thessin, 2019; Wahlstrom, et al., 2010).

Honig and colleagues have identified learning-focused partnership practices expected to benefit principal learning (Honig, 2012; Honig & Ikemoto, 2008; Honig, et al., 2010). These include joint work, modeling, development and use of tools, and brokering (Honig, 2012; Honig & Ikemoto, 2008; Honig, et al., 2010; Thessin, 2019). Of these, evidence showed the following high-quality practices along with an added practice, differentiation, were found to increase the capacity of principals to provide instructional leadership when implemented in one-on-one principal relationships or principal networks (Honig, 2012; Honig, et al., 2010).

Differentiation of support is defined as providing individualized support for principals (Honig, 2012; Honig, et al., 2010). Support should vary depending on individual needs and strengths and should be aligned to principal's self-selected goals or identified areas for improvement (Honig, 2012; Honig, et al., 2010). Although differentiation of support was identified as an effective practice, it was found to be relatively ineffective when not consistently sustained (Honig, et al., 2010).

Modeling or demonstrating ways of thinking and acting is an important strategy for changing work practices (Honig & Ikemoto, 2008; Honig, 2012; Honig, et al., 2010). Modeling is found to be more effective than telling (Honig, et al., 2010). This strategy promotes reflective practice and encourages the consideration of alternative ways to process challenging situations (Honig, 2012; Honig, et al., 2010). Modeling and demonstrating were most frequently noted as influencing principal instructional leadership (Honig, et al., 2010).

Developing and using tools, where tools are defined as materials designed to engage principals in new ways of thinking and acting, was deemed an effective practice

(Honig, 2012; Honig, et al., 2010). Two types of tools were defined, conceptual tools and practical tools (Honig, et al., 2010). Conceptual tools include principles, frameworks, and ideas, and are designed to shift how people think and act; a teaching and learning framework is one example (Honig, 2012; Honig & Ikemoto, 2008; Honig, et al., 2010). Practical tools aim to shift peoples' thinking and actions through specific examples of practices, strategies, and resources; examples include protocols to support walkthroughs and observations, cycles of inquiry, and data-based resources (Honig, 2012; Honig & Ikemoto, 2008; Honig, et al., 2010).

Brokering, also known as boundary spanning, incorporates bridging principals to or buffering them from resources, new ideas, and outside influences (Honig, 2006; Honig, 2012; Honig & Ikemoto, 2008; Honig, et al., 2010). Both buffering and bridging were applied as a means to support principal instructional leadership practice (Honig, 2012; Honig, et al., 2010).

Professional Community

Lee, et al., (2012) and Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, and LeMahieu (2015) introduce the role of collaborative structures which include communities of practice and networked improvement communities (NICs). School improvement literature identifies collaborative structures as an effective means to improve educator practice and student learning (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010; Kruse & Louis, 2009; Lee, et al., 2012; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). Key aspects of communities of practice include that it be focused on student learning (DuFour, et al., 2010; Kruse & Louis, 2009; Lee, et al., 2012), based on shared norms and values (Kruse & Louis, 2009; Lee, et al., 2012; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008), provides opportunity to work together to grow and improve

(DuFour, et al., 2010; Kruse & Louis, 2009), creates collective responsibility for all students (DuFour, et al., 2010; Kruse & Louis, 2009), and includes collaboration around curriculum development and best practices for teaching and learning (DuFour, et al., 2010; Kruse & Louis, 2009; Lee, et al., 2012; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008).

The majority of the literature on communities of practice centers on teacher practice (DuFour, et al., 2010; Kruse & Louis, 2009; Lee, et al., 2012). Literature that focuses on district or principal practice aims at guiding leaders to create conditions and supports for successful implementation of these practices in schools and districts (DuFour & Fullan, 2013; DuFour & Marzano, 2011). Limited literature on principal application of professional community to improve instructional leadership practice and the effects of such practices exists. In a study by Honig and Rainey (2014), specific practices of central office administrators who facilitate principal professional learning communities (PPLC) were identified. Findings noted facilitators who supported PPLCs engaged in the learning-focused partnership practices identified earlier in this section. Furthermore, engaging principals in meaningful conversations was an essential aspect of the learning process (Honig & Rainey, 2014). This study suggests that utilizing central office administrators as facilitators of PPLCs could prove to be a promising practice (Honig & Rainey, 2014).

Networks are another collaborative structure aimed at improving schools and have been found to have a significant impact (Lee, et al., 2012). Networked communities encompass many of the same elements as communities of practice; however, the purpose expands to focus on improving practice on a larger scale (Bryk, et al., 2015; City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2010; Kruse & Louis, 2009). A network is defined as a social

entity that promotes quality instructional practices and professional development meant to build capacity of educators and schools (Kruse & Louis, 2009). Networks also serve to bridge research and practice (City, et al., 2010; Kruse & Louis, 2009). NICs, as presented by Bryk, et al., (2015) combine the concepts of improvement science and networked communities as a means to accelerate organizational learning. Instructional rounds, similar to the medical model, aim to bring discussion around instructional practice into the process of school improvement (City, et al., 2010).

Networked communities prioritize solving problems collectively (Bryk, et al., 2015; City, et al., 2010). This is based on the premise that "we can accomplish more together…than alone" (Bryk, et al., 2015, p. 17). Both structures engage leaders in inquiry processes aimed at bringing instructional improvement to scale (Bryk, et al., 2015; City, et al. 2010). Beyond identifying a problem of practice, the instructional rounds process features observing, debriefing, and focusing on the next level of work (City, et al., 2010). Although similar, NICs, after identifying a problem, develop and refine interventions, and organize to replicate the interventions and support the expansion into practice (Bryk, et al., 2015). Both structures are designed to engage educational leaders in collaboration toward system improvement.

Conclusion

The literature provides insights into how and why the role of districts has changed, why instructional leadership at all levels of the school district matters, and how district-level leaders could restructure their work to focus on impacting principal's practice as a means to improve student learning. The role and expectations for school districts have changed significantly during the previous century. These changes

accompanied the expectation that school districts play an important and less autonomous role in educational reform. The educational policy regarding standards and accountability aimed to influence districts to set goals related to student achievement and reinforced a focus on instructional leadership (Anderson & Rodway-Macri, 2009). This shift in accountability changed the role of leadership and school districts from a focus on management to one of instructional leadership (Louis & Robinson, 2012).

The effects of principals on student learning outcomes are conclusive, identifying principals as second only to classroom instruction in impacting student achievement (Leithwood, et al., 2004; Grissom, 2019; Wahlstrom, et al., 2010). Teacher instructional leadership influence has advanced with an increased focus on peer influence through collaboration and communities of practice (Supovitz, 2008; Supovitz, et al., 2010). The role of central office administrators continues to evolve with the responsibility for instructional leadership development still in the early stages of development. The design of district office work is also being redefined (Honig, 2012). Honig, et al. (2010) assert that district-wide improvements in teaching and learning do not typically occur without significant engagement of the district office in supporting sites in building their capacity.

As district offices shift to a focus on teaching and learning, central office administrators must also shift their practice to one of providing support as a main agent for principal learning as opposed to the more traditional focus of monitoring and directing (Honig, 2012; Honig, 2013; Honig & Rainey, 2014; Thessin, 2019). The research identifies that central office administrators are key support providers for principals (Honig, 2012; Honig & Copland, 2008). While evidence supports the effectiveness of learning-focused partnership practices and collaborative structures, little

is known about the skills and knowledge that central office leaders include when applying these strategies to support principals in developing as instructional leaders (Honig, 2012).

Effective learning environments or structures to support principal learning have been identified from sociocultural learning theory (Honig, 2012). Sociocultural learning theory encompasses the idea that by participating in the learning of the community, one also contributes to their own individual learning, making these processes inseparable (Honig, 2012; Rogoff, Baker-Sennett, Lacas, & Goldsmith, 1995). This theory, aligned with creating the conditions for adult learning (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012; DuFour & Marzano, 2011), has been "associated with deepening and improving people's work across settings" (Honig, 2012, p. 738).

It is known that principal instructional leadership is needed to improve learning in schools, yet too little is known about how it may be developed (Miller, et al., 2016). If principals are going to be held accountable for improving student learning outcomes, then districts need to be responsible for building their capacity (Elmore, 2000). School district central offices are being called on to play an integral role in improving student learning (Honig & Copland, 2008). This will require new models of practice and support consistent with the need to support principals in building their instructional leadership capacity (Honig, 2013).

Chapter 3

Research Design and Methodology

The purpose of this study was to better understand principals learning needs and what works most effectively to support principal growth and development. The goal was to gain a broad understanding of what meaningful resources, structures, and supports districts and district level leaders could and should provide principals as a means to build their capacity to perform as instructional leaders whose focus is on learning. To do this, this study used qualitative research methods using an embedded comparative case study approach designed to investigate beliefs, viewpoints, practices, and experiences of principals and district level leaders who are responsible for principal development and provide supervision and evaluation for principals (Yin, 2014). This qualitative research approach was informed by an interpretive perspective, as the study sought to understand participants viewpoints, recognizing that these viewpoints are subjective and based on knowledge constructed by the participant (Sipe & Constable, 1996). Data were gathered from the perspective of these practicing leaders. This study was part of a larger research project in which two investigators with distinctive research questions collaborated in instrument design and data collection but engaged in separate analysis and writing.

Instrumentation

A semi-structured interview protocol was designed to gather data that met the separate but overlapping research questions of the two investigators. This protocol had two parallel sets of questions, one for principals and one for district level administrators who are responsible for principal professional learning as well as providing supervision for and evaluation of principals. The interviews were designed to provide in-depth

insights regarding the principal and district-level leader perspectives which may or may not be similar. Instruments structured in this fashion allowed for similar and divergent views between participant groups to be identified and analyzed. The interview protocols are included in Appendix A and B.

Sampling

The study sampled along two variables. The first stage was identification of the districts that participated, which simultaneously included the identification of district level leaders. The second stage was identification of the individuals who participated, the principals from each district who agreed to participate in an interview. Generally, it was a purposive, criterion-based sample (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

District sampling. Principal supervision structures vary from district to district as does the allocation of responsibility for planning support and professional development for principals. However, irrespective of the formal job descriptions and how the work is actually carried out, responsibility for supporting and assessing principals is vested in the district office leaders and the superintendent. The study intentionally included districts with differing models. The district sample for this study was made up of medium sized, suburban districts, with student populations between 4,500 and 9,000 students. Districts in this range often have varied supervisory structures, a district level leader who is solely responsible for supervision, a shared supervision structure that pairs a district level leader with the superintendent, or the superintendent who is solely responsible for supervision.

Four districts were selected to participate in this study. These were drawn from a convenience sample of eligible suburban districts located within a 25-mile radius of the Twin Cities. To be eligible, the criterion of district size was also included, with the

requirement that students be served through multiple schools at the elementary level and at least two secondary schools. Identified districts were contacted by one of the two investigators to secure the approval and support from their superintendent. Written support from the Superintendent was included in application for approval from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Minnesota but are not included here as they would reveal the identity of the districts.

Individual sampling. The sample of respondents included a total of four to six administrators from participating districts. In each district the individuals who participated included two elementary principals, one middle school and one high school principal, and the district level leader or leaders who were responsible for principal supervision. In all instances this included the superintendent of each district, as even when the district had an additional principal supervisor position, the superintendent shared in the supervisory responsibilities. One additional superintendent also participated in the study. That interview, which was intended to be a test interview, produced sufficiently rich data and therefore, was included in the analysis. Individuals were included on a voluntary basis which meant that in two districts a secondary principal did not volunteer or became reluctant to participate, so in these two districts the anticipated sample was not realized.

The demographics of the participants were constrained by the initial district sample. Districts that agreed to participate represented district office leaders who varied in gender, years of experience, and race. Where possible, sampling of principals within districts sought to obtain some variation in demographic characteristics to ensure some

variation in gender, years of experience, and race and ethnicity. The demographic that was most balanced among principals was gender.

Data Collection and Data Analysis Procedures

The method for data collection for this study was a semi-structured, parallel interview protocol, one for principals and one for district level leaders who supervise principals. Individual interviews, that allowed each participant to comfortably tell their story and share their individual experience, were conducted in most cases with a minimum of four to six individuals from each identified district. In districts where there was more than one individual responsible for principal development, supervision, and evaluation both were interviewed. The two principal investigators interviewed the district office leaders together, while the interviews with principals were conducted by a single investigator. Videos and transcripts from the individual interviews were then shared with the other investigator. For both district office and school-based leaders, interviews began with the same question, "tell me about your background and experience as an educational leader."

Overall, twenty-one individuals, including seven principal supervisors and fourteen principals, participated in interviews and hence the study. Interviews were conducted with individuals from participating schools and districts during the summer and fall of 2020 over Google Meets to adhere to social distancing requirements due to COVID 19 and interviews were recorded. The sections of the interview protocol most relevant to this study were developed using core topics related to quality leadership practices based on the literature review presented in Chapter 2.

Responses to interviews garnered qualitative data, which was transcribed using Scribie, a web-based service. These responses were coded and grouped into themes and sub-categories using thematic analysis based on the literature and guided by three of the five constructs identified in the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 1. These relevant constructs focused on the role of districts and district level administrators in developing and growing the capacity of principals as instructional leaders focused on learning. Themes were developed considering the literature and aligned to the three related constructs from the conceptual framework, and new headings were introduced to capture the participants' observations and insights.

Supervisor interviews were coded first. Trends, similarities, and differences were identified. These similarities and differences provided the basis for ongoing and evolving coding of the data. The codes allowed me to compare and categorize the data. The initial codes were then subjected to additional analysis, leading to the development of themes and sub-categories.

In a second phase, these themes and sub-categories were applied to analyze the principal interviews. Although additional themes and sub-categories were sought out based on responses from principal interviews, only one emerged. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and subsequently coded through each of the major codes as well as any developed sub-codes. These codes allowed me to develop assertions, that are supported by the data collected through the interview transcripts.

Member checks were used by reviewing the emerging themes with fellow doctoral students engaged in similar research. After the defense of the dissertation and before publication (with ProQuest), key respondents were given the opportunity to review

the manuscript to ensure the factual accuracy of the data and to ensure that appropriate confidentiality was maintained.

The study's methods were approved by the University of Minnesota IRB, Victoria Mercer, IRB Analyst, IRB ID: STUDY00009228. Study participants consented to the interview. Confidentiality and anonymity were protected for participating districts and individuals by never naming either and by masking individual characteristics that might allow individuals to be recognized. In particular, due to the limited sample size, to fully report and describe demographics could reveal subjects of my study. Each participant in the analysis is identified by a number that is not associated with their specific position or district. All other patterns or identifiers were generalized by participant position.

Chapter 4

Findings

To reiterate, the purpose of this study is to identify what it means for principals to be an instructional leader, focused on learning, and how districts can support principals to develop and grow in their capacity to be an instructional leader whose focus is on learning, for their school. The first part of this chapter focuses on what the participants in the study say about the behaviors and practices of instructional leaders that are focused on learning. The later three sections focus on what districts, as a system and principal supervisors do that supports and hinders principal growth as instructional leaders whose focus is on learning.

In these sections I will draw on the interviews with both district leaders and principals. Interviews with participants were all open-ended and categories were developed based on themes that emerged from the participants. Each of these sections is examined from the lens of both the principal supervisor and that of the principal.

Within this study, emerging themes were evaluated for three types of patterns. The first pattern was within and across roles, principal supervisors and principals. The second pattern was examining cross-district patterns, analyzing which themes were identified by a representative from each of the participating districts by role. The third pattern was examining cross-district patterns analyzing which themes were identified by all participants within an instructional level, these included principal supervisors, elementary principals, and secondary principals. In some instances, secondary principal results were also examined by middle school and high school level participants.

Defining Instructional Leadership

In order to provide context for this study, it was important to understand how principal supervisors and principals who participated in this study are thinking about and defining excellence in the principalship, and more specifically, principals as instructional leaders. While expectations and priorities for instructional leadership vary from district to district, and there is not one framework that is used by all districts, the behaviors and practices that emerged from the study participants have commonality with both state evaluation frameworks and published literature.

Principal Supervisor Perspective

Principal supervisors who participated in the study were asked to reflect on and describe from their perspective what makes an excellent principal.

Eleven distinctive behaviors and practices related to instructional leadership emerged from the participant responses. Of these four directly focused on student, adult, and system learning.

Student centered leadership. *Student centered leadership* was identified by **five out of seven** participants. This is a common phrase used by educators as a guide for setting priorities, particularly in decision making. Generally, this was described as being focused on students and doing what is best for them first and foremost. Being student centered was described in a variety of ways by the respondents. One respondent said, "you have to always put students first, and all students in that" (#1). Another respondent stated "100% student focused and really is not afraid to interrupt the comfort of adults for what's best for kids" (#2). A third respondent described this as "intrinsic, internally motivated to do whatever it takes to make sure that every student is successful…a drive to meet kids where they are and bring them to the top" (#4).

Further *student centered leadership* was described as centering the system, which encompassed operations and culture of the school along with teaching and learning practices and professional development needed for staff, on the students, their unique needs, interests, and perspectives. One respondent described this the as the following, "they take what they learn, from student experiences, and then take those experiences and that student voice and tie that into the overall culture and structure of the building" (#3). Another responded described it as "a focus on how do you meet the needs and interests of each child, so they start from the lens of each child" (#5).

Principal as a learner. *Principal as a learner* was identified by **five out of seven** participants. Principal as learner was described as individuals who encompass a strong learner orientation, maintain drive and intrinsic motivation for self-development, and have the ability to seek out learning related to one's own needs. Being a learner also included being self-reflective. One participant described this as "they're willing to self-reflect and think about, where am I? Where am I going? What are my next steps?" (#7). Further, participants defined this as demonstrating self-awareness, being curious, and being able to learn from the student's perspective and experience.

Building the capacity of teachers. *Building the capacity of teachers* was noted by **five out of seven** participants. A key element identified to build teacher capacity was providing feedback, both formal and informal, focused on district and school goals as well as to support individual growth and goals. A respondent described this as giving "feedback to teachers in real time that's consistent and very specific, that can be leveraged…it's like bite sized feedback information that helps them to then make the greatest transformation, or progress" (#6).

Other practices respondents identified to *build teacher capacity* included coaching, modeling reflective practices, promoting teacher self-reflection, and strategically engaging in conversations about practices using structured conversation protocols such as teachable point of view or rounding. Further, knowing and utilizing teacher expertise to grow teacher leaders while simultaneously supporting peer learning was identified. The formal observation and evaluation process were also referenced as a process that principals employ to support teacher growth and development.

Monitoring student learning. *Monitoring student learning* was identified by **four out of seven** participants. This encompassed understanding the assessments being implemented and how to use the data and results, and then monitoring student data with teachers and supporting development of the instructional response. One respondent described this as being "able to support them in their facilitation of learning for kids to move students along a continuum" (#3). Respondents also addressed monitoring leading indicators and knowing when to intervene, monitoring levels of instructional rigor, and engaging with collaborative teams regarding student learning data and results.

Understands the instructional practices being implemented. *Understands the instructional practices being implemented* in their school and classrooms was identified by **six out of seven** participants. This was defined as principals knowing and "being keen on seeing" (#6) the instructional practices being implemented in the classroom which included clarity of the standards students are learning and the expected level of instructional rigor. One principal described this as "doing walkthroughs really looking for how (the work) was showing up in teachers' interactions with students and students'

interactions with teachers" (#3) related to the instructional framework being implemented.

This also included engaging, partnering, and collaborating with staff on instruction to support student learning and working with teacher teams to develop the instructional response. One participant described this as "a principal that can...collaborate with staff at an instructional level to help support student learning" (#3). Further principals engaging in structured conversations about the day to day work being implemented, using strategies such as rounding, and modeling the practices they want to see in the classrooms were identified.

Visible in classrooms with purpose. Being *visible in classrooms with purpose* was identified by **five out of seven** participants. One participant explained this as "knowing what teachers are doing, by being in classrooms, by being in PLCs, and meeting with learning teams" (#2). It was also described as conducting walk-throughs to see instructional practices in action or visiting classrooms with the purpose of "talking to people about their professional practice" (#5). Another participant explained visibility in the following way,

> Visible in the classrooms and not just to be in the classrooms, but actually looking at what is it we're focused on and am I seeing that in the classrooms, and then am I providing feedback, even just informal feedback to teachers, so they're constantly reinforced as to the work that needs to get done and how they can get better (#1).

Supports teachers and creates the conditions for success. *Supports teachers and creates the conditions for success* was identified by **four out of seven** participants.

This area was described as principals "creating conditions for great learning and work to happen" (#7), putting in place systems for support, and working with teachers for strong implementation. One participant explained it as principals having an internal drive or "intrinsic, internally motivated to do whatever it takes to make sure that…teachers are supported in their efforts to teach kids" (#4). Another participant expressed it as,

> Creating the conditions within the system for teachers and staff to be successful, while developing individuals within that building…I always like to bring it back to both systems and professional learning is what is going to lead to the adults within the building to being successful (#5).

Shared leadership and partners with teachers. Implements *shared leadership and partners with teachers* was identified by **four out of seven** participants. This area is centered on principals working in partnership all throughout the system, aligning the school's theory of action with shared leadership, identifying who is their leadership team, meeting with them regularly, and knowing and tapping into their individual strengths. This was described as principals who "work in partnership and in a shared leadership approach" (#7). This was also explained as "a principal that can engage and partner with staff" (#3) individually or as teams, such as professional learning communities or learning teams, on an instructional level.

Excellence and high expectations. Strives for and maintains *excellence and high expectations* was identified by **five out of seven** participants. This was explained as modeling high expectations, communicating the importance of the work being implemented, "constantly in that cycle of continuous improvement…" (#7), holding people accountable, "being a strong advocate and the owner of their school" (#2), and

being a champion for the school. This was further described as "high expectations for teacher practice, for students and support, how do they provide that balance of pressure and support in the day-to-day basis for individual teachers to be successful within the system" (#5).

Equity lens. Utilizes an *equity lens* was identified by **three out of seven** participants. This was defined as recognizing, seeing, and addressing deficit thinking among staff, understanding how an equity lens impacts students and teachers, and employing culturally relevant instruction. One participant coined this as a "liberation mindset or ideology" and further described this as "leaders that actually lean into the perspectives of the students, staff, and families that they serve and try to center that in the operation of their school" (#3). In essence, providing equity leadership.

"Big picture" systems perspective. Employs a *"big picture" systems perspective* was identified by **five out of seven** participants. Overall, this was defined as principals who act as district leaders, who understand the big picture of the district, and the needs of the district. It was described by a participant as, "someone who can see the system and see the ground level work" (#7). Additional elements identified by participants included having a "clear vision of what they want to accomplish for students through staff" (#1), "working with the district for coherence and alignment" (#7) and having "ownership in building district systems" (#2).

For **three out of seven** principal supervisors, the aforementioned instructional leadership behaviors and practices, although not specific to instructional leadership, were predicated on the ability of a principal to **build deep, trusting, and authentic relationships**.

Principal Perspective

Principals who participated in the study were also asked to reflect on and describe from their perspective what makes an excellent principal. Principal interviews were analyzed using the same eleven distinctive behaviors and practices related to instructional leadership that emerged from the principal supervisor responses. Of these, there were three behaviors and practices identified by at least half of the principal participants across instructional levels, four additional were identified by at least half of the elementary principals, and one additional was identified by at least half of the secondary principals. An additional category that did not emerge in the principal supervisor interviews was also identified.

Understands the instructional practices b**eing implemented.** *Understands the instructional practices being implemented* in their school and classrooms was identified by **nine out of fourteen** principals. This was described by several principals as instructional leadership which was elaborated on with phrases like listening to what staff need and having tools in the toolbox to help teachers. Principals also identified having a strong background in pedagogy, common language, and monitoring instruction and engagement along with understanding and modeling the practices you want staff to use when working with students.

One participant described this specifically as really trying to "stay in the know of all of our resources, including assessments, I just did a training on Fast Bridge learning this morning because I am learning it…the fact that I don't really know much more than anybody else…it's okay, I model that" (#4). Another described it as needing to "have a strong background in pedagogy" (#9). Still another explained that if they are "going to be

an instructional leader, I need to think differently about what learning could look like and very differently about what feedback on learning could look like" (#12).

Shared leadership and partners with teachers. Implements *shared leadership and partners with teachers* was identified by **eleven out of fourteen** principals. This was described as collaborating and partnering with staff and with teams. One participant explained it as being "able to work in partnership with staff to make the vision and mission come to life" (#9). It also was expressed as flattening the hierarchy. One participant specifically described this as leading from who you are and that being "centered around collaboration and a desire to flatten the structure" (#12). Additionally, this encompassed empowering others and encouraging teacher leadership. This was described by one participant in the following way, it required "getting the right stakeholders together to be able to make a change, change that teachers can then feel empowered to make" (#7). This was further described as "one that leads by example, but also has built other leaders along with them" (#6).

Supports teachers and creates the conditions for success. *Supports teachers and creates the conditions for success* was identified by **seven out of fourteen** principals. This was described as supporting teachers and providing a frame for teachers to work in that provides guidance, autonomy, and allows for risk taking. This was described by one participant as creating "the conditions for you to be successful, that you understand our vision, you understand some of the frameworks, you understand some of the big non-negotiables, but then within that you know I've got your back and that I want your success" (#2). Another participant discussed supporting teachers through the lens of servant leadership in the following way, "assess the people they serve to understand what

their needs are, and then work tirelessly to move them from their current place to a place of their own growth and evolution, we're in the human development industry" (#13).

Relationships. A response category that was only marginally present in the principal supervisor interviews is related to teacher support. For **eleven out of fourteen** principal participants, *relationships* were identified as a cornerstone to effective principal instructional leadership. These were again described as trusting and included being approachable, vulnerable, not perfect but rather human, and a sense of being in this together.

Student centered leadership. *Student centered leadership* was identified by **five out of eight** elementary principals. This was described as putting students generally as well as student learning as the focal point and purpose for the work of the school. One principal expressed this as, "there is nothing that gives me greater joy than watching students learning and growing and watching teachers to work their magic" (#4). Another principal discussed this in terms of decision making.

> The lens I use the most is what's best for our students, and when I clarify for everyone in the room that that's going to be the lens that I'm going to look at the most, it helps them to understand why I am making the decisions that I do, because based on the data and the inputs that I have, we'll be looking at what is best for our students, and that's going to be my main driver behind what we do, (#8).

Principal as a learner. *Principal as a learner* was identified by **four out of eight** elementary principals. Participants described this as recognizing that their work continues to evolve and that they will need to continue to grow in their position. The principal's

role was expressed as "they have to be the lead learner" (#2). And more practically, it was described as knowing "that as a leader, I don't need to have all the answers, my staff knows that I'm on a curious journey, just like they are, to learn and to bring out the best in people" (#8)

Building the capacity of teachers. *Building the capacity of teachers* was noted by **four out of eight** elementary principals. Principals defined this as knowing teachers' strengths, giving feedback, and believing adult learning is an essential element of the role of principal. One participant described this as firmly believing "it's having instructional conversations, giving feedback, being in the classrooms and just being able to speak to that with some credibility" (#5). Another discussed how this is accomplished with a teacher, "provide you both the positive feedback that you need, the coaching conversations that you need, and the resources you need in order to meet (those) expectations" (#2).

Visible in classrooms with purpose. Being *visible in classrooms with purpose* was identified by **four out of eight** elementary principals. This was expressed both in terms of engaging in conversations with staff when moving about the building and seeing what is happening in the classroom by informally observing students learning. One traditional description of this was "management by wandering around…there's a lot to that, as much as possible, I am out in the halls and moving in and out of classrooms and I think you can pick up a lot after being in a classroom for even 30 seconds" (#5). One salient description by another participant was stated as having "to be present, in-tune with my staff, so making it into classrooms and making it around to be connected to my staff…knowing the feel" (#6). This was also explained in terms of utilization of

conversational structures, "within the continuum of conversations, we are both understanding where you are at, and you might be in a different place that's on the continuum at different times or different topics…a really good principal is active, is visible, and (teachers) know that you care and that you aren't out of touch with what's going on" (#2).

   Equity lens*. Utilizes an *equity lens* was identified by **four out of eight** elementary principals. The description for this element varied from the student experience to staff awareness and perspective. The student experience was described by one participant in this way, "it's about our kids feeling valued, inspired, and having a sense of belonging" (#1). Another participant described the adult work from a personal perspective, "to understand how important it is to be centered on the compass and to articulate my beliefs…in order for me to truly show up as human to others" (#5).

   "Big picture" systems perspective. Employs a *"big picture" systems perspective* was identified by **three out of six** secondary principals. One participant described this as "ability to be a district leader first, and really move forward the vision and the mission of the school district in the school at which they oversee" (#9). Another participant defined this element as "(you) have to be system thinkers…be able to see both, toggle between the long view and the short view, between the 50,000 foot view and the five foot view, ability to navigate both of those spaces and both of those perspectives is important" (#13).

Comparing Principal Supervisor and Principal Perspectives

   In analyzing the themes for cross-district patterns related to principal instructional leadership, three patterns emerged. These included instructional leadership behaviors and

practices that were identified by representatives from each participating district within a

level (*Reps*), instructional leadership behaviors and practices that were identified by

every principal participant within a single instructional level (*All*), and instructional

leadership behaviors and practices focused on learning leadership which was identified

by representatives from each participating district within a level (*Reps*).

Table 4.1 represents the patterns that emerged among participants regarding

Instructional Leadership Behaviors and Practices. Overall, consistency across districts

and across levels was limited, as shown in the table below (4.1).

Instructional Leadership Behaviors and Practices	Elementary Principals	Secondary Principals	Principal Supervisors
Understands the Instructional Practices Being Implemented	*Reps*	*Reps*	*Reps*
Student Centered Leadership	*Reps*		*Reps*
Principal as a Learner	*Reps*		
Build the Capacity of Teachers	*Reps*		
Utilizes an Equity Lens	*Reps*		
Relationships	*Reps*		

Table 4.1: Cross-District Pattern; Representatives (*Reps*) from Each District Within a Level

Only one area, *understands the instructional practices being implemented*, was

identified by representatives from all districts across all levels, elementary principal,

secondary principal, and principal supervisor. There was consensus that, *understands the*

instructional practices being implemented, is essential to instructional leadership and

reinforces the importance for principals, not just teachers, to understand instructional

practices. *Student centered leadership* is the only other area that transcended levels, with

representatives from each district at the elementary principal and principal supervisor

level identifying this area. All other cross-district patterns existed at the elementary

instructional level with elementary principal representatives also identifying, *principal as a learner*, *building the capacity of teachers*, utilizes an *equity lens*, and *relationships*.

Overall, the greatest consistency came from elementary principal participants who identified six cross-district themes at their level, as shown in Table 4.1. This demonstrates an emerging common set of understandings that represent the beginning of a common cross-district definition for instructional leadership as well as a common language at the elementary level.

Table 4.2 represents the patterns for Instructional Leadership Behaviors and Practices that emerged among principal participants by instructional level, elementary, middle school, and high school.

Instructional Leadership Behaviors and Practices	Elementary Principals	Middle School Principals	High School Principals
Shared Leadership and Partners with Teachers	*All*		
Building the Capacity of Teachers			*All*
Understands the Instructional Practices Being Implemented		*All*	
Supports Teachers and Creates the Conditions for Success			*All*
"Big Picture" Systems Perspective			*All*
Relationships	*All*		

Table 4.2: Cross-District Pattern; All (*All*) Participants at a Single Instructional Level

When examining patterns within levels among principal participants, consensus only exists by instructional level (Table 4.2). There were no consistent themes identified across levels. This evidence reinforces the less studied, yet longstanding belief about differences in needs and practices between instructional levels.

All principals at the elementary level identified *shared leadership and partners with teachers* and cornerstone for instructional leadership, *relationships*. All principals at

the middle school level identified *understands instructional practices being implemented*,

and both high school principals identified three areas, *building the capacity of teachers*,

supports teachers and creates conditions for success, and employs a *"big picture"*

systems perspective.

Next, Table 4.3 represents the patterns that emerged among principal participants

at each level for the Instructional Leadership Behaviors and Practices Focused on

Learning.

Instructional Leadership Behaviors and Practices Focused on Learning	Elementary Principals	Middle School Principals	High School Principals
Principal as a Learner	*Reps*		
Building the Capacity of Teachers	*Reps*		*Reps*
Understands Instructional Practices being Implemented	*Reps*	*Reps*	
Monitors Student Learning			

Table 4.3: Cross-District Pattern; Representatives (Reps) from All Districts at a Level

In the area of instructional leadership four themes emerged, identified in Table

4.3, that align to the concept of learning leadership, when being described as focused on

student, adult and system learning. Universally, principal supervisors did identify the four

areas whereas principals did not. Elementary principals identified three of the four,

principal as a learner, *building the capacity of teachers*, and *understands the*

instructional practices being implemented. Across the elementary and middle school

principal participants, *understands the instructional practices being implemented* was

identified, yet no high school principal participants identified this area. Among the

elementary and high school principal participants, *building teacher capacity* was

identified, yet no middle school principal participants identified this area. The final area

associated with learning leadership, *monitors student learning*, did not surface as a theme

among principals within or across levels, despite this being identified as a prominent theme among principal supervisors, with all but one superintendent participant identifying this theme. These findings reinforce that neither a common definition nor language for learning leadership exists among or across districts, with only initial evidence of this concept advancing among elementary principal participants.

In addition to cross-district patterns, it is worth noting that two districts had all participants from within their district, principals at each level and principal supervisor(s), identify an area. In one case, the district identified employs a *"big picture" system perspective* and in the other all participants identified *relationships* as the cornerstone that supports instructional leadership.

Summary

Overall, common themes for instructional leadership emerged from the participant interviews. However, there was a notable lack of consensus prioritizing the themes, with only limited patterns of agreement across districts or within positional levels.

Principal supervisor participants identified eleven consistent behaviors and practices for principal instructional leadership. The principal interviews were analyzed against the themes identified from the principal supervisor participant interviews. Principal participants across instructional levels only consistently identified three of these themes. However, agreement across elementary principal participants was greater with eight of the themes consistently identified, while across secondary principal participants four of the themes were consistently identified. Principal participant interviews did not reveal major new themes; rather they either affirmed or did not mention the themes previously identified by principal supervisors. One theme more prominent in the principal

interviews emerged in the context of supporting teachers. Principals consistently

expressed that a condition for successful instructional leadership was relationships.

How Districts Support Principal Growth

As was pointed out in Chapter 2, districts were not designed to be coherent

systems. As expectations changed for schools and principals, district structures and

systems have needed to evolve and respond in order to provide the needed support. This

has required superintendents to develop and implement systems that enhance district

coherence and are focused on instructional leadership as a critical component of the role

of principals.

This section examines how districts, as a system, support the growth of principals

as instructional leaders focused on learning. Three core themes emerged from participant

interviews, *systemic leadership approach*, *providing clarity and expectations*, and

guiding and supporting leadership development. Within each of the three themes, sub-

themes of systems and culture are revealed.

Principal Supervisor Perspective

Principal supervisors who participated in the study were asked to reflect on how

school districts, as a system, support principal growth as instructional leaders. From these

questions, three core themes and seven sub-categories emerged. Additionally, three

respondents identified unique behaviors districts engage in that they believe impact

principal growth.

Systemic leadership approach. Systemic leadership strives to increase

coherence by incorporating system processes and alignment, goal setting, and culture of

collaboration. Principal supervisors exhibited moderate consensus among these three sub-categories.

System processes and alignment. System leadership processes and alignment as a means to support principal growth and development was articulated by **six out of the seven** participants. Principal supervisors specifically addressed processes and approaches and alignment. The use of strategic plans, anchors, and initiatives was called out by one participant (#5). Another expressed clarity and alignment of building goals with the district's vision and direction (#1). System leadership approach was further defined as established structures and tools that guide leadership practices and behaviors. One participant described this as having a district "leadership approach that I work with principals on all the time" and "developing a common language around leadership, with a common set of tools" (#5). Another aspect of a leadership approach focused on by one participant was "the other system I put in place…who's your team? Who are your people…a building leadership team…who is your instructional leadership team…building an instructional leadership team model" (#2).

Purposeful system alignment was described as "cohesion between district office and school sites" (#6). It was also discussed in the following way, "what are the formative systems and structures that I put in place to ensure coherence and alignment throughout the system, much of that has to do with our principals, and teaching and learning working in partnership together" (#7).

Goal setting. Goal setting, including school improvement processes and practices, was identified by **five out of seven** of the participants. This was described as a formal document that outlined goals and a consistent process to monitor progress. One

participant explained that the formal improvement plan functions in this way, "that drives a conversation formally about building goals and building data, the implementation of best practice in the work that they're doing, it also serves as the living document that the building instructional leadership teams use" (#2).

Culture of collaboration. Create a culture of collaboration was noted by **three out of seven** participants. One salient description of this was, "we started talking about building together an 'us' culture, where it's not 'us' versus them" (#4). This was also talked about in terms of creating shared leadership both in "flattening the hierarchy" (#5) and in the role of building leadership teams by learning "how do they co-lead or how are they part of the leadership with principals" (#2).

Providing clarity and expectations. Providing clarity and expectations incorporates use of a district leadership framework and communicating and modeling clear expectations. Although this theme and sub-categories emerged from principal supervisors' responses, this area revealed less consensus than other areas.

Leadership framework. Providing a districtwide, common leadership framework was conveyed by **four out of seven** participants. The framework centered on the competencies desired for principals and functions as a tool to guide the system and the role of the principal. One participant illustrates this as "we also built a leadership framework, so it's a collection of six competencies that…leaders need to demonstrate, and we use those competencies to inform our conversations, to inform the design of our PD sessions, to inform evaluation" (#4). Another expresses this as, "all of the images and frameworks and tools we use…we use as part of our leadership approach" (#7).

Communicate and model expectations. Communicating and modeling

expectations was identified by **four out of seven** participants. This area centered on both

identifying and modeling the behaviors principal supervisors wanted to see in the

principal. One portrayed the idea of modeling as, the "superintendent has to be the

instructional leader or a very, very strong instructional leader" (#2). Another shared that

"the description of what makes a good leader has been communicated repeatedly and

modeled and reinforced in a variety of ways, I think it is becoming a shared idea or

vision" (#4).

Guiding and supporting leadership development. Guiding and supporting

leadership development incorporates principal and leadership learning structure and

district roles that support principals. Strong consensus among supervisor participants

exists within these sub-categories.

*Principal and leadership learning structure***.** A structure for principal learning

work, was highlighted by **six out of seven** participants. This was often described as a part

of the overall meeting structure; however, the commitment to dedicated learning time

was a specific part of the district leadership work. The described structures were

consistent in participants and frequency, following a predetermined and communicated

schedule. Meeting participants also typically included principals and district-level cabinet

members. One participant explained the meeting composition and rationale for such in

this way, "when I host my principal meetings, I actually invite all principals and all

cabinet members…trying to have all our system level leaders there really creates a

mentality that…this is all of our work together" (#3). Another participant described this

structure in this way, "a half-day for what we call Learning and Leadership, which is

capacity building time for our leaders, and we reinforce these ideas, these messages, repeatedly" (#4). This area also complimented the specific professional development that principal supervisors conduct to support principal capacity building.

District roles to support principals. District roles to support principals incorporated a dedicated role focused on principal growth and development and the role of existing district leadership roles to support principals. This area was identified by **six out of seven** of the principal supervisor participants.

Development of a specific role focused on principal growth and development. Development of a position focused on principal growth and development was communicated specifically by three participants who described a partnership between the superintendent and an additional supervisor position. One expressed this as "critically important to have a good assistant superintendent who could do those things and do them to a level that I would trust" (#1). Another communicated the benefits of a focused position using a team approach described as "the principal supervisor can't work in isolation, because who is that person going to bounce their ideas and their frustrations and their brilliant or not so brilliant growth strategies off of if they don't have a thought partner" (#4). Finally, one of the supervisors discussed the importance of principals having clarity regarding the role and how it parallels other work in the system, this was shared as receiving "questions from leaders of like, well, you're coaching us, but then you're also evaluating us and that's hard, and I just tell them, well, that's what you should be doing as a leader every day as well" (#6) paralleling this to their work with teachers.

Role of all district leaders, typically defined as the superintendent's executive cabinet, to support the growth and development of principals was identified by four participants. One participant described this in detail,

From a district support level for building principals is ensuring that it's not just the teaching and learning person, whether it's an assistant superintendent or director and the superintendent…What's your HR director doing? What's your special education director doing? What's your communication person? Finance, and for all of those people. Although sometimes they don't feel like they're there to support principals, you have to remind them, your job is to support principals, right. So, trying to find ways to get them in the building, try to find ways to include them in those conversations with principals (#1).

Another also described "that the cabinet are all responsible for sharing supervision and support of the principals" (#7). One explained that the focus was on a specific cabinet role, "Director of Curriculum and Instruction," to "serve as a coach and partner with our principals" (#3).

Three out of seven participants described unique district supports. These encompassed, "opportunities to be involved in other leadership activities" (#2), development of "a new position…at the school level, partnering with the principal, responsible for the teaching and learning day to day" (#5), and "try to shoulder a lot of the political challenges that they experience, so I try to say, no, that is my decision to provide some cover so that they don't have to focus or share energy on the political debate" to "stay focused on the strategic direction" (#3).

Principal Perspective

Principals who participated in the study were also asked to reflect on how school districts, as a system, support principal growth as instructional leaders focused on learning. The principal interviews were coded using the three themes and seven sub-categories that emerged from the principal supervisor interviews. All three core themes were identified by principal participants, along with four of the seven sub-categories.

Systemic leadership approach. As noted above, the *systemic leadership approach* encompasses *system processes and alignment*, *goal setting*, and *collaborative structures*. Principal participant responses identified two of these three sub-categories.

System processes and alignment. System processes and alignment were identified by **eleven out of fourteen** principals. These encompassed having a specific leadership approach, systemic processes, and purposeful alignment as a means to support principals. Principal participants described system leadership approach as being very grounded and consistent in who one is, as a district, and use of a leadership framework that used language, imagery, and tools to communicate and sustain this. One participant explained the value of consistency as the "sustained study that we have of our leadership model helps you so you're not jumping around from one thing to the next" (#2). Another participant described the system leadership approach as sanctification of beliefs "we've canonized all of our values in the system, we've canonized our leadership model, canonized the tools we use in our coaching models, and we've created beautiful representations of them" (#13).

Leadership processes were described as centered on the vision and mission as the driver for all district work and to set and guide goals. Principal participants further explained this as clear processes, which encompassed processes for thinking,

improvement, and to shift relationships. One participant stated, "I really trust and support the system thinking approach that we went to the workshop to learn about, the PDSA cycle" (#10). Another explained "systems were based on working with people and getting buy-in and helping people get ownership in things…you have a built in feedback loop" (#14).

Principal participants also identified alignment in terms of both beliefs and actions. This was explained by one participant as "the alignment of the work and the belief is so clear here, (Superintendent) put a lot of work into aligning what we're about as a system" (#13). Another described it as "we're also very grounded in who we are and consistent with who we are" (#1). This participant further emphasizes that "the coherence and alignment of a school district is important" (#1).

Culture of collaboration. Creates a culture of collaboration was identified by **seven out of fourteen** principals. This was described as instilling "a sense of collective leadership across the district, so when we think about the district level plan, and there is clarity in understanding the direction we need to work as a district" (#1). Another principal provided this salient explanation of what a collaborative culture looks like.

> We have a philosophy around leadership, and that philosophy is really around working in partnership, and that includes the way in which they would expect me to operate with them, and the way in which I would expect them to operate with me…I could ask for feedback on something that I'm working on, I could ask them for clarity, if I don't agree, we disagree, but we do it in the meeting, and then we come back and we come to an agreement and then it's never, "the district said," the district is us (#9).

Providing clarity and expectations. Providing clarity and expectations encompassed use of a *leadership framework* and *communicating and modeling expectations*. Principal participants identified the later of these two sub-categories.

Communicate and model expectations. **Nine out of fourteen** principal participants identified this area. This encompassed clarity on the focus, where the superintendent stood, and clarity regarding expectations. It also included communicating and modeling those clear expectations. This was simply stated by one principal participant as "I appreciate that she (superintendent) is upfront about what we're here to do" (#12). Another expressed that "I like his (superintendent) clear focus on the focus, the district mission or strategic plan, I appreciate the fact that he continually, in everything he does, he brings it back, how does it relate to the strategic plan…I've never work within somebody that is that crystal clear" (#5). Still another participant described it as impactful over time, "when you can create the language that you are going to use, not only in your initial conversation, but if you use that over time, you're going to create clarity and you're going to over communicate clarity within a visual that they can actually place themselves in" (#1).

Guiding and supporting leadership development. Guiding and supporting leadership development entails *principal and leadership learning structure* and *district roles to support principals*. One of these sub-categories was identified by the principal participants.

Principal and leadership learning structure. Principal leadership learning structure was identified by **eleven out of fourteen** principals. Additionally, all elementary principals identified this area. Participants consistently defined this as a

specific structure dedicated to leadership learning, separate from other district-wide leadership meetings, as a regularly scheduled time. One participant explained they experienced an "increased emphasis on professional development, that for instance, we'd gather once a month for full day meetings" (#8). These learning focused meetings were described by another participant as opportunities to "emulate the training that we have as leaders, the sustained focus on not only the educational practices that you want a school to embed and be really good at, but the focus on developing your leaders" (#2). The focus for these meetings was described in this way by another participant "we would discuss different things around leadership, so we would read…we would talk about the principles in that, and then we could apply them in a school setting" (#9). It was also noted that principal supervisors often led this learning work, "(superintendent) provides a lot of professional learning for principals, administrators, because he's a lead learner, he's the one that is up there speaking, he's not delegating that to other people, but he's trying to build the capacity of other people" (#1).

Comparing Principal Supervisor and Principal Perspectives

In analyzing the themes and sub-categories for cross-district patterns, three patterns emerged. These included sub-categories where each participating district had elementary principal, secondary principal, or principal supervisor representatives identify an area (*Reps*), each district had a principal from across elementary and secondary levels identify an area (*Reps*), or all participants at a level identified an area (*All*).

Table 4.4 illustrates the patterns that emerged regarding How Districts Support Principal Growth by participant position, principal and principal supervisor. Additionally, differences among elementary and secondary principals are noted.

How Districts Support Principal Growth	K-12 Principals		Principal Supervisors
	Elementary	Secondary	
Systemic Leadership Approach			
• System Processes and Alignment	*Reps*		
• Goal Setting			*Reps*
• Culture of Collaboration	*Reps*		
Providing Clarity and Expectations			
• Leadership Framework			
• Communicate and Model Expectations	*Reps*		
Guiding and Supporting Leadership Development			
• Principal and Leadership Learning Structure	*All*	*Reps*	*Reps*
• District Roles to Support Principals			

Table 4.4: Cross-District Patterns; Representatives (Reps) from Each District at a Level, All (*All*) Participants at a Level

While many of the themes and sub-categories had explicit support among participant roles, principal supervisors and principals, fewer cross-district or cross-level patterns emerged. The only area of consensus that transcended all participant groups, was the sub-category, *principal and leadership learning structure*. Beyond this the responses were scattered. Each district had a principal representative from across levels identify two sub-categories, *collaborative structures* and *communicate and model expectations*. Each district had an elementary principal participant identify the sub-category, *systemic processes and alignment*. Each district had a principal supervisor representative identify the sub-category, *goal setting*. In other words, limited agreement about the important features of district principal support emerged.

In addition to cross-district patterns, one district had all participants from their district, all principals and principal supervisor(s), identify the theme of *systemic processes and alignment*.

Summary

Principal supervisors identified three consistent themes and seven sub-categories for how districts support principal growth and development. The principal interviews were analyzed against the themes identified from the principal supervisor participant interviews. Principal participants identified all three themes but within these themes, only four of the seven sub-categories were identified. Principal interviews did not reveal any new or additional themes or sub-categories, instead they either affirmed or did not have a representative group mention the themes previously identified by principal supervisors.

Within each of the three themes both structures and culture were consistently identified by principal supervisor participants. Principals identified both structures and culture for theme one, *systemic leadership approach*. However, principal participants only identified culture for theme two, *providing clarity and expectations*, and structure for theme three, *guiding and supporting leadership development*.

Overall, the focus of districts to provide support through the creation of coherent systems and structures is still evolving. In this section, there is evidence that a structure for principal and leadership learning has emerged as an effective district system to provide support. The lack of any further consensus both across districts and among levels is an indication that district level systems to support principal growth as instructional leaders continues to be an area for further development.

How Principal Supervisors Support Principal Growth

As the role of districts shifted to one focused on and responsible for school improvement, the role of superintendents and central office leaders has also changed. These roles became one of key supporter for principal development as instructional

leaders (Honig, 2012). This section focuses on identifying what principal supervisors do that supports principal growth as an instructional leader.

Principal Supervisor Perspective

Principal supervisors who participated in this study were asked questions about how principal supervisors support principal growth as instructional leaders. This included describing specific situations, through stories, and reflecting on specific actions principal supervisors take to positively impact principal growth. From these questions, four core themes emerged. The four themes for how principal supervisors support principal growth encompassed: *use of system processes*, *mentoring and partnership*, *culture of adult learning*, and embedding *coaching approaches*.

   Principal growth through systems. *Principal growth through systems* entails formal districtwide methods. This includes *goal setting and monitoring processes*, *evaluation processes*, and *providing clear expectations*.

   Goal setting and monitoring process. Goal setting and monitoring process was identified by **seven out of seven** participants. This encompassed the use of templates, structured timelines, such as beginning, middle, and end of the school year, and specific systems for meeting to monitor and review progress. The process centered on continuous improvement and included support for developing and writing goals aligned to district priorities and needs. One participant talked about the development process in the following way, "being really specific about their goals and supporting them in writing goals that are good, smart goals, that actually deliver on what they are trying to accomplish" (#1). Another described the implementation and alignment process in this way, "you have a representative team in your building…helping to build capacity and

empower so that you are all leading the building goals and the big work of the district together" (#2).

Systems for monitoring goals and checking for evidence of progress was described as both formal and informal and explained in the following two ways by participants. One respondent stated it as "sitting down with leaders and attacking their continuous improvement plan, determining where they are at with their goals that they've set, recognizing that this is fluid, that it is living and breathing" (#3). Another described effective monitoring process as "using a variety of methods for checking in on progress, I think in reflection, doing those learning walks around the system probably has led to some of the greatest impact on seeing a change in practices" (#7) related to implementation of goals. This area reflected what participants described as district goal setting practices.

Evaluation process. While often intertwined with the goal setting process, the evaluation system and practices were explicitly identified as a separate element by **five out of seven** of the participants. The evaluation system was described as aligning the goal setting process with the district identified principal competencies. One principal supervisor shared that the spring or summative evaluation meeting typically outlines goals the principal should focus on in the coming year. One participant focused on the type and use of the tool by stating,

> With the evaluation tool, most of them have moved to rubric-based tools, which I
> think is good, but...what I would say is you have to live in the language of the
> rubric with principals and be really clear about what that means…you can really
> dig in and have a deeper conversation because of the rubric language (#1).

Another leader focused on the importance of the evaluation by stating you have to "work the process formally" (#2).

Clear expectations. Providing clarity, expressed as clear expectations, was identified by **five out of seven** participants. This was expressed as "being clear on expectations, particularly as it relates to the instructional framework or focus of what it is that you expect them to do" (#3). Further it encompassed being clear about expectations and direction, with clear being described as kind and direct. This was illustrated in this quote, "in the places that I see additional need for growth, I have learned to be explicitly clear" (#2).

Principal growth through mentoring and partnership. *Principal growth through mentoring and partnership* includes *knowing and collaborating with the principal as a leader and individually* and encompasses *relationships*.

Knowing the principal individually and as a leader. The importance of knowing the principal individually and as a leader, was identified by **five out of seven** participants. This was described as the ongoing dialogue and connection with individual principals. This varied from formal, regularly scheduled meetings to informal check-ins that occur on a weekly basis. This is where principal supervisors talked about being in the building with the principal, spending time together, and getting to know and understand what is needed on an individual basis. One participant described this as follows, "I'm talking to all of them consistently, what those conversations look like is based more on what I see as the needs within the building" (#5). Other purposes for these visits and conversations were explained as, "observing, it's not just feedback, but it's being really, really observing and knowing who the leader is and what the leader is doing is so important" (#6) and

allowing the supervisor to "have a heartbeat on where are principals at and what might they need" (#7).

      Relationships. While not a specific strategy or structure for supporting principal growth and development, relationships were identified by **six out of seven** principal supervisors as essential to the success of any of the forementioned structures and strategies. These relationships were described as strong and trusting.

      System-wide culture of adult learning. Principal growth through a *system-wide culture of adult learning* incorporates leadership targeted *professional development*, *networks for support*, *visibility with purpose*, and *continuum of pressure and support*.

      Systems and practices for professional learning. Providing systems and ongoing practices for principal professional learning, commonly referenced as professional development, was identified by **six out of seven** participants. Participants identified regular meetings scheduled to focus on principal learning work, for example, principal supervisor's "leading learning leader meetings" (#2), and as opportunities to build instructional leadership, provide feedback, and engage in role playing. This was also expressed as focusing on district priority work, instruction, and use of tools and processes, all aimed at capacity building for the principal.

      Network of support. Network of support, defined as strategies that engage principals in opportunities to collaborate or learn with and from colleagues, was identified by **five out of seven** participants. Networks of support were defined in a range of ways including, conducting instructional rounds, calibrating instructional observations, providing opportunities to dialogue about instructional practices, and encouraging peer sharing. Principal supervisors spoke of these more formally and often related to

opportunities facilitated by the principal supervisor or other district-level leaders. One supervisor illustrated networking as follows, "meeting with them collectively, often…they need to see how their peers are working" (#5).

Visibility with purpose. Principal supervisors engaging in practices that allow them to be visible with purpose in the schools was expressed by **four out of seven** of the participants. Participants described this as "I'm there enough so I really get a sense of who they are (as a leader) and what they're doing and what they need" (#2). It was also explained as "a cadence of meetings or check-ins, it could be getting around to all of them, using the whole cycle of continuum of conversations" (#7). More generally, it was described as being in the building to understand the context and the leader as a means to know them and to understand what is needed in order to offer support.

Continuum of pressure and support. Offering and balancing a continuum of pressure and support through interactions and expectations of principals was stated by **four out of seven** of the participants. This was explained as a "continuum of empathy and accountability, and that we're constantly...we should be doing a dance between what that looks like and balancing it" (#6). It was also expressed as "I feel that they know that I have really high expectations and that they feel that I also support them" (#2). One participant described this as "ensuring that they have the right support to be held to high expectations," (#4).

Principal growth through use of coaching approaches. Principal growth through use of a coaching approach centers on being performance driven using structured and formal practices. This encompasses *coaching*, *modeling*, encouraging *reflective practices*, *feedback*, and *observations*.

Coaching. Principal supervisors providing coaching for principals was identified by **seven out of seven** participants. Participants included a range of coaching strategies, from cognitive coaching to coaching conversations and asking questions, to using an external coach. One participant explained it in the following way,

> Listening to what she was experiencing, asking thoughtful questions as she would share about different challenges…asking her mindful questions about what she was experiencing, she would be having challenges or struggles, utilizing questions to get her back focused on what the goal was that she set for the year (#3).

Another participant described engaging in a coaching conversation in another way, "I often have leaders who have a leadership dilemma that they're trying to work through, and I'm not giving them answers, but instead helping to coach them. And building their capacity in that way" (#6).

Modeling. Modeling the behaviors and practices that principals' supervisors want to see principals employ in their school and with staff was noted by **five out of seven** participants. This included modeling of leadership approaches, such as shared leadership, systems thinking, and use of staff survey data, as well as modeling the frameworks and tools principals are expected to employ. One participant described this as

> What we want teachers to model for students, we have to model for principals so they can model for teachers and so on…ask really good and reflective questions of them to push them further and... the expectation that they're doing the same thing in the classroom with their teachers (#1).

Reflective practices. Encouraging reflective practices was identified by **five out of seven** principal supervisors. This was mainly addressed in the context of goal setting

and evaluation as participants described most reflection occurring around leadership domains and staff feedback. Encouraging reflective conversations was related to this self-reflection.

Feedback. Providing feedback, utilizing various avenues, was described by **five out of seven** participants. Feedback was discussed in three distinctive ways. One type of feedback identified was stakeholder feedback provided to the principal. One participant discussed this in the following way, "if they can get feedback from their staff around what's working, and what's not working…that's a tool that I use to help them reflect on their leadership" (#3). Another type of feedback is more direct, and given when working with principals, related to practices being implemented in the school or in role-playing situations with the district leadership team. Another participant described this type of feedback in relationship to "creating a culture of feedback where people are not afraid to receive critical feedback" (#4). The final form incorporated observations overtime and feedback given strategically which was described in the following way, "I maintain my own feedback observation system, what I'll do is make observations and then try to be intentional about how I'll give feedback in order to push their own growth" (#6).

Observation. Intentionally setting up structured and unstructured observations of principals conducting priority work was identified by **four out of seven** principal supervisors. This was described as being able to "watch principals in a variety of settings in order to really be able to support them" (#2). Informally, this looked like "constantly observing patterns of behavior that I see within a principal's team, within a principal, within a school leadership team" or observing for "patterns of behavior, systems and structures, and mental models that might be influencing what is happening" (#7). More

formally, it included observing staff meetings, teacher professional learning communities, or a teacher observation. One participant further described this as a requirement for the principal to invite them "into a post-observation conference with a teacher... it's not about the teacher, I want to hear them and how they're coaching the teacher" (#1).

Principal Perspective

Principals who participated in this study were asked questions about what supports them to grow as an instructional leader. This included describing specific situations, through stories, and reflecting on specific actions they have taken, or practices their supervisor has used, to impact their growth. Principal interviews were analyzed using the themes and sub-categories identified by the principal supervisors, including use of *system processes*, *mentoring and partnership*, *culture of learning*, and *embedding coaching approaches*.

Principal growth through systems. System processes encompasses three sub-categories. Principals identified only one of the three sub-categories, *goal setting and monitoring*.

Goal setting and monitoring process. Goal setting and monitoring was identified by **seven out of fourteen** principals. This encompassed establishing school improvement plan goals and personal goals. With school improvement plans, participants noted the role of the district vision and direction, as well as supports such as district data retreats. One participant stated, "you need to be well aware where we're headed as a district, you need to put your school improvement plan together, so it connects with that" (#1). Participants also discussed writing personal goals, around leadership competencies, feedback and reflection. This experience was explained in the following way, "where we get to create

our own goals, that to me really supports my professional growth, because one, it helps me think through all of the important things that I want to do for the school year and create a plan, so that is super helpful" (#7). Another participant described the goal setting process in this way,

One of the things that we're asked to do as leaders…commit to some of those steps that we're going to be taking with our professional development and writing down and committing some of the changes that we're going to be implementing, having that's important. In the past it's been more of a conversation, but I think that specificity can come through those shared documents where there's something about writing it down that can help you to make it into a growth plan, (#8).

Principal growth through mentoring and partnership. Mentoring and partnership includes supervisors who *know and collaborate with principals as a leader and individual* and the role of *relationships*. This area had the greatest level of accord among principal participants.

Knowing the principal individually and as a leader. The importance of knowing the principal individually and as a leader was identified by **twelve out of fourteen** principals. This was described as both personal and professional conversations, getting to know one another, checking-in on how it's going, and opportunities to meet more informally. One participant explained, "the relationships have to be built one conversation at a time, and you have to be intentional about it" (#2). Another described it this way, "our meetings, there is always a layer of formality, but also socially informal,

he's very horizontal in his leadership as much about checking in with leaders across the system, he has relationships with each layer of the leader" (#13).

It also encompassed supervisors being responsive and available, meeting individual needs, and providing support. One participant stated, "(my supervisor) allowed me to determine what support I needed" (#7). The importance of this was also described as follows, "a genuine care for people in their development…that shines through that they wish well for them and assuming positive intentions, the ability to be honest" (#14).

Relationships. Although not a specific strategy or structure for supporting principal growth and development as instructional leaders, relationships were identified by **fourteen out of fourteen** principal participants as an essential element that creates the conditions and affects their ability to grow. Responses centered on the importance of trust and authenticity. This was summarized by one participant as, "I really trust her, when I meet with her…and she really wants to know, how are you really doing? … And then I am very comfortable being completely honest with her" (#4). Another participant expressed the benefits, "if you can get people to trust and that's part of the relationship…people know they trust you; they're willing to take a risk, they are willing to share when things don't work" (#14). Further noted by one participant was "I think it is all about the relationships that you build…it's a two-way street" (#3).

System-wide culture of adult learning. Culture of adult learning includes four sub-categories. Three of these were identified by principal participants.

System and practices for professional learning. Professional development was identified by **thirteen out of fourteen** principals. At a high level, one participant stated, "one thing that (the superintendent) is very clear on is that we can't move our system

unless we have the information and the professional development to make that happen" (#8). Another described "that's a key driver in our work, is that training and that opportunity to come together and really focus on important topics" (#8). Principal learning was expressed as a priority, with one respondent conveying, "I have never been in a district that has supported professional growth like this one, there is plethora" (#4).

Responses further addressed content and process. Content for professional learning centered on leadership development and system leadership approach, although learning around instructional and assessment practices and supporting instruction in their schools was also mentioned. This was described as staying relevant related to best practice (#10).

Process was addressed in a general way, expressed as "having me think outside the box and challenging me and inspiring me and making things connect and click" (#1). It was also addressed more specifically, with a participant describing sustained study of the leadership model as, "that's the professional development that we receive from them on how to create and use those tools, with our staff, with each other" (#9). Another participant expounded on this as learning about leadership approach tools, that were contentless, focused on building the capacity of the principal to have meaningful, learning centered, conversations (#1). A main idea was common learning.

Structures included book studies and shared experiences specifically targeted at principal and leader needs. One participant explained it this way, "I was challenged to grow…I had to bring in some academic learning, I had to do some other systems thinking and reading…we had to do the learning" (#13).

Visibility with purpose. Visibility with purpose was identified by **eight out of fourteen** participants. This was explained as being present in the school buildings and seeing the principal in their element (#3). One participant described visibility of a principal supervisor in this way, "he was just very present, he was always in the building and walking around, checking on things, and knowing what was going on" (#14).

Visibility with purpose addresses that the focus of the principal supervisor visits, often the superintendent, was two-fold, connecting with the principal and visiting the classrooms to observe the instructional process. One participant described the importance of connecting, as rounding with "principals on a bi-weekly or monthly basis…just try to be a little more visible and walkthrough" (#2). Another described it as, "she's really good about being present in the building, so I do get time to talk to her one-on-one" (#4). The latter was illustrated through a conversation between the principal and supervisor, "I'm coming over to walk through your building if you want to join me, so I walked her through the building and she would share what she noticed and she observed, so she tells me that way what is important to her" (#10).

Continuum of pressure and support. Utilizing a continuum of pressure and support was identified by **ten out of fourteen** participants. This was described as balancing high expectations with coming alongside on the journey by being engaged and offering support. This was described directly by two participants as "she pushes us in a positive way to be better all the time" (#3) and "She's a pusher…I always feel supported" (#4). Another participant described the purpose for this in the following way, "they've done a good job of pushing us to continually be on that path to improve" (#8).

Principal growth through use of coaching approaches. Embedding coaching approaches encompasses five sub-categories. Principals identified two of these sub-categories, *coaching* and *feedback*.

Coaching. Coaching was identified by **eight out of fourteen** participants. This was defined as coaching conversations and the use of questioning to help principals think more deeply as well as providing additional perspectives. One participant provided a general example "he would support you and talk through things, good and bad, about why something worked, or it didn't work" (#14). Another participant offered the following salient description "she does a good job of questioning and getting people to think, I sometimes wish she would insert more of her thought opinion, but rarely have I gotten to the end of the conversation around a problem that I am trying to solve and felt like I didn't get anything out of it" (#12). External coaches were also identified.

Feedback. Feedback was identified by **nine out of fourteen** principals. Feedback was described in two distinct ways. One type of feedback identified by several participants was more formal, feedback gathered from stakeholders, "we do feedback, like stakeholder feedback and surveys" (#3). The other type of feedback is performance based, given on products, such as school improvement plans, or related to process given directly to principals when working together, related to expectations and practice. Participants also emphasized the importance of feedback being individualized as well as including the positive. One principal participant described it in the following way, "it's helpful when you get feedback that is specific to you, not generalized" (#2). This was further expounded on,

It's that individual feedback, be it, keep doing, start doing, stop doing, and then

the conversation that goes with it, because it's positive feedback, you appreciate

it…and if it's negative feedback, you know that they care, and they want you to

do it better now (#2).

Another participant discussed how feedback supports them in their growth. This was

described as,

I'm the type of person that thrives more on that positive feedback or people

noticing things in my practice as I'm trying to make a shift because that helps me

to know that they are engaged, and they are keeping in the back of their mind

those goals that I'm working toward. And when they see them, they'll drop that

note, they will send me the email, and those things make a very positive impact

on my development to know that it's being seen (#8).

Comparing Principal Supervisor and Principal Perspectives

In analyzing the themes and sub-categories for how supervisors support principal

growth as instructional leaders for cross-district patterns, two patterns emerged. These

included sub-categories where each participating district had representatives across

elementary principal, secondary principal, or principal supervisor identify an area (*Reps*)

and sub-categories where all elementary principal, all secondary principal or all principal

supervisor participants identify an area (*All*).

Table 4.5 represents the patterns that emerged based on participant responses

related to How Principal Supervisors Support Principal Growth. Data is represented both

by participant role and positional level.

How Principal Supervisors Support Principal Growth	K-12 Principals		Principal Supervisor
	Elementary	Secondary	

		MS	HS	
System Processes				
Goal Setting and Monitoring Process	*Reps*			*All*
Evaluation Process				
Providing Clear Expectations		*Reps*		*Reps*
Mentoring and Partnership				
Know Principal Individually and as Leader	*Reps*	*Reps*		
Relationships	*All*	*All*		*Reps*
Culture of Adult Learning				
Professional Learning	*Reps*	*All*		*Reps*
Network of Support				
Visibility with Purpose	*Reps*			
Continuum of Pressure and Support	*Reps*		*All*	
Coaching Approaches				
Coaching				*All*
Modeling				
Reflective Practices				
Feedback	*Reps*			
Observation				

Table 4.5: Cross-District Patterns; Representatives (*Reps*) from Each District by Level or All (*All*) Participants at a Level

How supervisors support principal growth as instructional leaders is the area with greatest consensus among participants. Two sub-categories, *relationships* and *professional development* were identified across participants. Each participating district had elementary principal, secondary principal, and principal supervisor representatives identify the sub-category of *relationships* with all elementary and secondary participants also identifying this area. Each participating district had elementary principal, secondary principal, and principal supervisor representatives identify the sub-category of *professional development* with all secondary participants also identifying this area.

Additionally, six other areas represented partial agreement. Each district had elementary and secondary principal representatives identify the sub-category of *knowing the principal individually and as a leader*. Each district had elementary principal representatives and all principal supervisor participants identify the sub-category of *goal*

setting and monitoring process. Each district had secondary principal and principal supervisor representatives identify the sub-category of *clear expectations*. Each district had elementary principal representatives identify three additional sub-categories, *feedback*, *visibility with purpose*, and *continuum of pressure and support*. *Continuum of pressure and support* was a sub-category that was also identified by all high school principal participants. All principal supervisor participants also identified the sub-category of *coaching*.

In addition to cross-district patterns, one district had all participants at the principal and supervisor level identify two sub-categories, *visibility with purpose* and *continuum of pressure and support.*

Summary

Table 4.6 presents the overall picture of how supervisors support principal development. Principal supervisor participants identified four consistent themes and fourteen sub-categories for how principal supervisor participants support principal growth and development. Greatest consensus among principal supervisors existed in this section with all but three sub-categories being identified by more than seventy-percent of the principal supervisor participants. The principal participant interviews were analyzed against the themes identified from the principal supervisor participant interviews. Principal participants identified all four themes, within the themes, six out of fourteen sub-categories were identified by principals at all levels. Two categories were identified by the majority of principal participants; however, the identification disproportionately represented elementary principals. These two areas were *goal setting and monitoring process* and *visibility with purpose*. Secondary principals also identified two additional

sub-categories not identified by the majority of principals overall, *clear expectations* and *modeling*. Principal interviews did not reveal any new or additional themes or sub-categories, instead they either affirmed or did not have a representative group mention the themes previously identified by principal supervisors.

How Principal Supervisors Support Principals Growth		
Theme with Sub-categories	Principals	Supervisors
System Processes		
Goal Setting and Monitoring Process	*Elementary*	*Supervisors*
Evaluation Process		*Supervisors*
Providing Clear Expectations	*Secondary*	*Supervisors*
Mentoring and Partnership		
Know Principal individually and as a Leader	***Elementary Secondary***	***Supervisors***
Relationships	***Elementary Secondary***	***Supervisors***
Culture of Adult Learning		
Professional Development	***Elementary Secondary***	***Supervisors***
Network of Support		*Supervisors*
Visibility with Purpose	*Elementary*	*Supervisors*
Continuum of Pressure and Support	***Elementary Secondary***	***Supervisors***
Coaching Approaches		
Coaching	***Elementary Secondary***	***Supervisors***
Modeling	*Secondary*	*Supervisors*
Reflective Practices		*Supervisors*
Feedback	***Elementary Secondary***	***Supervisors***
Observation		*Supervisors*

Table 4.6: Summary of Practices Identified by Level

Overall, principals seem to know and were able to identify what experiences and supports help them grow and develop. Likewise, for the most part, principal supervisors know this as well. Six areas of strong consensus emerged among principal participants and principal supervisor participants regarding how supervisors can support principal growth and development. In two out of four of the themes, *mentoring and partnership*

and *culture of adult learning*, there was significant consistency between principals across levels and principal supervisors. The sub-category, *visibility with purpose*, was not identified consistently by secondary principal participants and only the sub-category, *network of support*, was not identified across participant groups. Although the overall theme of *coaching approach* did not demonstrate strong agreement, two sub-categories, *coaching* and *feedback*, were identified consistently between principals across levels and principal supervisors.

How Supervisors and Districts Impede Principal Growth

In addition to identify how supervisors support principal growth, it was important to identify practices or behaviors of districts, as a system, or supervisors that impede principal growth. This section aims at identifying what is less supportive or inhibits principal growth and development.

Principal Supervisor Perspective

Principal supervisor perspective on impeding principal growth and development mainly centered on the system with few examples of specific supervisor behaviors or practices. Four distinctive categories were identified with one supervisor describing a practice that was an outlier.

Relationship between the district office and schools. The *relationship between the district office and schools* was identified by **seven out of seven** participants. This was described explicitly by three participants as the classic us against them mentality pervasive in many school districts. One expressed it slightly different, as not being "able to change some culture things from…leaders at the district office" (#2). Yet, another voiced not consistently being in the schools, perceived as a "hands-off" approach

resulting in principals feeling "less connected to you or start to feel like you don't get it anymore because you're not there in the trenches with them" (#1). Two participants expressed more individual relationships elements. One explained it as,

> How they have experienced their relationship with me, meaning if in the past they've brought forward something…they need to work on or might need support with, and their experience, intended or not, was negative in anyway, then they are less likely to bring those, and more likely to say I have to figure this out and there is no way I'm bringing this to (district leadership) (#7).

Another individual example described by a participant was giving "feedback to an individual very early on…I would have waited longer and developed more of a trust with him before I gave the feedback" (#6).

District processes that hinder schools. *District processes that hinder schools* were expressed by **four out of seven** participants. This varied from "a culture of a lot of talk about what we're doing and the lack of documented systems and evidence around that" (#2), such as goal setting plans, to "district office nonsense that are serious barriers to…principals being efficient and effective" such as "a process or system or non-system or stupid requirement" (#4). This was also expressed as there being a "channel or how we're going to work together" and yet, the system allows for principals to "bypass and go around or go directly to others that are at the cabinet level" rather than work with their supervisor (#6). A counter idea related to practices that hinder schools was when district leaders do not give principals a prescriptive process to address a need when they just want to be told how to do something (#7).

Practices for providing support. *Practices for providing support* that hinder

principal growth and development was identified by **four out of seven** participants.

Practices varied from a disconnect between the leaders providing support and the leader

evaluation process, to supporting too many individuals not allowing the supervisor to

provide each with what they need. It was also expressed as not delivering "feedback in a

way it would be received" and "misreading messages…thinking the individual didn't

want me to come and help because he was a leader who would never call" (#6). Finally, it

was identified as connecting less with leaders and schools that were doing well (#5).

Ineffective evaluation processes and practices. The use of *ineffective evaluation

processes and practices* were highlighted by **three out of seven** participants. This varied

from little to no active supervision to evaluators who were responsible for too many

direct reports and therefore were not engaged at a deep enough level. It also encompassed

a lack of system or process for evaluation or the opposite, supervisors not following

through on the process that was defined.

One additional specific supervisor behavior that did not connect to the four

common categories; however, was noteworthy was also identified. This was described as

not setting a principal up for success through the supervisor's leadership approach. This

was illustrated in the following example, "if you're making a decision as the person

supervising the principal, and it's something people aren't really going to like, don't

make the principal deliver the message as theirs, when it's not theirs" (#5).

Principal Perspective

Principals who participated in this study were asked questions about what

impedes their growth and development as a principal. From similar questions with

principal supervisors four distinctive categories were identified. Principal interviews were analyzed against these themes. From this analysis two themes were identified. Additionally, two principals identified a single practice that was an outlier, yet worth noting.

Relationship between the district office and schools. The *relationship between the district office and schools* was identified by **five out of fourteen** principals. This was defined as two key areas that hinder principal growth, communication and relationships. Communication was described as a lack of transparency and giving mixed messages. One participant described this as "I think more than anything, is when you're not communicated with, they don't tell you, that's the hardest time, then you lose trust" (#3).

Relationships was discussed both among cabinet members and between cabinet members and the principals. Relationship problems among cabinet was described by one participant as the superintendent "trying to fix or mend or build their cabinet into a place of being able to function" (#6). Another participant described it in terms of "silos that get built up when everything is by department" (#12), these silos, described by another participant, result in mixed messages and lack of alignment (#5). Beyond cabinet member interactions among themselves, another participant described an additional barrier as "there were not strong relationships between cabinet and principals" (#12).

District processes that hinder schools. *District processes that hinder schools* was identified by **eight out of fourteen** principals. These encompassed the focus for meeting structure, lack of alignment within the system, lack of transparency or involvement in decision making, and power structures. Principal participants described ineffective meeting structure and content in the following ways, "we'd have these long

drawn out meetings, and half the time it was around an agenda that was built by cabinet that really had nothing to do with us" (#6) and "meetings were very focused on…a lot of management and operational things versus leadership" (#9). Lack of alignment between departments is expressed as negatively effecting principal participants and is described in the following way,

> there is not always alignment among the Directors, and this has been under all three superintendents that I've worked with, and the challenge as the building principal is doing what you believe you are supposed to be doing, but what happens when you're being told (different things from different directors). And it's like guys, just figure it out and tell me what you need me to do (#5).

> Lack of transparency in decision making was illustrated by one participant through the following example,

> the part that never feels good…when something gets brought up, but you know the decision has already been made, so it's kind of like, are we a part of this decision or are we really not, and are we bringing this up as more of a formality? We talked about this with the principals, but it really wasn't a conversation…this was clearly already decided (#11).

Finally, power structures were described as micromanaging and hierarchical systems. One participant described it in this way, "micro-management is never a good thing, unless it's a crisis…when the superintendent tries to micro-manage the principal, out of their own fear or whatever is going on or not, it gives a message that we don't trust you" (#10). This was further described by another participant in this way, "the structure was very hierarchical and also confusing…there were multiple times I asked different

people in the district different questions where I wasn't supposed to ask that person that question because I wasn't following the chain (of command)" (#7).

Two principal participants each identified an additional way that districts impede principal growth that did not connect to the identified themes; however, seemed noteworthy. The first centered on the role of the principal as instructional leader being systematically delegated away from the principal to another staff member. This was described as "they took a lot of the instructional leadership duties away from us and gave them to our coaches, and that, I love that part" (#2). The other addressed how turnover in the superintendent role affects principals and their growth. This was stated in the following way, "I always keep in mind a little bit, in the realms of helping you in your role as principal, and as you think about trying to improve or sustain…a superintendent doesn't last either, I'm being a realist" (#14).

Comparing Principal Supervisor and Principal Perspectives

In analyzing the themes for cross-district patterns, one pattern emerged in this section. This pattern is one of themes where each district had representatives (*Reps*), elementary principal, secondary principal, or principal supervisor, identify an area.

Table 4.7 represents the limited patterns that emerged regarding How Supervisors and Districts Impede Principal Growth.

How Supervisors and Districts Impede Principal Growth	Elementary Principals	Secondary Principals	Principal Supervisors
Relationships Between the District Office and Schools			*Reps*
District Processes that Hinder Schools	*Reps*	*Reps*	
Practices for Providing Support			*Reps*

Table 4.7: Cross-District Pattern, Representatives (*Reps*) from Each District by Level

No areas of consensus between principal participants and principal supervisor participants emerged in this section. Principal participant experiences centered on processes. Each participating district had elementary principal and secondary principal representatives identify the theme of *district processes that hinder schools*. Each participating district had principal supervisor representatives identify two themes, *relationships between the district office and schools* and *district practices for providing support*.

Summary

Principal supervisor participants identified four themes for how supervisors and districts impede principal growth as instructional leaders. The principal participant interviews were analyzed against these themes. Principal participants identified two of the four themes. Principal interviews did not reveal any new or additional themes, instead they either affirmed or did not have a representative group mention the themes previously identified by principal supervisors.

Participants were able to identify practices, behaviors, and in some instances, circumstances that hinder or impede principal growth as instructional leaders. In this area participants generated more single responses that tended to be noteworthy, although not a theme. However, overall, this is the section with the least consensus and therefore, limited patterns across participants by level or across districts.

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Chapter Summary

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The findings for this study were derived from open-ended interviews conducted with principal supervisors and elementary and secondary principals from across medium-sized suburban districts. Themes emerged from the interviews and participant quotes

further illustrated the findings. Interviews were aimed at identifying what it means for principals to be an instructional leader focused on learning, and how districts, as a system, and principal supervisors support and impede principal growth as instructional leaders that are focused on learning. Further, the goal was to identify not only patterns within roles, but across district and across role patterns as a means to better understand how to best support principals to grow and develop in their instructional leadership, with a focus on learning. Chapter five discusses these findings as a means to answer the questions posed for this study.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusions

There is solid evidence that district leaders have an influence, although indirect, on student achievement (Louis et al. 2010, Grissom, Egalite, & Lindsay, 2021), especially through supporting the work of principals (Honig et al, 2010). However, there is less clarity about what districts need to do to support principals' improvement (Thessin, 2018). This study investigated how medium-sized suburban districts in one metropolitan area promote principal development from the perspective of both district leaders and school principals.

The purpose of my study was to identify what it means to be an instructional leader focused on learning and the behaviors and practices districts, as a system, and principal supervisors employ to support and enhance the growth and development of principals as instructional leaders whose focus is on learning.

I sought to investigate the following overarching question and sub-questions. Question: How can districts support principals to grow and develop their capacity to provide instructional leadership, focused on learning, for their school?

Sub-question 1: How do principals and principal supervisors define instructional leadership, focused on learning?

Sub-question 2: How do districts, as a system, support principal growth and development as an instructional leader, focused on learning?

Sub-question 3: How do principal supervisors support principal growth and development as an instructional leader, focused on learning?

Sub-question 4: How do districts, as a system, or principal supervisors, impede or hinder principal growth and development as an instructional leader, focused on learning?

Overview of Findings

To arrive at answers to these questions, open-ended interviews were conducted with principal supervisors and elementary and secondary principals from across medium-sized suburban districts in one metropolitan area. Themes emerged from the interviews indicating trends among principal supervisors and principals. Further, results were analyzed to identify patterns within roles as well as across roles and districts.

In this section, each of the four sub-questions will be discussed individually providing insights based on the findings outlined in chapter four. This will be followed by a summary of how leaders might operationalize these findings to address the overarching question posed for this study.

Defining Instructional Leadership

The idea of instructional leadership has been prominent in both the scholarly and practitioner literature for several decades. However, interviews did not reveal a common definition for instructional leadership nor learning leadership, across participants.

The only common element of instructional leadership that most respondents, at all leadership levels and across districts, identified was *understands the instructional practices being implemented*. This aligns with the literature, albeit limited, related to a common definition for instructional leadership, which in the early literature is described as oversight of the instructional program (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986) and in the most recently published literature is addressed as "engagement with teachers that center on

instructional practices" (Grissom, Egalite, & Lindsay, 2021). Other areas that were

mentioned by at least half of the respondents were the importance of *shared leadership

and partnering with teachers*, and the importance of *supporting teachers to create the

conditions for success*.

When examining results for commonality among principals, there was limited

consensus. Rather, principals at each different level maintained different ideas about how

instructional leadership should be defined, demonstrating a difference in what seems to

be most important at their level. Elementary principals had a more consistent perspective

both within and across districts, with several common themes which included, *principal

as a learner*, the principal's role in *building the capacity of teachers*, along with

understanding the instructional practices teachers are being asked to implement. These

illustrate an evolving type of leadership, learning leadership, which in concept

encompasses adult collaborative learning, individual teacher learning, and ultimately

student learning. From this, one can deduce that there is an emerging common language

and set of shared understandings at the elementary level related to the concept of learning

leadership. A similar consensus did not exist among the secondary school principals,

however.

Although not an area of focus in the literature on instructional leadership,

relationships were consistently identified by the majority of participants. Principals and

principal supervisors underscored the significance of trusting and authentic relationships.

District Support for Instructional Leadership

The findings were limited regarding what districts, as a system, should do to

support principal growth and development as instructional leaders. Through principal

supervisor interviews the value and importance of creating coherence, through systems and processes, seemed evident. However, each principal supervisor seemed to be at a different stage of implementation of common frameworks and systems aimed at creating consistency and providing support for principals within their district. The findings further suggested that the longer the tenure of the superintendent, the more embedded the approaches.

Solid consensus among and across participants existed regarding *principal and leadership learning structure* which focused on the importance of providing consistent and targeted professional development for principals and leaders. This is not surprising as it is a theme in the literature. However, the role of the district in developing systematic, job-embedded professional development for principals is relatively recent, as noted in Chapter 2 (Wahlstrom, et al., 2010).

There was less clarity among participants about other ways districts support principals. However, what is clear, is that principals want *systemic processes and alignment* along with *clear expectations*. While the majority of principals and principal supervisors identified these areas, they did not express agreement about which system processes or approaches were most beneficial.

Additionally, when identifying how districts support principal growth, principal supervisors consistently paired together structural and cultural elements when defining ways for districts to support principals. This was an interesting finding as it suggests an interdependence between systems and culture. Yet this was not consistently identified by principals. This may be reflective of supervisor's responsibility to create coherence which focuses on interdependence between various aspects of the system.

The Principal Supervisor

How principal supervisors support principals is the area of greatest agreement among participants within-levels, across-levels, and across-districts. The interviews suggest that principals have a keen understanding of what they need to support their growth and development as an instructional leader and likewise, there seems to be a shared understanding of these needs among principal supervisors.

There are two key constructs that were consistently identified by participants, *mentoring and partnership* and *culture of adult learning*. These findings align to the structures identified in the literature as differentiation and professional development.

Principals expressed a desire to be *known individually and as a leader* and a desire for support to be personalized and customized to their specific needs including opportunities to connect and engage informally with their supervisor. With this, *relationships*, both trusting and authentic, were emphasized by nearly every participant as a critical component that creates the conditions for growth and has an effect on principal growth.

Professional development was also identified. In this case it centered on the content for the learning emphasizing both leadership development including district priority work and system approaches along with supporting the instructional program. Further, as a support to principal growth and development maintaining high expectations and providing the supports to get there was noted as the *continuum of pressure and support*. This parallels what is commonly understood about effective student and teacher learning, that it is important to maintain high expectations and provide the scaffolds and supports to achieve the desired outcome. Finally, *visibility with purpose* also emerged as

a promising practice when used as a means to support principal learning, to align district practices, and as a means for the principal supervisor to communicate their values and priorities.

Beyond district supports, *system processes* seem to have potential when considering how supervisors support individual principal growth and development. Elementary principals and their supervisors found *goal setting and monitoring processes* to be effective whereas secondary principals and their supervisors found *clear expectations* to be highly effective. This could be due in part to elementary principals being closer to the classroom which allows them to be more imbedded in day to day practice, whereas secondary principals work across disciplines, causing the need to provide clarity and direction across a broader context to be more essential.

Although somewhat less consistent, *coaching* and *feedback* were also identified as supportive strategies. From the findings, *coaching* less defined by the participants, centers mainly on questioning, whereas *feedback* is described as more multidimensional, incorporating stakeholder, formal, and informal feedback. Regardless, both coaching and feedback can serve to significantly guide how principal supervisors can effectively work with principals.

Overall, the findings for this question illustrate the significance of supervisor's intentional actions and strategies. There is a hopeful message in these findings in that there are specific approaches identified that can guide principal supervisors to work effectively with principals to support their ongoing growth and development. Furthermore, these findings are consistent with the literature, outlined in chapter 2,

related to how supervisors support the growth and development of principals (Honig, et al., 2010, Honig, 2012).

What Inhibits Districts Support for Principals?

The findings related to how districts impede, or hinder principal growth and development were not directly focused on the principal as an instructional leader, although there is a link to that. Findings centered on practices, processes, and relationships, all of which impact the ability for a district to positively support principals. However, principal supervisors and principals showed little agreement on the specifics, identifying different areas as most significant. Principal participant results centered on *district processes* while supervisors emphasized *relationships between district office and schools* and *practices for providing support*. Although the latter was not identified as an area of focus for principals, principal supervisors identified a need to provide better systems for support, within that identifying both feedback and meeting individual principal needs as common opportunities for improvement. These systems for support, identified by supervisors, mirror what principals said they need from their supervisor.

For this question, it is also noteworthy that more individual and unique responses were generated then for other questions. The most significant response was related to the relationship between superintendent turn-over and the impact this has on principal growth and development.

Unanticipated Findings

In considering my study as a whole, there were three unanticipated findings. The first was the lack of consistency and agreement between principals at different levels. This was reflected throughout although was most pronounced when considering how to

define instructional leadership and was further highlighted in some aspects of what was most supportive to their growth and development. Next, it was clear that principals do not want or expect more autonomy than they currently have, instead, they want guidance and a system or framework to work within. In addition, they also want to be afforded space and freedom to address the unique needs and identity of their school, but within the framework or system provided by the district. Finally, while my study did not seek to identify in district patterns, two districts had in district patterns emerge, ones where every participant from a district identified a consistent area. These within district patterns all occurred in the participating districts where the superintendents had longer tenure, suggesting that coherence emerges with consistent leadership over time.

Summary

The overarching question for this study was: How can districts support principals to grow and develop their capacity to provide instructional leadership focused on learning for their school? While the responses to the previous sub-questions collectively provide a response to this question, Figure 5.1 illustrates a framework to operationalize these findings as a means to support the growth and development of principals as instructional leaders with a focus on learning.

Figure 5.1: District Practices to Support Instructional Leadership

Implications

The results from this qualitative study highlight practices for districts, as a system, and principal supervisors to support the growth and development of principals as instructional leaders focused on learning. The implications for this study are presented at the district and principal supervisor level.

Implications for Districts

Implications for districts transcend defining instructional leadership with a focus on learning and district structures and strategies that support principal growth and development. These two key areas align with leadership influences that are outlined in the literature as impacting school leadership, district leadership practices and leader professional development experiences (Wahlstrom, et al., 2010).

Defining instructional leadership. Individual principals and district leaders each typically have their own definition for instructional leadership. From this study, however,

it seems less probable that districts, as a system, commonly (regularly) create a shared understanding explicitly defining and communicating this. Through the findings from this study, it seems both districts and principals would benefit from developing a theory of action for instructional leadership with a focus on learning as a means to clearly articulate collective beliefs and expected approaches. This could be operationalized through development of a professional practice document that communicates what and why, clear expectations, and provides resources to consistently achieve this. Development of a common definition and shared understanding should occur in collaboration with principals and be built from the commonality and values that already exist. The findings from this study as well as the scholarly and practitioner literature should further inform this work.

System coherence. Creating coherence through systems and structures seem to benefit principal growth and development. Further, principals seem to want systems or frameworks to guide them. Districts should strive to create or leverage systems, structures and processes identified as supportive to fostering instructional leadership by prioritizing the areas identified by study participants as a means to support principals. This includes implementing systems that encompass both cultural and structural elements to reinforce one another. Further, coherence frameworks, such as the one developed by the Public Education Leadership Project at Harvard, highlights this relationship (Childress, Elmore, Grossman, & King, 2004) and could be used to stimulate on-going discussion within districts. Systemic leadership approaches seemed to be important to principal participants, which ones were most effective seemed to still be emerging. Engaging

principals in the process along with the why for the use of the various system processes may be beneficial.

Adaptive guidance. Districts providing principals guidance and a system or framework to work within was identified by principal participants as essential. Within the district framework, principals also desire flexibility to be responsive to the unique needs and identity of their schools. Districts and more explicitly, principal supervisors, should seek to provide a system of loose-linkage that pairs frameworks and guidance with personalized principal support. District leaders should strive to provide adaptive guidance by personalizing support within the systems and frameworks created at the district level. Demonstrating these practices as a means to support the unique needs of principals will not only provide the support for principal leadership growth but will also model the processes and practices principals are expected to implement when supporting teachers and in-turn, that teachers are expected to enact with students.

Principal professional development. Focused principal professional learning was identified as a priority for participants in this study, both when considering district systems and supervisor practices. Structure for principal and leadership learning was identified as a way districts support principals. Providing targeted professional learning focused on leadership development and understanding and supporting instructional practices emerged as an important way supervisors support principals. Further, professional learning should support and reinforce the theory of action for instructional leadership. Literature states that while professional development is spoken of often by district leaders, there is little evidence of extant district systems of coherent principal professional development, and principals have ranked district support in this area lower

than all other areas of district support (Wahlstrom, et al., 2010). School districts need to implement consistent principal and leader learning structures that encompass an overall meeting structure with dedicated learning time that includes all system leaders, principals and cabinet, and that is separate from other leadership meetings. Structures should be paired with a focus on high quality professional learning as a key part of the district and supervisor responsibility.

Implications for Principal Supervisors

This study revealed that both principals and principal supervisors know which practices are most beneficial to support principal growth and development. Therefore, principal supervisors should engage with principals to solicit how to best implement the identified practices. This section identifies how principal supervisors could operationalize these systems, structures, and practices.

Relationship building. The role of positive relationships was seen throughout this study**.** Relationships cannot be separated from effective structures, systems, and practices when seeking to determine what supports principal growth and development. The systems and structures identified seem to be interdependent with the relationship that is developed. This is no surprise. Principals want to be cared about and they want their supervisor to be invested in their growth. This aligns to the literature on positive school leadership, which is grounded in relationship building and identifies caring, understanding, and trust as critical components (Murphy & Louis, 2018). To effectively impact principal growth, principal supervisors must engage with principals regularly and individually in order to develop authentic and trusting relationships.

Instructional leadership development. Principal supervisors need to leverage the coherent systems, along with the theory of action for instructional leadership developed in collaboration with principals. Intertwining these elements with the principles for how people learn, identifying preconceptions, providing a framework to attach learning to, and offering opportunities for metacognition (National Research Council, 2000), can serve as the foundation for operationalizing practices to support principal growth and development. The key practices identified through this study include knowing the principal individually and as a leader, providing coaching and feedback, and providing professional development.

Knowing the principal individually and professionally. Beyond positive relationships, principal supervisors need to prioritize formal and informal meetings, and spending meaningful time with principals in their school in order to know them individually and professionally. This encompasses understanding their individual leadership growth opportunities and needs as well as the needs and priorities for their school while also aligning these to the district vision for instructional leadership. The strategies and practices that should be prioritized include collaborating one-on-one, checking-in regularly, and seeing the principal in their element. In essence, demonstrating interest and investment in the principal's growth and development. Described in the literature as differentiated support, the caveat to this practice is that in order for it to be an effective practice requires that it be consistently sustained (Honig, et al., 2010).

Coaching and feedback. Both coaching and feedback are identified as meaningful strategies to support principal growth and development. Principal supervisors need to effectively use these strategies in a way that supports and enhances the district

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vision for instructional leadership. Supervisors should seek principal voice as a means to understand how principals prefer to receive feedback and what kind of feedback is most beneficial, allowing them to effectively leverage the use of actionable feedback. Additionally, coaching, both questioning and direct feedback, demonstrates interest and investment in the principal's growth. The role of reciprocal relationships needs to be considered in order for principals to be able to receive coaching and feedback.

Professional development. Supervisor practices that support principal growth and development as instructional leaders requires support that comes through professional development.

Principal. Support to implement the district vision for instructional leadership should come through professional development as described in the district implications section. Although there is commonality in what principals across levels identified as providing support for their growth and development, there are also differences between what elementary and secondary principals self-identify as most effective in meeting their needs. Based on this it seems prudent that principal supervisors would be mindful in identifying methods and practices, being intentional to solicit and target stated preferences. Further, if principal supervisors find meaningful differences across levels within their districts they may want to consider prioritizing or leveraging different structures at different instructional levels.

Supervisor. The education system holistically and districts more locally, should consider what professional development is needed for principal supervisors to effectively support the growth and development of principals. Subsequently, principal supervisors

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should be provided the professional learning needed to improve consistency and effectiveness by incorporating these practices more universally.

Future Research

This study was a small scale study done in a limited geographic area. It would be beneficial to conduct a larger study across geographic areas to determine if these findings are transferable to different contexts as a means to utilize them to better guide school districts and principal supervisors to effectively support the growth and development of principals as instructional leaders with a focus on learning.

Shared beliefs, priorities, and language surfaced as essential elements of an effective approach to further principal growth and development as instructional leadership. Yet, based on the findings, there seems to be differences in what is valued and what is needed at different instructional levels. School reform literature rarely addresses differences from this perspective. It would be valuable to learn more about how differences in instructional leadership priorities, district systems, and supervisor practices impact principals at different levels and if this has a meaningful impact on how to best support principal growth and development at each instructional level.

While relationships were a topic laced throughout this study, it was not the topic of the study. However, based on the findings in this study, it is clear that relationships are an integral element of effective principal supervision, particularly when focused on maximizing growth and development. This role of relationships, including types of relationships, how they are most effectively developed, and how they are leveraged to positively impact principal growth and development should be further studied.

Specifically, it would be beneficial for the role of reciprocal relationships as well as trusting relationships to be areas of focus.

There continues to be limited research on the skills, background, and resources that principal supervisors need to effectively support the growth and development of principals as instructional leaders. This is an area that should be further studied to determine if there are pre-requisites such as supervisor background, qualifications, or skill sets, that allow principal supervisors to be most effective. In essence, determining how or if confidence in the supervisor skillset or credibility in their background impacts the effectiveness of the supervisor from the perspective of the principal being supervised. In conjunction with this, what professional learning should principal supervisors engage in to be more effective at supporting principal growth and development as instructional leaders, considering both skills and knowledge needed.

Professional community has emerged as an effective strategy in the literature and while tenants of this are seen in participant responses, it never emerged as a significant theme. How districts have intentionally implemented and leveraged this construct, and the outcomes of such structures would be worthy of further study.

Throughout the study parallels to student and teacher learning were made by interviewees as a frame of reference for the discussion about principal growth and development. Further study on these parallels, including literature on learning, specifically, the key findings from *How People Learn*, could serve as a starting point as there is potential application, particularly in the first two findings, considering preconceptions and attaching learning to a framework (National Research Council, 2000). A future study on principal learning encompassing this research as well as the body of

literature that exists on student and teacher learning, may provide further insights and guidance.

The average tenure of a superintendent in Minnesota is 5.75 years, and even less across the nation at 3.8 years. If and how superintendent longevity impacts principal growth and development as instructional leaders is another potential area for further study.

Conclusion

In conducting this study, one might romanticize that a simple answer exists to the questions that were posed on how to effectively support the growth and development of principals as instructional leaders whose focus is on learning. Through this study, visiting with leaders from highly successful districts, I was hopeful that an obvious process to foster effective instructional leadership might emerge. Instead, it has become clear that there is no simple formula or process for this complex challenge. However, there continues to be compelling reasons to pursue learning more about this area, as evidence continues to emerge that principal leadership, including instructional leadership, significantly matters to student learning outcomes (Leithwood, et al., 2004, Wahlstrom, et al., 2010, Grissom, et al., 2021). This study, although not conclusive, provides a starting place for principal supervisors who strive to significantly impact the growth and development of principals as instructional leaders whose focus is on learning.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Principal Interview Protocol

Thank you for participating. Just a reminder, we will be discussing your experiences with...

...being supervised as an administrator.
...receiving effective and less effective support for your professional growth.
...how needs for your support and growth may have changed in the last year.
We know that much has changed with current events and we will ask you about that at

the end. Before that, we want you to reflect back on your career as a whole. So…

1. Tell me/us briefly about your background (as an educator/educational leader)
   Probes
   a. Good feel for where they have been -- so you can come back, later in the interview, with probes like "How was that experience in X (previous district or previous position).
      i. To the degree that you can, make them feel that you are really listening to THEIR story.
   b. Multiple districts?
   c. Interrupt if they tell you their life history

2. In your view, what makes a truly excellent principal?
   Probes (Funneling)
      i. You mentioned/did not mention instructional leadership/leadership for learning. Can you tell me about your vision of instructional leadership or learning leadership?
      ii. Does your district's vision of principal instructional leadership vary from your own? If so, how?

3. Describe your relationship or interactions with your (current) supervisor and superintendent?
   Probes
   a. Trusting?
   b. Authentic?
   c. Formal, Friendly
   d. Pushing? Supporting?
   e. (Look for others from Positive School Growth)

4. How has your supervisor supported or hindered your professional growth?
   Probes

a. Nature of relationship/interactions?
b. Systems, structures or procedures?
c. Easy sharing their problems of practice with your supervisor? Frequency? To what would you attribute their openness or lack thereof?
d. If no reference to instructional leadership, ask for them to respond in that context.
e. If no reference to tools/systems described by their district, ask about them...

5. More broadly, how does your district support or hinder your growth and development?
Probes
a. Nature of relationships/interactions?
b. Systems, structures or procedures?
c. Easy sharing their problems of practice with other district admin? Frequency? To what would you attribute their openness or lack thereof?
d. If no reference to instructional leadership, ask for them to respond in that context.
e. If no reference to tools described by their district, ask them about....

6. Tell me about a time in your career when your growth as a leader was effectively supported.
Probes
a. What role, if any, did your supervisor play in this growth?
b. District practices that supported this growth.
c. Tell me about the relationship you had with the person who effectively supported you in this situation? What do you think made him/her so effective in helping you grow?
d. Systems, structures or procedures? (particularly helpful)
e. If no reference to instructional leadership, ask for them to respond in that context.

7. Now the opposite. Tell me about a time in your career when your growth was hindered?
Probes
a. What role, if any, did your supervisor play in this hindrance?
b. District practices that hindered your growth.
c. Tell me about the relationship you had with the person who effectively supported you in this situation? What do you think made him/her so effective in helping you grow?
d. Systems, structures or procedures? (particularly helpful)
e. If no reference to instructional leadership, ask for them to respond in that context.

8. Now that you have done some reflecting about your growth as a principal and how it has been impacted by interactions with supervisors and district practices, are you noticing any themes or patterns? What advice would you give...?
    a. Superintendents/principal supervisor to help principal's growth?
    b. Principals as they seek to grow into/as strong instructional leaders?

9. During the past, several months in the light of COVID and the death of George Floyd, what has changed, if anything, related to the questions we have asked you today?

Appendix B

Principal Supervisor Interview Protocol

Thank you for participating. Just a reminder, we will be discussing your experiences with...

...providing supervision for administrators.
...effective and less effective support for administrators' professional growth.
...how needs for support and growth may have changed in the last year.

We know that much has changed with current events and we will ask you about that at the end. Before that, we want you to reflect back on your career as a whole. So…

1. Tell us briefly about your background (as an educator/educational leader)
   Probes
   a. Good feel for where they have been -- so you can come back later in the interview, with probes like "How was that experience in X (previous district or previous position).
      i. To the degree that you can, make them feel you are really listening to THEIR story.
   b. Multiple districts?
   c. Interrupt if they tell you their whole life history

2. In your view, what makes a truly excellent principal?
   Probes (Funneling)
   a. You mentioned/did not mention instructional leadership/leadership for learning. Can you tell me about your vision of instructional leadership or learning leadership?
   b. Does your district's vision of principal instructional leadership vary from your own? If so, how?

3. What are your goals or vision for principal supervision (as a supervisor)?
   Probes
   a. Do you have any goals for relationships between principals and their supervisors?

4. Describe your relationship or interactions with your principals.
   Probes
   a. Tell me a little more, what might your interactions look like over the course of a given month?
   b. How did your relationship develop? Creating conditions?
   c. Trusting?
   d. Authentic?
   e. Formal, Friendly
   f. Pushing? Supporting?

g. How open are your principals to sharing their problems of practice with you? To what would you attribute their openness or lack thereof?

h. (Look for others from Positive School Growth)

5. How have you supported your principals' growth?
   Probes
      a. Nature of relationship/interactions?
      b. Systems, structures or procedures?
      c. If no reference to instructional leadership, ask for them to respond in that context.
      d. Have there been ways you have unintentionally hindered their growth?

6. More broadly, how does your district support (or hinder) principal growth and development?
   Probes
      a. Nature of relationships/interactions?
      b. Systems, structures or procedures?
      c. Easy sharing their problems of practice with other district admin? Frequency? To what would you attribute their openness or lack thereof?
      d. If no reference to instructional leadership, ask for them to respond in that context.

7. Now let's think about a specific example. It can be from any time in your career. Tell me about a time when you have supervised a principal who grew significantly. (effectively supported a principal)
   Probes
      a. What role, if any, did you or district practices assist their growth? Nature of relationships/interactions? What do you think made him/her so effective in helping you grow?
      b. Systems, structures or procedures? (particularly helpful)
      c. If no reference to instructional leadership, ask for them to respond in that context.

8. Now the opposite. Tell me about a time in your career when you have supervised a principal whose growth stagnated (was hindered)?
   Probes
      a. What role, if any, did you or district practices play in hindering their growth?
      b. Nature of relationship/interactions? What do you think made him/her so *ineffective* in helping you grow?
      c. Systems, structures or procedures? (particularly helpful)
      d. If no reference to instructional leadership, ask for them to respond in that context.

9. Think of yourself now versus you as an early year/initial supervisor. What has changed in your picture of being a "good/great principal supervisor"?

Probes
   a. How have you changed and what caused it?
   b. What are you better at doing?

10. Now that you have done some reflecting about supporting principal growth, are you noticing any themes or patterns? What advice would you give...?
    a. Superintendents/principal supervisor to help principal's growth?
    b. Principals as they seek to grow into/as strong instructional leaders?

11. During the past, several months in the light of COVID and the death of George Floyd, what has changed related to the questions we have asked you today?

Appendix C

Principal Responses to Themes

Instructional Leadership: Principal Perspective	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8
1. Student Centered Leadership	■	■		■		■		■
2. Principal as a Learner		■		■		■		■
3. Building the Capacity of Teachers		■		■	■		■	
4. Monitoring Students Learning			■				■	
5. Understands the Instructional Practices Being Implemented	■		■	■			■	
6. Visible in Classrooms with Purpose		■			■	■		
7. Supports Teachers and Creates the Conditions for Success		■		■				
8. Shared Leadership and Partners with Teachers	■	■	■		■	■	■	■
9. Excellence and High Expectation	■							
10. Equity Lens	■		■		■			■
11. Big Picture Systems Perspective	■	■					■	
12. Relationships	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

A shaded box indicates an area that was identified, and a blank box indicates an area that was not identified by the participant.

Instructional Leadership: Principal Perspective	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14
1.Student Centered Leadership	▓					
2. Principal as a Learner		▓			▓	
3. Building the Capacity of Teachers					▓	▓
4. Monitoring Students Learning		▓	▓			
5. Understands the Instructional Practices Being Implemented	▓	▓	▓	▓		
6.Visible in Classrooms with Purpose		▓	▓			
7. Supports Teachers and Creates the Conditions for Success	▓	▓		▓	▓	▓
8. Shared Leadership and Partners with Teachers	▓		▓	▓		
9. Excellence and High Expectations						
10. Equity Lens			▓	▓		
11. Big Picture Systems Perspective	▓				▓	▓
12. Relationships		▓	▓			▓

A shaded box indicates an area that was identified, and a blank box indicates an area that was not identified by the participant.

Districts Support Principal Growth: Principal Perspective	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8
1. System Processes and Alignment	X	X		X	X	X	X	
2. Goal Setting			X	X				
3. Culture of Collaboration	X					X	X	
4. Leadership Framework			X				X	X
5. Communicating and Modeling Expectations	X	X			X			X
6. Structure for Principal and Leadership Learning Work	X	X	X	X				X
7. District Roles to Support Principals							X	

A shaded box indicates an area that was identified, and a blank box indicates an area that was not identified by the participant.

Districts Support Principal Growth: Principal Perspective	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14
1. System Processes and Approach	▓	▓		▓	▓	▓
2. Goal Setting process						
3. Culture of Collaboration	▓			▓	▓	▓
4. Leadership Framework				▓		
5. Communicate and Model expectations	▓	▓		▓	▓	▓
7. District Roles to Support Leadership		▓				▓
7. Structure for Principal and Leadership Learning Work	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	

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Supervisor Supports Principal Growth: Principal Perspective	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8
1.Goal Setting and Monitoring Process	▨		▨			▨	▨	▨
2. Evaluation Process			▨	▨				▨
3. Clear Expectations		▨			▨			
4. Knowing the Principal Individually and as a Leader	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨		▨	▨
5. Relationships	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨
6. Systems and Practices for Principal Professional Learning	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨		▨
7. Network of Support			▨	▨	▨			
8. Visible with Purpose		▨	▨	▨	▨		▨	▨
9. Continuum of Pressure and Support	▨		▨				▨	▨
10. Coaching		▨			▨		▨	
11. Modeling		▨						
12. Reflective Practices		▨		▨				▨
13. Feedback	▨	▨	▨		▨	▨	▨	
14. Observation			▨					

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Supervisor Supports Principal Growth: Principal Perspective	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14
1.Goal Setting and Monitoring Process		▓		▓		
2. Evaluation Process		▓				
3. Clear Expectations	▓	▓	▓	▓		
4. Knowing the Principal Individually and as a Leader	▓	▓	▓	▓		▓
5. Relationships	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓
6. Systems and Practices for Principal Professional Learning	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓
7. Network of Support						▓
8. Visible with Purpose		▓				▓
9. Continuum of Pressure and Support		▓		▓	▓	▓
10. Coaching	▓	▓		▓	▓	
11. Modeling		▓	▓	▓		
12. Reflective Practices						
13. Feedback	▓	▓	▓			
14. Observation		▓				

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Impede Principal Growth: Principal Perspective	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8
1. Relationship Between District Office and Schools			▓		▓	▓		
2. District Processes that Hinder Schools			▓		▓	▓	▓	
3. Practices for Providing Support					▓			
4. Ineffective Evaluation Process		▓					▓	▓

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Impede Principal Growth: Principal Perspective	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14
1. Relationship Between District office and schools				▓		▓
2. District Processes that Hinder Schools	▓	▓	▓			▓
3. Practices for Providing Support				▓	▓	
4. Ineffective Evaluation Process	▓					

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Principal Supervisor Responses to Themes

Instructional Leadership: Supervisor Perspective	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7
1. Student Centered Leadership	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓		
2. Principal as a Learner	▓		▓	▓		▓	▓
3. Building the Capacity of Teachers	▓		▓		▓	▓	▓
4. Monitoring Students Learning	▓	▓	▓		▓		
5. Understands the Instructional Practices Being Implemented	▓	▓	▓		▓	▓	▓
6. Visible in Classrooms with Purpose	▓	▓	▓		▓	▓	
7. Supports Teachers and Creates the Conditions for Success				▓	▓	▓	▓
8. Shared Leadership and Partners with Teachers		▓	▓		▓		▓
9. Excellence and High Expectation		▓		▓	▓	▓	▓
10. Equity Lens	▓		▓			▓	
11. Big Picture Systems Perspective	▓	▓	▓		▓		▓
12. Relationships		▓			▓	▓	

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Districts Support Principal Growth: Supervisor Perspective	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7
1. System Processes and Alignment	■	■		■	■	■	■
2. Goal Setting	■	■	■			■	■
3. Culture of Collaboration		■		■	■		
4. Leadership Framework		■		■	■		■
5. Communicating and Modeling Expectations	■	■		■	■		
6. Structure for Principal and Leadership Learning Work	■	■	■	■	■	■	
7. District Roles to Support Principals	■		■	■	■	■	■

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Supervisor Supports Principal Growth: Supervisor Perspective	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7
1. Goal Setting and Monitoring Process	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓
2. Evaluation Process	▓	▓	▓	▓		▓	
3. Clear Expectations	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓		
4. Knowing the Principal Individually and as a Leader	▓			▓	▓	▓	▓
5. Relationships	▓	▓	▓		▓	▓	▓
6. Systems and Practices for Principal Professional Learning	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	
7. Network of Support	▓	▓		▓	▓	▓	
8. Visible with Purpose	▓	▓			▓		▓
9. Continuum of Pressure and Support	▓	▓			▓	▓	
10. Coaching	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓
11. Modeling	▓	▓	▓		▓		▓
12. Reflective Practices	▓	▓		▓		▓	▓
13. Feedback	▓	▓	▓	▓		▓	
14. Observation	▓	▓				▓	▓

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Impede Principal Growth: Supervisor Perspective	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7
1. Relationship Between District Office and Schools	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨
2. District Processes that Hinder Schools		▨		▨		▨	▨
3. Practices for Providing Support		▨	▨		▨	▨	
4. Ineffective Evaluation Process		▨		▨	▨		

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