

# Leading for Effective Teaching

How School Systems Can Support Principal Success



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Craig Jerald** is president of Break the Curve Consulting, which provides technical assistance and strategic advice to organizations working to improve education for all students. Prior to consulting, Craig was a principal partner at the Education Trust and a senior editor at *Education Week*, where he founded the organization's first full-time research team. Craig began his career as a middle school teacher of language arts, history, and mathematics in California's Long Beach Unified School District.

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# Executive Summary

In 2009, seven school districts and four charter management organizations (CMOs) joined with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation as Partnership Sites to Empower Effective Teaching. In these sites, system, board, and union leaders committed to redesign how they develop, evaluate, recognize, and retain effective teachers as a foundation for improving teaching and learning. Now those efforts are bringing critical questions of school leadership to the fore, driving changes in expectations for principals and for how school systems organize to support principals and other instructional leaders.

Principals are being called on to play a key role in a new continuum of instructional leadership, extending from the central office to the classroom and focused on fostering effective teaching for every student. But national research suggests that school systems still have far to go to help principals and other leaders fulfill that promise. As key personnel in this continuum, principals are challenged to find time to focus on instructional leadership. On average, urban school principals spend only 8 to 17 percent of their time on activities related to instructional leadership, and some evidence suggests that half of those activities lack sufficient focus to have any real chance of helping teachers improve instruction.

The challenge is not entirely surprising. Many principals simply have not had opportunities to acquire the necessary body of knowledge and skills to be effective leaders of instructional improvements in their schools.

And this gap in expertise is just one of several major challenges that school systems must address to enable principals to be successful leaders of learning. Even highly skilled principals say they face great obstacles in carving out enough time for instructional leadership amid the many other demands of their jobs. And too many principals receive mixed signals about which leadership practices offer the greatest leverage for improving classroom instruction and student learning, a significant problem given the real constraints on principals' time.

This report is one product of a broader Principal Leadership Knowledge Development project sponsored by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. It seeks to describe how the principalship is changing in school districts and CMOs that have adopted sophisticated new teacher development and evaluation systems and to highlight emerging strategies in partnership sites and several other systems for better supporting principals as instructional leaders and human capital managers. We hope this report can inform similar conversations about school leadership taking place in local communities and states around the country.

The report focuses on three broad “action areas” that show considerable promise for helping principals meet new expectations: **clarify** the principal's role as an instructional leader by specifying the high-impact practices for which principals will be accountable; **develop** principals' instructional leadership practices through job-embedded supports that build expertise; and **enable** principals to succeed as instructional leaders by providing sufficient time and strategic supports to perform the job well.

## 1. Clarify the principal's role as an instructional leader by specifying the high-impact practices for which principals will be accountable

School systems can reap important benefits by reaching agreement with principals on a common vision for instructional leadership that is granular enough to specify high-impact leadership practices. First, principals can benchmark their own day-to-day practices against a clear set of expectations; no one can effectively perform a job that's been nebulously defined. Second, principals can more efficiently learn from one another because they share a common focus and frame of reference for professional conversations about leadership practice. Finally, school system leaders and central office staff can align all of the policies and programs that “touch” principals—from recruitment and selection to evaluation to professional development—to support them in achieving excellence in a defined set of leadership practices.

To that end, a growing number of school systems are **focusing more attention on instructional leadership and human capital practices in principal recruitment, selection, and evaluation**. Some now require candidates to prove that they can accurately observe lessons and provide feedback to teachers or to demonstrate that they can plan and deliver strong professional development for teachers. Some are designing new evaluation systems for school leaders that expect principals to develop a much keener understanding of the quality and instruction across classrooms, to more strategically select and retain teachers based on their effectiveness, and to help all teachers improve their classroom effectiveness over time.

## 2. Develop principals' instructional leadership practices through job-embedded supports that build expertise

Traditionally, school systems have managed schools and supervised principals through an administrative branch organized into regional offices led by “area superintendents,” while another branch offered principals occasional professional development on topics not especially targeted to meet their individual needs. Such an approach has made it difficult for school systems to offer principals coherent and consistent job-embedded opportunities to strengthen their leadership practices.

Today, leading school systems are rethinking how central offices can support principals to meet the new expectations for instructional leadership. First, they are identifying highly placed central office leaders who can act as instructional leadership directors (ILDs) responsible for developing principals' knowledge, skills, and effectiveness rather than merely monitoring whether they comply with school system policies. Some school systems are **redefining the role and function of the traditional area superintendent position**. Others are **creating entirely new central office leader positions** dedicated to helping principals strengthen their instructional leadership practices.

Second, leading school systems are creating a wide range of additional aligned supports to help principals grow as instructional leaders. Nearly three out of four partnership sites described **professional development on new teacher evaluation systems**, particularly training to accurately observe lessons and provide feedback based on new instructional frameworks, as a successful recent support for principals' instructional leadership.

In general, however, school systems are finding they do not need to invest in expensive new add-on programs to help principals grow as instructional leaders. Rather, they can repurpose and redesign existing systems, time, and resources to do a better job supporting principals. For example, many school systems are **adapting monthly meetings of principals to provide stronger professional development and support** for instructional leadership.

### 3. *Enable* principals to succeed as instructional leaders by providing them with sufficient time and strategic supports to perform the job well

No amount of professional development can enable someone to succeed at an impossible job. Partnership sites and other leading school systems are working on two fronts to make effective instructional leadership feasible.

First, school systems are helping principals strategically expand instructional leadership capacity in their buildings by sharing such responsibilities among multiple leaders. Research has consistently shown that when more staff members share instructional leadership responsibility with principals, classroom teaching and student learning improve more rapidly. As a result, school systems are placing greater emphasis on principals' capacity to build and manage strong **instructional leadership teams** in their schools. Such teams often include expert teachers, instructional coaches, other administrators, and department heads. Under such a scenario, principals become "leaders of instructional leaders" in their schools. The contributions of other instructional leaders *support* rather than *supplant* a principal's own responsibility and authority to lead learning, extending a principal's instructional leadership reach in his or her school building.

Second, school systems are enabling principals to better balance time spent on lower-priority tasks with instructionally focused work and to perform required tasks more efficiently. School systems are leveraging the following strategies to help principals free up more time for instructional leadership:

- **Reducing administrative burdens** by cutting the number of meetings that require principals to leave their school buildings and by eliminating or streamlining paperwork;
- Helping principals **perform tasks more efficiently** by providing them tools and information that facilitate required tasks and by reorienting central office units to provide more personalized support based on principals' individual needs and school context;
- Enhancing capacity to **manage day-to-day operations** by adding or training additional administrative staff members; and
- Providing principals with assistance in **scheduling and defending time** for instructional leadership practices.

The days of simply exhorting principals to be better instructional leaders are ending. Now school system leaders, principals, and teachers must discover new and innovative ways to partner with one another as instructional leaders who continuously improve teaching effectiveness for every student in every classroom.

# Introduction

Judith White, one of 13 new instructional directors in **Prince George’s County Public Schools**, Maryland, drafts an email to a principal to follow up on a visit she made to his school that morning. She summarizes their discussion about how the principal can conduct “learning walks” to obtain more detailed evidence about the effectiveness of instruction in his classrooms, and she attaches an example of a letter to teachers about the activity that he can adapt for his own staff. She reminds the principal that they have scheduled a day and time for another visit when Judith will review his letter and his plan with him, during which the principal will practice by role-playing conversations with teachers so that Judith can give him additional feedback. Judith also confirms the scheduled date of the learning walk so she can visit the school again to support the principal on the day of the event.

At a recent retreat for the district’s 13 new instructional directors, the associate superintendents to whom Judith and her colleagues report urged them to prioritize their schedules to maximize such school visits next year. The message was clear: Providing intensive support to help principals learn new strategies for improving teaching effectiveness and student learning should take a front seat to serving on central office committees or juggling other administrative duties.

Three thousand miles away in California, Tatiana Epanchin, the Bay Area superintendent for **Aspire Public Schools**, talks to her principals about a new plan for next year. Over the past year she visited every one of her 10 schools for two hours every week to help principals improve instruction, but she too often ended up spending more than half of that time helping principals deal with managerial “brush fires.” Next year she plans to visit principals for three hours on alternate weeks to carve out more time during each visit to focus on instructional goals. Tatiana has asked her assistant to help principals schedule three-hour blocks to work on the same instructional leadership issues during alternate weeks.

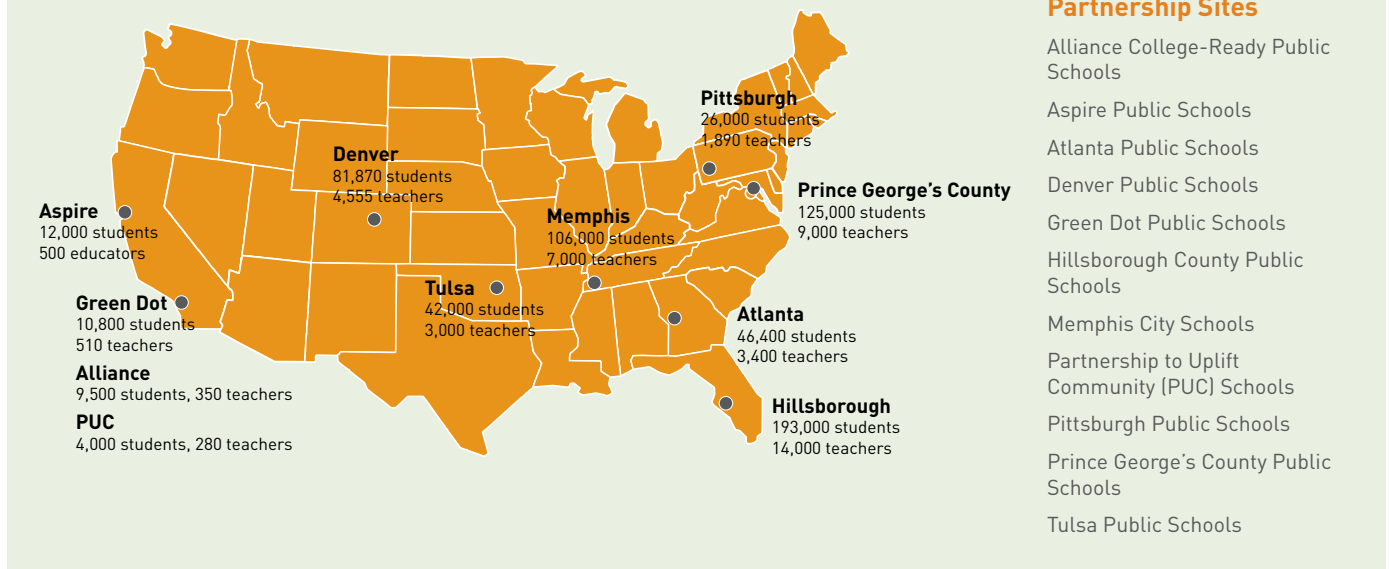
And in the Midwest, a high school principal in **Tulsa**, Oklahoma, leads a yearlong project to deepen her teachers’ understanding of effective instructional practices and to calibrate school-wide expectations for excellent teaching. She and her staff spend two-week blocks studying specific indicators on Tulsa’s new Teacher and Leader Effectiveness framework, and teachers deemed experts in a particular practice open their classroom doors to anyone who wants to observe skilled instruction. Next year those same teachers step up and lead similar professional development for new staff members. “That’s when I felt like I was the most effective as an instructional leader up to that point in my career,” the principal reflects.

These examples illustrate changes in traditional expectations for principals and how central offices organize to support school leaders in districts and charter management organizations (CMOs) that are among the earliest implementers of new teacher development and evaluation systems.

## Context

In 2009, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation awarded grants to a group of **Partnership Sites to Empower Effective Teaching**, seven districts and four CMOs in which system leadership, board leadership, and union leadership collaborated to develop plans to implement new multiple measure systems of teacher evaluation; to strengthen supports for teachers; to recognize and reward effective teaching; and to ensure that the most underserved students have access to highly effective teaching (see Figure 1). Three years into the effort, those ambitious reforms are driving changes in what school systems expect of principals, as well as how central offices support principals to be effective instructional leaders.

**Figure 1. Partnership Sites to Empower Effective Teaching: Districts and Charter Management Organizations**



Many partnership sites have recently revised or are in the process of revising their job descriptions for principals, with revisions focused heavily on reimagining the principal's role in leading instructional improvement. A growing number of school systems are requiring candidates to demonstrate that they can accurately observe lessons and provide feedback to teachers or use data on teacher and student performance to plan and deliver high-quality professional development for teachers.

Many sites are designing new evaluation systems for school leaders that build on recently adopted teacher development and evaluation systems, including instructional frameworks that clearly define effective teaching practices. Principals are being asked to develop a much keener understanding of the quality of instruction across classrooms, to more strategically select and retain teachers based on their effectiveness, and to help all teachers strengthen their classroom effectiveness over time (see sidebar on p. 7, "A New Focus on Empowering Effective Teaching in Denver's Pilot *Framework for Effective School Leadership*"). State adoption of the **Common Core State Standards** is only reinforcing the urgency of such action (see sidebar on p. 8, "Common Core State Standards Reinforce the Need to Strengthen Instructional Leadership for Teaching Effectiveness").



## A New Focus on Empowering Effective Teaching in Denver’s Pilot *Framework for Effective School Leadership*

In **Denver Public Schools**, a new set of policies to empower effective teaching prompted serious reconsideration of the role of school leaders, and the district is now piloting an evaluation system for principals based on a new set of aligned expectations. While leadership of school-level instructional programs and improvement planning figured prominently in the district’s *School-Based Administrator Evaluation Handbook*, adopted in 2005, the pilot *Framework for Effective School Leadership* also includes leadership practices that have a more granular focus on fostering effective teaching in every single classroom. The following “principal behaviors”—four examples each selected from three of the *Framework’s* 13 indicator areas—illustrate evolving expectations for school leaders:

- Examples from Instructional Leadership Indicator 1: Leads for high-quality, data-driven instruction by building the capacity of teachers to lead and perfect their craft
  - Ensures teachers receive regular, direct, actionable feedback regarding their classroom practice to grow professionally and increase instructional consistency across all classrooms.
  - Expects action on feedback regarding classroom instruction and holds teachers accountable for trying out new instructional strategies based on feedback.
  - Proactively identifies teacher leaders and creates systems for teacher leaders to be empowered in their role.
  - Creates classroom embedded opportunities for teachers to learn from and with one another.
- Examples from Human Resource Leadership Indicator 1: Identifies, develops, retains, and dismisses staff in alignment with high expectations for performance
  - Regularly looks at a body of evidence, including student achievement data, to assess performance in order to identify supports and make effective performance management decisions.
  - Uses multiple channels to identify the most effective teachers and strategically places them into positions based on his/her knowledge of teachers’ strengths and areas for growth, considering student needs.
  - Regularly identifies teacher leaders from different cultural backgrounds and provides opportunities for staff within the school to grow and contribute.
  - Expects and supports growth plans for each staff member, creating a culture of personal reflection and growth.
- Examples from Human Resource Leadership Indicator 2: Applies teacher and staff performance management systems in a way that ensures a culture of continuous improvement, support, and accountability
  - Facilitates reflective feedback conversations based on teachers’ levels of self-reflection so all teachers are supported in articulating their strengths and discovering their areas for growth.
  - Uses performance management system to consistently identify high-performing teachers, and provides structures so that they can share best practice and expertise with others.
  - Aligns school professional development plan to data collected through performance management process and student level data.
  - Ensures that all teachers receive high-quality feedback/support/modeling based on their needs and areas of growth throughout the school year.

To be sure, principals are not being asked to shoulder such significant responsibilities alone. Rather, they are being called on to play a key role in a continuum of instructional leadership that extends from the central office to the classroom and is exercised in service to improving teaching. Many partnership sites are tapping teachers identified as highly effective, based on performance evaluations that rely on multiple measures, to assume a wide variety of instructional leadership roles in and across school buildings, teaming with principals and other instructional leaders to cultivate high levels of teaching effectiveness for every student in every classroom.

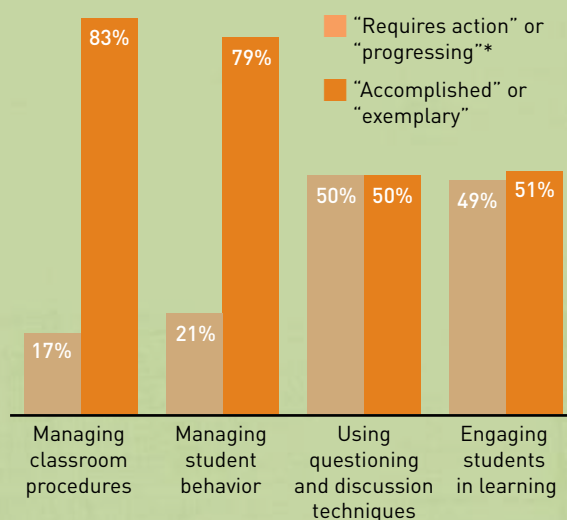
This report examines school leadership trends and emerging practices in partnership sites as well as other school systems, including **Houston Independent School District**, **Montgomery County Public Schools**, and **Uncommon Schools**. It also highlights perspectives emerging from relevant research and thought leaders in the field. The report is not intended to offer definitive answers to difficult questions about the best ways to define and support effective school leadership; indeed, much more research is needed in this area. Instead, this report describes promising changes in principal leadership and support that school systems implementing more sophisticated teacher development and evaluation systems also might consider.

## Common Core State Standards Reinforce the Need to Strengthen Instructional Leadership for Teaching Effectiveness

State and local adoption of the new **Common Core State Standards (CCSS)** and aligned assessments will require all students to engage in more cognitively demanding tasks than ever before. Yet earlier this year, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) project reported that classroom lessons taught by nearly 3,000 teachers scored higher on indicators related to time and behavior management than on indicators related to developing students' higher-order thinking skills. The trend was remarkably consistent across the five different observation frameworks researchers used to evaluate the lessons.

**Hillsborough County Public Schools** has identified the same pattern in its own classroom observation scores based on the *Framework for Teaching* (see Figure 2). "As Hillsborough begins to introduce the CCSS to teachers, it is framing them as a direct response to the evaluation data," a recent case study by the Aspen Institute reported. The district is helping principals and peer evaluators sharpen their observation and coaching skills so that they can, in turn, help teachers improve on practices essential for helping students meet the demands of the CCSS.

**Figure 2. Classroom Observation Scores in Hillsborough County Public Schools**



\* The performance rating called "progressing" was known as "developing" prior to the 2012–13 school year.

Source: Based on data provided in Curtis, R. (2012.) *Building It Together: The Design and Implementation of Hillsborough County Public Schools' Teacher Evaluation System*. Washington, DC: The Aspen Institute, Appendix C, p. 31.

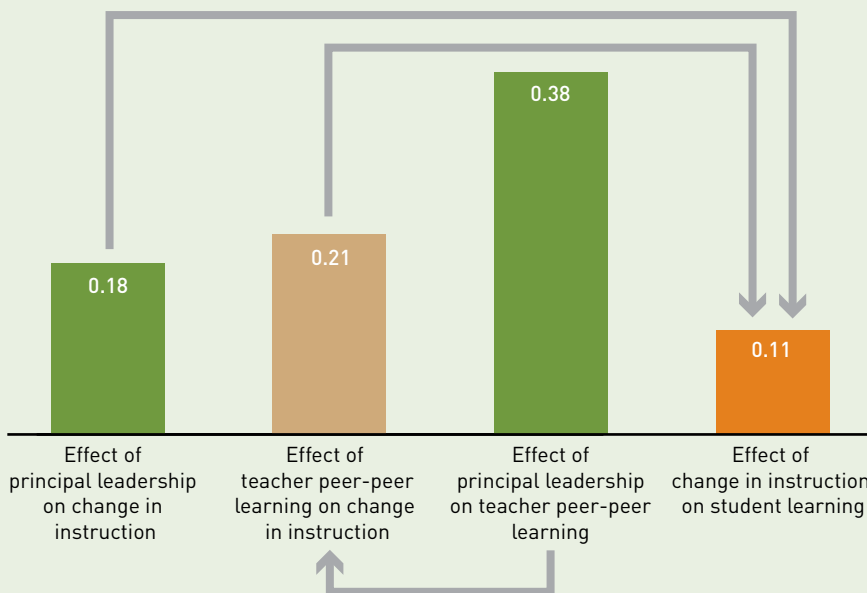
## The School Leadership Challenge

The deepening focus on school leadership in partnership sites and other school systems comes at a time when research continues to affirm that principals can have a significant impact on student learning. For example, a 2008 meta-analysis led by Viviane Robinson, Distinguished Professor at the University of Auckland and director of the University's Centre for Educational Leadership, found that students achieve at higher levels when principals actively plan and participate in teachers' learning and development. "This is a large effect and provides some empirical support for calls to school leaders to be actively involved with their teachers as the 'leading learners' of their schools," the researchers concluded.<sup>1</sup>

A 2010 study by researchers at the University of Pennsylvania found that, in their direct work with teachers, principals can positively influence classroom instructional practices that in turn improve student learning. Moreover, principals also can be instrumental in creating working conditions and opportunities that encourage and allow teachers to learn from and with one another to improve student learning. Because of that combination of direct and indirect impacts, the researchers concluded, "principals are the most important actor in student learning"<sup>2</sup> (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Pathways of Principal Impact in a Mid-Sized Urban District**

*The evidence in this study suggests that principal leadership has a direct and positive impact on classroom instruction (0.18). But principal leadership also has an impact on teachers' professional opportunities to learn from and with one another (0.38), which in turn has a positive impact on classroom instruction (0.21). Finally, changes in classroom instruction are positively related to better student achievement in English/language arts (0.11).*



Source: Based on data provided in Supovitz, J., Sirinides, P., & May, H. (2010). How principals and peers influence teaching and learning. *Educational Administration Quarterly* 4(1), 31–56, Table 2, p. 44.



However, recent studies also have revealed that many principals have a long way to go in providing strong instructional leadership of the kind now expected by school systems. In fact, several recent studies have revealed that principals still spend only 8 to 17 percent of their time on instructional leadership work as opposed to administrative, managerial, or community relations tasks.<sup>3</sup> One study published last year concluded that principals devoted only about 3 to 5 hours per week to activities focused on improving instruction during the two-plus years of the study.<sup>4</sup>

One study published last year concluded that principals devoted only about 3 to 5 hours per week to activities focused on improving instruction during the two-plus years of the study.

Even more sobering, much of that time is spent in ways that have little chance of improving teaching effectiveness. Examining the quality of principals' instructional leadership practices in one mid-sized urban district over a six-day period, University of Pennsylvania researchers found that only one out of 46 direct actions that principals took to improve instruction had a

significant chance of driving improvement. In contrast, "almost half were unfocused and unlikely to lead to any productive instructional change." The researchers concluded that "much of what principals currently call instructional leadership does not pass muster, for much of it is unlikely to produce changes in instruction in their schools."<sup>5</sup>

In a book published last year, *Leading for Instructional Improvement*, Stephen Fink and Anneke Markholt of the University of Washington Center for Educational Leadership (CEL) assert that principals require a much deeper level of expertise to play an effective role in directly orchestrating instructional improvements than is commonly understood.<sup>6</sup> "The art and science of teaching is far more complex and sophisticated than our lay public and policymakers realize," Fink and Markholt contend. "As such, the requisite school leadership to improve teaching practice is also far more complex and sophisticated than most people realize."<sup>7</sup>

Fink and Markholt point out that principals need at least two kinds of related but distinct expertise to be effective instructional leaders. They need to be experts in classroom instruction who are able to observe and analyze teaching practices to pinpoint precise areas of strength, identify opportunities for improvement, and pose questions for further inquiry. And they need to be experts in *adult* learning who can plan and deliver the kinds of supports teachers need to acquire new knowledge and skills. Principals must rely on both sets of expertise to gather deep and detailed evidence about the quality of instruction in all of their classrooms, based on which they can then work with other instructional leaders to provide targeted supports for teaching improvement.

Michael Copland, the former chair of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Washington, who currently serves as a senior program officer with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, believes that a third level of expertise is too often overlooked in debates about instructional leadership. Principals need to be expert learners themselves to continuously build their own expertise and to lead the kind of collaborative inquiry necessary to solve complex problems of teaching and learning. Modeling how to learn, including what cognitive scientists call a “growth mindset,” also is important. “Great principals are learners,” Copland argues, “and they reveal their learning to others as a routine part of their practice.”

Given the critical importance of such sophisticated skills and knowledge, national experts like Fink and Copland are not surprised that most principals still spend so little time on instructional leadership and that so little of that time is actually spent effectively. The problem is not necessarily one of will but of capacity: Most principals simply have not had opportunities to acquire the necessary body of knowledge and skills to be effective leaders of instructional improvements in their schools.

Moreover, the “expertise gap” is just one of several major challenges that school systems must address to enable principals to be effective instructional leaders. Even highly skilled principals say they face great obstacles in carving out as much time as they would like to work with teachers to improve instruction, especially amid the many other demands of their jobs. And many principals are unclear about which instructional leadership practices offer the greatest leverage for improving classroom teaching and student learning, a significant problem given the real constraints on principals’ time. The Wallace Foundation and other organizations have invested heavily in research and development to answer critical questions about school leadership, but much remains to be learned.

For example, while affirming that principals can play a significant role in promoting effective teaching and student learning, some recent research has offered differing perspectives on which leadership practices might offer the biggest returns. Indeed, although principals have been encouraged to be *instructional leaders* for decades, “the term is often more a slogan than a well-defined set of leadership practices,” a team of researchers led by Kenneth Leithwood and Karen Seashore Louis lamented in a report for the Wallace Foundation. “Displacing the sloganistic uses of the term ‘instructional leadership’ with the more precise leadership practices specified by well-developed leadership models is much to be desired.”<sup>8</sup>

Because of the many obstacles principals face in becoming effective instructional leaders, partnership sites and other leading school systems have concluded that the responsibility must be reciprocal. If school systems expect principals to dramatically improve teaching effectiveness by making instructional leadership a primary focus of their day-to-day work, then they must provide principals with the clarity, development, and strategic supports to do that job well.

But those same leaders also are discovering that transforming school systems to perform that new function can be extremely challenging work. “School district central offices were originally established and have historically operated to carry out a limited range of largely regulatory and basic business functions,” explains Meredith Honig, an associate professor of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Washington and a partner at CEL, “not to support teaching and learning improvement, let alone provide intensive supports for principals’ instructional leadership.”<sup>9</sup> Her recent research has explored how school system central offices can provide principals with better job-embedded supports to grow as instructional leaders.

Earlier this year, a team from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, CEL, and Break the Curve worked with partnership sites and other leading school systems to better understand how they are supporting principals to be successful in the new roles expected of them.<sup>10,11</sup> The following sections incorporate examples collected from those school systems and from national experts to illustrate and examine each of the following promising action areas in depth:

1. *Clarify* the principal’s role as an instructional leader by specifying the high-impact practices for which principals will be accountable

2. *Develop* principals’ instructional leadership practices through job-embedded supports that build expertise

3. *Enable* principals to succeed as instructional leaders by providing them with sufficient time and strategic supports to perform the job well

# 1. Clarify the Principal's Role as an Instructional Leader

School systems can reap important benefits by reaching agreement with principals on a common vision for instructional leadership that is granular enough to specify high-impact leadership practices. First, just as teachers are benefiting from more explicit expectations about practices that improve student achievement, principals can benefit from greater clarity about leadership practices. Principals, too, need to be able to calibrate their own day-to-day practices against a clear set of expectations; no one can effectively perform a job that's been nebulously defined.

Second, principals can more efficiently learn from one another because they share a common focus and frame of reference for professional conversations about leadership practice. Teachers in school systems that have adopted detailed instructional frameworks often comment that the framework has created a common foundation for more focused peer feedback and professional conversations about practice.

Finally, school system leaders and central office staff can align all of the policies and programs that “touch” principals—from recruitment and selection to evaluation to professional development—to support them in achieving excellence in a defined set of leadership practices. Central office staff members who are specifically charged with helping principals improve their instructional leadership practices cannot do so if there is no agreement on what the commonly expected practices are and what it looks like to perform them successfully.

Meredith Honig of the University of Washington finds that school systems often skip this important first step. “We work with a lot of districts that want to know what the central office needs to ‘look like,’ but so much of what the central office can do really hinges on the principal’s role,” she explains. “For example, we’re working with a system right now to help them redesign human resources, but it’s limited because, absent principals being good human capital managers, there’s only so far that the human resource system can improve. Districts need to start by getting some real clarity about what principals are expected to do and then work out from there.”

## Emphasizing Instructional Leadership Practices

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Partnership sites are making serious headway in specifying and emphasizing the instructional leadership practices they expect of principals, including human capital management, although many also say much work remains to be done. A growing number of sites are focusing more attention on instructional leadership and human capital practices in principal recruitment, selection, and evaluation.

**Job descriptions.** Two-thirds of partnership sites either have recently revised their principal job descriptions or are in the process doing so, in many cases with the very explicit intention of incorporating a more robust vision of instructional leadership. For example, **Atlanta Public Schools** “revised and updated the principal job descriptions to reflect [the district’s] new vision to focus all work around effective teaching and learning.” As a consequence, “the new job description has a much greater focus on instructional leadership and supporting effective teaching and learning practices.”

“We work with a lot of districts that want to know what the central office needs to ‘look like,’ but so much of what the central office can do really hinges on the principal’s role.”

—Meredith Honig  
University of Washington

Similarly, last year **Memphis City Schools** completely rewrote its principal and assistant principal job descriptions to focus greater attention on the responsibilities related to instructional leadership and human capital management. The new job descriptions send a clear message to principal candidates. Principals must be able to “provide professional development, including embedded and individualized professional development and coaching, to instructional faculty.” And they “increase teacher effectiveness by recruiting, hiring, assigning, and retaining staff.” Nearly half of the 25 bulleted expectations in Memphis’ revised descriptions clearly relate to instructional leadership in some significant way, and the same is true for half of the bulleted expectations in Atlanta’s new job description.

**Selection.** Moving beyond job descriptions, several partnership sites have incorporated performance tasks related to instructional leadership practices into their principal selection processes. Such tasks require candidates to prove that they can accurately observe lessons and provide feedback to teachers, for example, or to demonstrate that they can use evidence to plan and deliver strong professional development for teachers (see Figure 4). **Denver Public Schools** has worked to create exceptionally tight alignment between specific expectations outlined in its *Framework for Effective School Leadership* and several stages of its principal selection process, including a bank of candidate interview questions linked to principal behaviors described in the framework (see Figure 5).

**Figure 4. Using Performance Tasks Related to Instructional Leadership in Principal Selection**

School Systems	Performance Task
Atlanta Public Schools	1) Candidate must observe and rate a video-recorded classroom lesson.
Denver Public Schools	1) Candidate participates in a “live” learning walk in a school and then answers a set of debrief questions that assess how well he or she can observe and develop follow-up plans for improving classroom instruction. 2) Candidate writes an email to a teacher providing post-observation feedback.
Green Dot Public Schools	1) Candidate provides a 20-minute mock professional development session in response to a written prompt (see Figure 6 on p.16). 2) Candidate shadows a Green Dot campus leader for two hours, observing how a principal or assistant principal performs daily duties, after which the candidate shares insights about the role of Green Dot’s school leaders as instructional leaders and identifies areas for improvement and next steps based on what was observed in classrooms.
Hillsborough County Public Schools	1) Candidate observes a portion of a video-recorded classroom lesson and reviews data from that classroom, then the candidate engages in a brief role-playing conversation with a member of the interview panel who plays the role of the video-recorded teacher.
Partnerships to Uplift Communities (PUC) Schools	1) Candidate observes a classroom lesson with the interview panel, collects observational evidence, and engages in a role-playing activity providing feedback and coaching to a member of the interview panel who plays the role of the observed teacher. 2) Candidate presents a mini-professional development session to a group of teachers who then complete a feedback form, after which the interview panel reviews the feedback with the candidate to discern his or her ability to be reflective and to receive feedback openly.



**Figure 5. Examples from Denver Public Schools “Interview Question Bank” for Principal Selection**

Key Indicator from Framework for Effective School Leadership	Principal Behaviors	Relevant Interview Questions for Principal Candidates
<p><b>Instructional Leadership, Indicator IL3:</b></p> <p>Actively supports teachers in implementing high-quality instruction</p>	<p>Leader participates in conversations about instruction with groups of teachers and through ongoing reflective feedback conversations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ “What does the phrase ‘community of practice’ mean to you in relation to a school’s teaching team?”</li> <li>■ “What are the most effective ways for teachers to work together in support of each other’s efforts to improve instructional practice and increase student achievement?”</li> </ul>
	<p>Leader uses classroom observation data to understand strength and growth areas in school-wide instructional practice and uses the data to guide decisions about school-wide professional development.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ “Tell me about a time you observed a teacher and gave him/her feedback to help him/her improve instructional practice. Did your efforts result in changes to his/her practice and/or improvements in his/her student achievement performance?”</li> </ul>
	<p>Leader effectively identifies teacher leaders and creates systems within which teacher leaders can share their expertise and learning with colleagues.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ “How would you empower teachers to take on leadership roles and improve their instructional leadership abilities?”</li> <li>■ “What are the best ways for them to develop their skills in coaching and giving constructive feedback to one another?”</li> </ul>

Source: Denver Public Schools. Used with permission.

Two CMOs that place great emphasis on principals’ planning and providing professional development for teachers require candidates to role-play mock professional development sessions during the selection process. **Partnership to Uplift Communities (PUC) Schools** asks candidates to present professional development to classroom teachers, who then fill out a form providing feedback on the quality of the session. Figure 6 shows **Green Dot Public Schools’** prompt for candidates’ 20-minute mock professional development exercise.

Such performance tasks require a substantial time commitment not only from candidates but also from employees participating in principal selection. But Cristina de Jesus, Green Dot’s President and Chief Academic Officer, explains why it is essential. “We want an effective teacher in every classroom, and there’s time for weekly professional development set aside at every single school, so that professional development better be good, and we better see its impact in the classroom,” she explains. “We were finding that a lot of administrators didn’t have that capability. They didn’t understand the level of instruction they needed to know to really dissect and come up with the right training for teachers. If they were coming from a large district, many of these folks had never even been asked to lead professional development.”

De Jesus says Green Dot now clearly communicates to all principals and all candidates for the principalship that, “As an administrator, your ‘students’ are your teachers. The whole school is your classroom, and you need to treat it like your classroom.”

**Figure 6. Prompt for Mock Professional Development Session During Green Dot's Principal Selection Process**

# School Leader Hiring Process

## Step 3: Panel Presentation

You are the principal of a school with a teaching staff comprised of roughly 25% veteran teachers. The remaining 75% of teachers have less than three years of experience. After reflecting on teacher evaluation data from the prior year, your team decided to provide summer professional development on the topic of Academic Discourse. You offered a half day introductory session focused on the three key components of Academic Discourse: using academic vocabulary, supporting ideas with evidence and referencing text. The collaboration was led by you and your English department chair. The teacher evaluation rubric language for Academic Discourse is provided below.

Level 1: Does Not Meet Standard	Level 2: Partially Meets Standard	Level 3: Meets Standard	Level 4: Exemplifies Standard
Conversations in whole and small group settings are moderated by the teacher and elicit little academic discourse (e.g., content vocabulary, scholarly language, or students justifying, explaining, or defending their answer) among students.	During conversations in whole and small group settings, discussion is facilitated by the teacher, and academic discourse among students is inconsistent and/or students inconsistently use content vocabulary, justification, explanation or defense of their answers. Discourse may also be limited to a small number of students..	Conversations in whole and small group settings are facilitated by the teacher and involve students in consistent levels of academic discourse; students display some, but not all of the following: initiating and talking about an academic idea, using academic vocabulary, supporting ideas with evidence, referencing text, etc.	All of level 3 and... Conversations are facilitated by students. Students talk without prompting about an academic idea, using academic vocabulary and support ideas with evidence.

During the first month of school, the Instructional Leadership Team (department chairs) observed 30 classrooms looking for implementation data. Additionally, the administrative team conducted its first round of informal observations. The average rubric scores from the observations are listed below:

Academic Discourse	Elective	English	History	Math	Science
<b>ILT Observation Scores</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>2.7</b>
<b>Admin Observation</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>2.5</b>

Create a 20 minute professional development session that will serve as a follow-up to the summer introduction to input. It will be important to consider the following when planning the session:

- Does the professional development session differentiate for the varied skill levels of teachers?
- Does the professional development session respond to the implementation data?
- Does the professional development session tie theory and practice?
- Does the professional development session offer opportunities for reflection and follow-up?

Please bring any materials and/or resources you plan to use for the 20-minute session. You will be required to present your session in front of a panel of three to four people on the day scheduled for your interview. You will be evaluated in the following areas:

- ✓ Organization and preparation of the session
- ✓ Presentation of material
- ✓ Knowledge of the subject matter
- ✓ Knowledge of adult learning theory



“As an administrator, your ‘students’ are your teachers. The whole school is your classroom, and you need to treat it like your classroom.”

—Cristina de Jesus  
Green Dot Public Schools

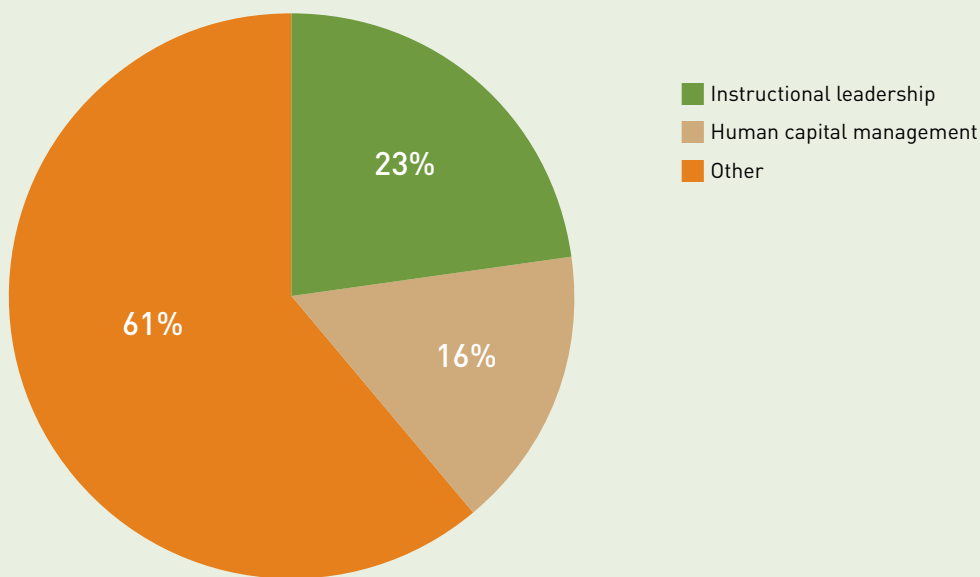
Source: Green Dot Public Schools. Used with permission.

**Evaluation.** Sites also are designing new principal evaluation systems that include more explicit expectations for instructional leadership, including human capital management. In most cases, school systems have made instructional leadership a discrete rated domain in the leader evaluation framework. Figure 7 shows the proportion of separate domains across 10 principal evaluation rubrics that focus explicitly on instructional leadership and human capital management.

In some cases, school systems' recent redesign of teacher evaluation highlighted a clear need to follow up by redesigning principal evaluations to align with the new expectations for teachers. **Hillsborough County Public Schools'** new principal evaluation system examines how well principals retain *effective* teachers in their schools, taking into account retirements and promotions as well as dismissal of teachers rated ineffective.

Some sites have been focusing more attention on instructional leadership and human capital management in principal evaluation for at least half a decade. For example, in 2007, **Pittsburgh Public School** leaders worked with the Pittsburgh Administrators Association to develop PULSE: Principal Urban Leadership System for Excellence. PULSE is a comprehensive system to recruit, train, support, evaluate, develop, and compensate principals with a focus on student growth and academic achievement. The principal evaluation standards developed for PULSE place strong emphasis on instructional leadership and human capital management.

**Figure 7. Proportion of Domains Focusing on Instructional Leadership or Human Capital Management in 10 School Systems' Principal Evaluation Frameworks**



Note: The 10 frameworks included 56 domains total. Domains in the "other" category typically covered such topics as organizational management, resource management, strategic leadership, external relations or communications, and family and community involvement.

## Walking the Walk: How Green Dot Public Schools Consistently Reinforces Expectations for Principals to Be Leaders of Teacher Learning

Leaders of **Green Dot Public Schools** expect principals to “own” teacher learning and ensure high-quality professional development for all teachers. In fact, Green Dot principals do not just plan and arrange professional development opportunities for teachers; they also take an unusually active role in delivering professional development to teachers. “As an administrator, your ‘students’ are your teachers,” president and chief academic officer Cristina de Jesus tells principals. “The whole school is your classroom, and you need to treat it like your classroom.”

Green Dot then reinforces the message and supports principals to successfully execute that instructional leadership practice through a series of aligned policies. For example:

- Green Dot requires candidates for principal positions to provide a mock professional development session as a key part of the selection process (see Figure 6).
- “Planning Effective Professional Development” is one of four key areas of focus in Green Dot’s Administrator in Residence program for aspiring and first-year principals.
- Green Dot’s home office developed a *Professional Development Rubric* to guide principals and other administrators in planning and delivering high-quality professional development to teachers.
- The school calendar sets aside large blocks of time each Friday for principals to lead teacher professional development.
- Cluster directors and other members of Green Dot’s home office visit schools to observe Friday professional development sessions and provide feedback to principals based on the *Professional Development Rubric*.

- Green Dot’s home office identified three expert principals who now serve as principal professional development advisors and whose schools offer “lab sites” where other principals can visit to observe effective professional development in action.

Green Dot’s leaders also consistently consider the principal’s role when planning and evaluating additional instructional supports for teachers, making sure that the home office never delivers teacher supports *around* principals but rather always *through and with* principals. For example:

- Last year Green Dot leaders noticed that some principals might be viewing a new cadre of district-based instructional coaches as supplanting rather than supporting principals’ own role in leading teacher learning. “Now we’re really working hard to explain to principals that these are instructional supports they can leverage, but it’s your school, and you need to be responsible for teacher development,” de Jesus explains. “You need to follow up with teachers to confirm, ‘This is my understanding of what you talked with the coach about, and here’s how I’m going to follow up in my next observation of your classroom.’”
- School system leaders also carefully considered the principal’s role when designing Green Dot’s new Demonstration Classroom Teacher program. After participating teachers observe an expert demonstration teacher’s lesson and debrief with that teacher and a facilitator, Green Dot expects teachers to debrief with their principal or assistant principal back in their own buildings. “That follow-up is important because we expect our principals to own teacher development,” says de Jesus. “Instructional leadership can’t just be somebody else’s problem.”

## Prioritizing Instructional Leadership Practices

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Several years ago Kim Marshall, the former principal of Boston’s Mather School, conducted a time-and-motion study of how much time it would take to fully execute eight commonly recommended instructional leadership practices. He concluded that the typical principal simply would not have enough hours in the school year to complete all eight. “A principal must *choose*,” Marshall argues, “and a wise principal will focus time and energy on the activities that contribute the most to teaching and learning.”<sup>12</sup>

Marshall makes an important point that partnership sites and other leading school systems are beginning to confront: Clarifying a vision for instructional leadership cannot simply involve adding a long list of bulleted responsibilities to the existing list. Eventually it involves making tough choices about which instructional leadership practices matter most as well as deciding which *other* kinds of responsibilities should be reduced to enable principals to focus on teaching and learning.

Fortunately, formal research studies like the one by Viviane Robinson and her colleagues are beginning to shed more light on which instructional leadership practices can have the biggest impact on teaching and learning. That study found that actively “promoting and participating in teacher learning and development” had a strong impact on student achievement. Two other practices had a moderate impact: “planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum” and “establishing goals and expectations.” However, researchers are hardly unanimous about which practices make the most difference.

**Uncommon Schools**, a CMO with schools in New Jersey, New York, and Massachusetts, undertook its own in-house study to identify and prioritize the highest-impact instructional leadership practices for principals. Paul Bambrick-Santoyo, managing director of the CMO’s North Star Academies in Newark, New Jersey, studied the instructional leadership practices of successful principals across the Uncommon Schools network. He only selected principals whose schools achieved at very high levels, who were able to replicate those results when they moved to other schools, and whose former schools maintained high performance.

Based on close observation of those principals, Bambrick-Santoyo identified seven practices, which he calls “leadership levers,” that he and other CMO leaders are now helping all principals master. Described in great detail in a recently published book called *Leverage Leadership*, four of those levers involve working with teachers directly to improve instruction, and three levers deal with school climate and organizational management (see Figure 8).<sup>13</sup>

“A principal must *choose* ... and a wise principal will focus time and energy on the activities that contribute the most to teaching and learning.”

—Kim Marshall  
Boston’s Mather School

## Figure 8. Successful Instructional Leadership Practices of Uncommon Schools Principals

### Instructional Levers

1. **Data-driven instruction.** Define the roadmap for rigor and adapt teaching to meet students' needs.
2. **Observation and feedback.** Give all teachers professional, one-on-one coaching that increases their effectiveness as instructors.
3. **Instructional planning.** Guarantee every student well-structured lessons that teach the right content.
4. **Professional development.** Strengthen both culture and instruction with hands-on training that sticks.

### Cultural Levers

1. **Student culture.** Create a strong culture where learning thrives.
2. **Staff culture.** Build and support the right team for your school.
3. **Managing school leadership teams.** Train instructional leaders to expand your impact across the school.

Source: Bambrick-Santoyo, P. (2012). *Leverage Leadership: A Practical Guide to Building Exceptional Schools*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, An Imprint of John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Moreover, Bambrick-Santoyo contends that school systems need to make clear that such high-impact instructional leadership practices are the principals' primary day-to-day work, and that everything else—including such staples of principal leadership as community relations—should come second or not at all. “I have been studying the list of principal standards for different states and districts, and they’re too long,” he says. “We need to separate the wheat from the chaff as we’ve done with the Common Core State Standards.” He urges state and local school systems to “put a stake in the ground” the way Uncommon Schools has done with its seven levers.

The goal is not simply to make expectations more manageable but also to make excellence more accessible. “You want to get very granular on a manageable number of expectations so you can help principals achieve excellence on them,” Bambrick-Santoyo explains. “For example, under ‘observations and feedback,’ I want to know the actual quality of the leader’s practice occurring in those feedback sessions with teachers. That matters. But the only way you can get to that granular level of detail is if you eliminate a ton of other stuff.”

At the same time, other experts have recently cautioned that certain responsibilities not generally considered “instructional leadership,” traditionally defined, might also matter a great deal for student learning. Stanford University researcher Susanna Loeb has warned against “narrowing the principal’s focus to only overseeing day-to-day instructional practices and observing teachers in classrooms at the expense of managing key organizational functions, such as budgeting and maintaining campus facilities. Rather, we might conceive of effective instructional leadership as combining an understanding of the instructional needs of the school with an ability to target resources where they are needed, hire the best available teachers, and keep the school running smoothly.”

## Operationalizing Instructional Leadership Practices

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Although their research identified some leadership practices that can have an impact on student learning, Robinson and her colleagues strongly caution that effective execution of any particular practices “requires an understanding of the particular qualities that are responsible for their impact.” For example, “take the dimension with the strongest effects—leadership of teachers professional learning and development. Increased leadership of this sort could be counterproductive if it is done without reference to the evidence about the particular qualities and processes of teacher professional development that produce effects on the students of the participating teachers.”<sup>14</sup>

To that end, partnership sites are realizing that their considerable work to help teachers and principals understand what effective *instructional* practices look like in classrooms must be mirrored by similar work to help principals understand what effective *leadership* practices look like in daily work. Just as teachers need to understand the more and less powerful ways to “check for understanding” during a lesson, principals need to understand, for example, how providing feedback on an observed lesson can help a teacher improve as well as the particular qualities that make feedback more or less useful to teachers.

In that vein, **Green Dot Public Schools** developed a *Professional Development Rubric* to guide principals in planning and delivering high-quality professional development, one of the key instructional leadership practices the CMO expects of all principals. Leaders from the home office visit schools to observe Friday professional development sessions to provide feedback to principals based on the *Professional Development Rubric*. Green Dot also recently identified three expert principals who now serve as Principal Professional Development Advisors and whose schools offer “lab sites” where other principals can visit to observe effective professional development in action.

In *Leverage Leadership*, Bambrick-Santoyo devotes separate chapters to fleshing out each of the seven leadership practices of successful Uncommon Schools principals. For example, in his chapter on observation and feedback, he explains the process by which feedback leads to improvements in teaching practice; describes the characteristics of effective compared with ineffective feedback; and offers a six-step process for planning and conducting useful feedback sessions with teachers. He illustrates his points with real-life examples from instructional leaders in Uncommon Schools. Finally, just as some school systems that have adopted new instructional frameworks make available videos of classroom lessons that model effective practice, Bambrick-Santoyo offers video-recorded clips of successful principals to illustrate key elements of effective leadership practices.

# Key Considerations for School Systems

## Action Area 1.

*Clarify the principal's role as an instructional leader by specifying the high-impact practices for which principals will be accountable*

**PROBLEM:** Principals and central office leaders often lack agreement on a vision for instructional leadership that establishes explicit expectations for principals' day-to-day practice. As a result, busy principals are unclear about which instructional leadership practices offer the greatest leverage for cultivating effective teaching, and central office units cannot align policies and programs to help principals achieve excellence on a core set of high-impact leadership practices.

- Has the school system collaborated with principals to reach agreement on an explicit vision for instructional leadership that specifies a core set of leadership practices for cultivating effective teaching in every classroom?
- Does that vision *prioritize* a manageable number of leadership practices that are most likely to have a significant impact on teaching and learning based on empirical evidence from published research or from a study of the school system's most successful principals?
- Has the school system taken the extra step to flesh out (*operationalize*) each of the agreed-on practices so that:
  - all principals understand the rationale for each practice and *why* it has been prioritized;
  - all principals understand how each practice leads to gains in teaching effectiveness and student achievement; and
  - performance descriptors and real-life examples illustrate *what* successful execution of each practice looks like in a principal's daily work?
- Does the school system *emphasize* the critical importance of those agreed-on practices by:
  - communicating that principals should prioritize the practices above other lower-impact tasks in their day-to-day work, including in their weekly calendars; and
  - reducing or eliminating other lower-impact responsibilities in principal job descriptions or evaluation rubrics?
- Has the school system aligned key personnel policies to emphasize and support successful execution of those particular leadership practices?
  - Do principal job descriptions communicate the key importance of those instructional leadership practices?
  - Does the principal selection process require candidates to demonstrate that they understand and can successfully engage in those practices?
- Are principals evaluated primarily based on their ability to successfully execute those practices in ways that lead to measurable gains in teaching effectiveness and student achievement? Does the evaluation system help principals establish clear goals for improving on targeted practices?



## 2. Develop Principals' Instructional Leadership Practices

Traditionally, school systems have managed schools and supervised principals through an administrative branch organized into regional offices led by area superintendents,<sup>15</sup> while another branch offered principals occasional professional development on topics not especially selected to meet their individual needs. Sometimes districts have hired or appointed principal coaches or mentor principals, but those individuals have not been executive-level leaders in the central office. Such an approach has made it difficult for school systems to offer principals coherent and consistent job-embedded opportunities to improve their instructional leadership skills.

According to Meredith Honig of the University of Washington, “a growing handful of urban school districts have launched ambitious reforms of their central offices” intended to remove such barriers.<sup>16</sup> In those districts, every department and every leader who interacts with principals are becoming part of an integrated system of supports explicitly intended to develop principals' expertise. Just as **Green Dot Public Schools** expects its principals to view school staff members as their “students” and to approach school leadership as teaching, these reforms reimagine “district central office leadership as teaching” that strengthens principals' instructional leadership practices.

### Coaching from Central Office: Instructional Leadership Directors

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“As part of these strategies,” Honig writes in a study published in October's *Education Administration Quarterly*, “the position of area superintendent has been radically rewritten to focus not on running a regionally based segment of the central office but on working with small groups of principals individually and in networks to develop their capacity for instructional leadership.”<sup>17</sup> Honig and her research colleagues have coined the term “instructional leadership director” (ILD) to describe this new job, although in practice every school system uses a different title.<sup>18</sup>

ILDs are different from principal coaches or mentor principals employed by some school systems because they are executive-level leaders who generally report directly to the superintendent or, in larger districts, to an associate or deputy superintendent or to a chief academic officer. That position in the central office hierarchy reduces the distance between the superintendent and the principal, reinforcing for all employees that the superintendent understands and supports the principal's new role as both a leader of instruction and a “learner” of instructional leadership. Of course, school systems can vary greatly in size and in the smallest systems, principals can report directly to the superintendent or deputy superintendent. But the goal is the same: Whoever supervises principals becomes a coach and teacher rather than merely a manager and evaluator.

For this project, we asked all of the partnership sites and several other school systems which central office leaders come closest to matching the ILD role as described by Honig. The **Appendix**, on page 50, provides a table listing those job titles among partnership sites, along with information on the number of such leaders and the average number of principals they support in each site. We followed up by interviewing a number of these leaders in person and by phone, sometimes individually and sometimes in groups, to get a better sense of how they are working with principals to become stronger instructional leaders. (Two ILDs are profiled on pp. 27 and 28.)

Although a number of school systems are intentionally moving toward the ILD vision, they are taking varied approaches to rethinking principal supervision and support. **Hillsborough County Public Schools** and **Prince George’s County Public Schools** offer a useful strategic contrast. Hillsborough redefined the job of area director and is providing current employees with training and support to perform the new role. Prince George’s County restructured its regional offices entirely, creating a new position called “instructional director” and hiring new personnel to play the role.

**Hillsborough County Public Schools.** Last year Hillsborough County made a major shift in the role of its eight area directors, retitling the position “area leadership director” and rewriting the job description to introduce a greater focus on supporting principals’ instructional leadership. Hillsborough’s previous description of the area director position was a textbook example of the traditional focus on supervisory management, not only in the area director’s role but also in the principalship: “The area director supervises the day-to-day operations of the school and the school budgets for a specific geographic area to assure proper implementation of school board policy and procedures. In a sense, they are the ‘principals’ principal.’ ”



Now, just as Hillsborough expects principals to be leaders of learning for teachers, the district also expects area leadership directors (ALDs) to be leaders of learning for principals. To support ALDs in making that difficult transition, the school system contracted with The New Teacher Center to provide training in “blended coaching” strategies for all eight ALDs over the course of last year. Through that training, ALDs have learned new techniques to coach principals through questioning and feedback rather than always offering directive advice. They have learned how to encourage principals to solve problems for themselves and in collaboration with their ALDs. The school district also hired seven principal coaches who can help ALDs support novice and struggling principals.

For George Gaffney, a five-year area director who works with 33 traditional schools and a career center for at-risk teenagers, the journey has been gradual, challenging, and ultimately rewarding. “This has been a shift in my communications with principals to use better questioning techniques rather than being so directive, which is the biggest thing for me,” Gaffney explains. “We’ve had to learn how to help principals solve problems rather than solving their problems for them.”

For example, he says, for most of last year he was very directive with a principal struggling to adapt after moving from an elementary to a middle school, until he adopted a coaching stance toward the end of the year. “During my last conversation with her,” Gaffney explains, “I went around my desk and sat down beside her, which changed the dynamics of our conversation.” Then, he says, “I took myself out of that role of being her supervisor, and I put myself in a position of coaching her. I think she noticed the change, that I was no longer here just to direct her and evaluate her, but to assist her. If she failed, I failed. And I had to share with her that I don’t always have the answers myself, but through both of our inputs, we will come up with a good solution together.”

Ironically, says Gaffney, “as an area leadership director, when I can let go of the control, stop directing everything that is taking place, and put it into their hands, I feel an even greater sense of control. You’re in control but you’re not controlling, if that makes sense. For me that has been a big transition.”

**Prince George’s County Public Schools.** When he was still deputy superintendent of Prince George’s County Public Schools in 2008, former Superintendent William Hite penned a white paper on what the school system needed to do to boost human capital for instructional improvement. “Each office should facilitate and support the individual growth of principals,” Hite’s paper asserted. “This support should be in the form of modeling, mentoring, and coaching, with a heavy emphasis on instructional improvement, teacher evaluation, and data analysis.” To accomplish that, he argued, “the role of the assistant superintendents must change. Too many priorities, too many schools, too few resources all prevent the role from operating to more effectively address the varying needs of principals.” Area leaders should oversee no more than 15 principals each, the paper suggested, and “their performance should be measured against the growth of the principals.”

In 2011, Hite dismantled a regional system in which five associate superintendents were attempting to play a more strongly supportive role for as many as 40 principals each and replaced it with 13 new instructional director positions to supervise and support about 15 principals each. Instructional directors report to one of three associate superintendents who in turn report to the district's chief academic officer. The district also cut 90 intermediary positions that once supported the area offices. "I said the sole purpose of this role is to develop the capacity of the principal, not to run the principal's school, and this is so important to me that I am taking everybody else away," says Hite.

The school system clearly communicated the superintendent's vision and rationale for the instructional director position as it recruited and hired candidates for the job. "The goal is to build instructional leadership capacity at each school," Chris Mills, the principal of Kenilworth Elementary School, told local newspaper *The Gazette* when he accepted an offer in June 2011. Jane Spence, the principal of Bowie High School and another successful

candidate, told *The Gazette* that, "Regional school supervisors in the **Prince George's County Public School** system previously functioned as 'jacks-of-all trades,' but the restructured administrative team will primarily focus on improving teaching."

Over the past year, P.G. County's new instructional directors have worked together and with their associate superintendents to add flesh to that vision while continuing to hone their own

expertise. Hite describes one instructional director whom he has observed in action: "She is always in a school as a support mechanism. She observes, and most importantly, she listens," he says. "She's able to see nuances, but she's always asking the question, 'What can I do to help you get at this a different way?' She's a problem-solver and she can model with the best of them, but she doesn't immediately respond with a solution. She helps principals to think towards the solution themselves."

Based on an in-depth case study of ILDs in three urban school districts, Honig identified the following set of strategies as most likely to contribute to greater improvement in principals' instructional leadership practices:

- Engaging in "joint work" focused on principals' authentic problems of instructional leadership practice;
- Modeling how instructional leaders think and act;
- Developing and using tools that reinforce good instructional leadership practice and using those tools to help principals reflect on their own practices;
- Acting as "brokers" who connect principals with useful resources or buffer them from demands that distract from instructional leadership;
- Differentiating support based both on principals' needs and on school context; and
- Helping principals learn from and with one another through peer networks.<sup>19</sup>

Taken together, the strategies illustrate how the most successful ILDs adopt a supportive "teaching stance" in their work with principals and use techniques that research has shown to best facilitate adult learning. The two profiles in this section illustrate how principal supervisors in partnership sites and other leading school systems are incorporating such strategies into their own work.

"We've had to learn how to help principals solve problems rather than solving their problems for them."

—George Gaffney  
Hillsborough County  
Public Schools

## PROFILE: Judith White

### Instructional Director, Prince George's County Public Schools



"We are in our schools all the time. We are on the road," says Judith White of the work she and a dozen colleagues do as P.G. County's brand new cadre of instructional directors. In her new job, Judith supervises and supports 15 principals across three of the district's middle schools, 11 elementary schools, and one early childhood center. She estimates that she spends about 80 percent of her working hours outside of the central office administration building visiting schools or traveling between schools.

Judith brings a wealth of expertise to her new role. She was an assistant principal for four years and a principal for seven, during which she led a school that had been designated "in need of improvement" to performing at high levels on state-wide assessments. She participated in the pilot program of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards' new national certification process for principals, and she is a "trainer of trainers" for the National Institute for School Leadership. She also mentored novice principals who each shadowed her for a year as part of P.G. County's Resident Principal program.

"So I have done a lot around this thing we call the 'principalship' and being a good instructional leader," she says. Nevertheless, she does not view her job as simply telling her 15 principals how to achieve success. "You have to move them in the right direction without doing their jobs for them," she explains. "Because if you do their jobs for them, they still won't know how to address the same issues when they come up again."

That kind of teaching approach takes a great deal of intensive one-on-one work with principals. She points to a February day on her calendar when she visited one school at 10:00 a.m., a second at 1:00 p.m., a third nearby school at 2:00 p.m., and a fourth at 3:00 p.m. The second and third visits were with two relatively "high flying" principals who did not need as much of her time. The final visit was with a brand new principal, so Judith scheduled that one last in order to spend more time in the school. "I had five new principals this year," she says, "and for those five, I spent a lot more in their schools and probably talked with each at least four times every week."

Judith usually schedules follow-up visits depending on the next steps she and a principal agree to at the end of each visit, and she emails a "communication summary" to the principal as soon as possible. She developed a template for her communication summaries that includes space to record areas of success she observed, areas for improvement, steps the principal agreed to take, any assistance she will provide, and the goal for her follow-up visit. All of that information also flows into a Google Docs template she created to maintain a running summary for her work with each principal over the course of the year.

Judith's highly strategic approach to scheduling and record-keeping enables her to provide focused and ongoing support to help principals develop new skills and solve concrete problems. She points to one of her communication summaries from a visit during which she and a principal discussed how to conduct "learning walks" to obtain more detailed evidence about the quality of instruction in classrooms, after which she sent him an example of a letter to teachers about the activity that he could adapt for his own staff. Judith also scheduled a follow-up visit to review his draft letter and plan, during which the principal role-played conversations with teachers so Judith could give him targeted feedback. She also visited the school again on the day of the learning walk to support the principal during the activity and debrief afterward.

To enable her principals to maximize time for that kind of instructional leadership, Judith helps them manage demands from the central office. "When things are due, they're due, but we try to prep them in advance. You try to make the pill the smallest pill to swallow." By the same token, she often acts as a bridge to other central office departments so her principals can get what they need. "The ability to communicate and have people work on your behalf is very important in this role, so when I call, my schools get serviced."

Finally, Judith also frequently models good instructional leadership practices for principals who need to understand what such practices look like and sound like. "There is nothing that I ask them to learn how to do that I am not willing to show them myself," she explains. Sometimes she identifies a principal who is highly skilled in a particular practice, either one of her own or one who works with another instructional director, so a principal can visit another school to observe a peer model effective instructional leadership. In either case, she makes sure the principal understands the thinking behind the action. "I will ask, 'Did you see how she did that? Tell me what you saw and your reflection on that. How would you change what you're doing based on what you observed?'"

## PROFILE: Rolando “Rudy” Treviño

### School Improvement Officer, Houston Independent School District



Rudy Treviño brings a sharp vision for what he expects of principals as instructional leaders to his job as a school improvement officer (SIO) for 13 elementary schools and three early childhood centers in Houston Independent School District. “We cannot talk about principals as instructional leaders if they are not in the classrooms, if they can’t identify effective teaching, if they don’t understand instructional strategy, if they are not able to apply different skill sets to assist and mentor teachers,” he explains. “The business is teaching and learning, and they need to be able to learn themselves.”

That clear vision for school leadership shapes how Rudy works with the principals he supervises and supports. “For me, that means I am in the classrooms a great deal of time with them,” he says. “We constantly have conversations about what is taking place in the classrooms.” He relies heavily on his own experience as a classroom-focused middle school assistant principal, elementary principal, and principal of Houston’s nationally award-winning Eastwood Academy high school.

Rudy is one of 29 Houston SIOs who each report to a chief elementary schools officer, chief middle schools officer, or chief high schools officer. That grade-level configuration replaced the school system’s traditional regional offices as part of a massive restructuring in 2010–11. From the beginning, the school system communicated that the new SIO position would be more about principal support than supervision. “The school improvement officers are all highly successful, energetic, reform-minded leaders who will provide coaching, mentoring, and support to HISD school principals,” the *Houston Chronicle* reported when the first cadre was selected in March 2010.

To fulfill that role, Rudy spends as much time as he can in schools. “Ideally, my Outlook calendar is scheduled to allow me to visit every school once a week, and I have three brand new principals who I often visit twice per week.” A 16-to-1 ratio makes that impossible in some weeks, but there are others when he meets his goal, “even if it’s only an hour at some of the schools to be able to debrief and keep up with how those principals are doing as instructional leaders.”

Except for Tuesday mornings, when he meets with his fellow SIOs and other central office leaders, Rudy generally tries to schedule every day around school visits from early morning until late afternoon, after which he breaks to check emails, returns phone calls, and handle other administrative tasks. “Hopefully, on most days my Outlook calendar is filled with school and classroom visits and coaching and mentoring principals from 7:00 a.m. until at least 3:00 p.m.,” he says. “I live out of my car,” he jokes, “and my principals let me work out of their offices if I really need to deal with something.”

Rudy relies on a wide variety of coaching strategies to help principals grow as instructional leaders, including shadowing principals, co-observing and debriefing about classroom lessons, and providing targeted feedback on principals’ conversations with teachers and parents. He also models how instructional leaders can work effectively with teachers. For example, “I often participate in the professional learning community meetings where teachers are engaged in talking about their practice, and I will model how to ask teachers questions that support their learning so the principal can see and hear that.”

Rudy also offers his principals opportunities to learn from and with one other. For example, he often convenes a handful of principals at a school to observe a particular strategy, provide feedback to the host principal, and debrief about what they can learn for improving instructional programs or climate back at their own schools. He finds that it is much easier to conduct such visits with a smaller group of principals because larger groups are more disruptive for the host school and not as conducive to deep intellectual analysis among the visiting principals.

Tools such as frameworks and protocols offer important support for Rudy’s work with principals, whether he is providing one-on-one coaching or facilitating peer-learning activities. “Normally, I use a protocol, whether I’m doing a walkthrough with a principal or we’re visiting another school, because that leads to more focused conversations,” he says. “I use a lot of those kinds of tools, particularly if I’m having one of those challenging conversations where I’m asking them to reflect critically on their own practice and analyze how their behaviors contribute to certain responses from teachers.”

Rudy says the SIO role reflects a paradigm shift in central office leadership similar to the evolution of principals from building managers to instructional leaders. “We need to think about, are we simply supervising and micromanaging and telling people what to do, or can we cross the bridge to building capacity by becoming mentors, coaches, and modelers of the practice,” he explains. “I love helping people grow and coaching them and mentoring them, and I think that is one of the reasons I was selected to be a school improvement officer.”

The two profiles of ILDs in this section illustrate how principal supervisors are becoming principal *supporters* in some school systems, helping principals develop the capacity to cultivate teaching effectiveness and improve student learning. Such leaders incorporate much more explicit “teaching” into their work with principals than central office leaders have in the past—through coaching, modeling, collaborative problem solving, and facilitating peer learning opportunities. In order to execute such a function, however, they need to build their calendars around work with principals in schools rather than meetings in the central office. Furthermore, such work is far from easy, and they must fight to keep the focus on instruction rather than the operational issues that can often swamp principals’ daily work lives (see sidebar on p. 45, “How One Associate Superintendent Is Carving Out More Time for Instructional Leadership Work with Principals”).

Finally, it is important to keep in mind that this kind of work is very new for central office leaders, and much remains to be learned about the most effective strategies ILDs can adopt for developing principals’ practices in ways that have the biggest impact on teaching and learning. Research such as Honig’s continues to reveal valuable lessons, but establishing causal links between particular ILD practices and improvements in student learning will require even more sophisticated research designs moving forward.

In the meantime, it is clear that central office leaders like Judith White and Rudy Trevino are working in ways that do offer principals a very new kind of personalized and job-embedded form of professional development and support. The “lonely job of being a principal,” as **Aspire Public Schools** leaders characterize it, is no longer so lonely in school systems such as these. However, this new role also requires school systems to rethink the kinds of support they provide central office leaders who supervise and support principals.

## A Broader System of Supports for Strengthening Leadership Practices

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According to Honig, school systems need to avoid the trap of thinking about ILDs as the only source of professional learning for principals. “The superintendent needs to work with other central office leaders to figure out a full complement of supports that principals need to be successful,” she says. “The ILDs are a piece of that, and because of their partnership with principals, they work on the ‘front lines’ of a system of support for principals. But they need to be on the front lines of *something*. ILDs can’t do it by themselves.”

Partnership sites are providing a wide range of supports for principals as instructional leaders. Figure 9 shows the kinds of supports that sites described in response to an open-ended question about supports for principals. Nearly three out of four sites described professional development on their new teacher evaluation systems, particularly training on how to accurately observe lessons and provide feedback based on instructional frameworks, as a successful support for principals’ instructional leadership.

Stacey Vernon, a secondary level principal in **Tulsa Public Schools**, describes how she leveraged the school system’s new *Teacher and Leadership Effectiveness* (TLE) framework to deepen and calibrate her staff’s understanding of effective instruction. After piloting the TLE with a group of Edison Preparatory School teachers, Vernon planned and implemented a yearlong “deep dive” into the framework for the rest of her teaching staff. Every two weeks

“It’s an evaluation system that can lead to professional conversations about effectiveness. To me, that’s when I felt like I was the most effective as an instructional leader up to that point in my career.”

—Stacey Vernon  
Tulsa Public Schools

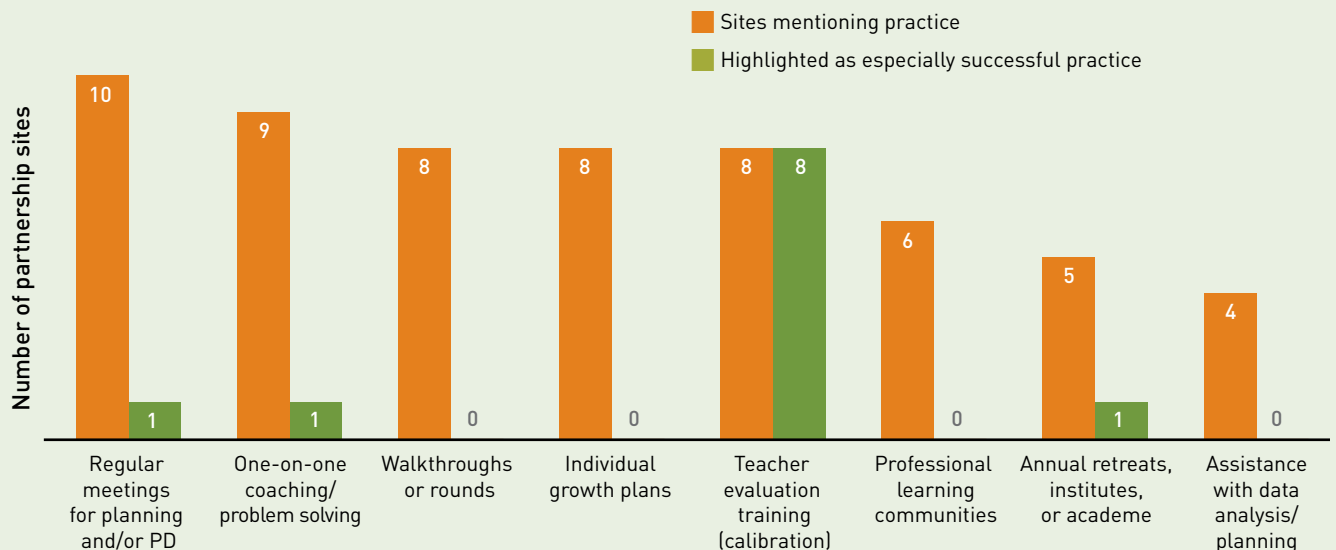
the staff focused on one indicator or a pair of related indicators on the TLE framework. Although the professional development was voluntary, about 80 percent of Edison’s teachers participated each week.

“I created PowerPoints that went with each indicator, with examples of what effectiveness would look like for that indicator,” explains Vernon. “We offered examples of artifacts if it was an indicator that lent itself to that and resources we identified on the Web. We put up flip videos of our teachers who excelled in that indicator. We also identified teachers in our building who were experts in that indicator, based on my and other administrators’ observations, and who agreed to open their classroom doors to anyone who wanted to come watch them teach.” At the end of the year, she asked teachers who had been identified as experts in particular indicators to lead professional development on those instructional practices for new staff members moving forward.

“Then during the second week of work on each indicator, we asked teachers to reflect on what they had heard and seen and to share their own best practices and artifacts,” says Vernon. “We also calibrated. We said, ‘Now that you’ve had this experience, do you see an “effective” practice as something different than the administration presented it, and if so, let’s talk about it and let’s all come to an agreement about what a effective practice on this indicator looks like in this building.’ ”

Vernon says that adopting such an evaluation system would be her top advice to any school system hoping to better support principals as instructional leaders. “It’s an evaluation system that can lead to professional conversations about effectiveness,” she explains. “To me, that’s when I felt like I was the most effective as an instructional leader up to that point in my career.”

**Figure 9. School Systems’ Supports for Principals as Instructional Leaders**



Source: Survey of partnership sites conducted in spring 2012.



Telephone interviews and site visits revealed how sites are leveraging the most common type of support, regular meetings of principals, to become better cultivators of teaching effectiveness in their schools. School systems are:

- Refocusing principal meetings on effective instruction instead of operational concerns;
- Deepening principals' knowledge about curriculum and effective instructional practices;
- Providing principals with opportunities for active participation during meetings, often based on authentic “problems of practice”;
- Using the meetings to model good professional development practices; and
- Structuring meetings to better meet principals' different learning needs.

**Refocusing principal meetings on effective instruction.** Traditionally, monthly meetings of principals in most large urban school systems and charter management organizations (CMOs) have focused on administrative issues, with various central office leaders making presentations about new programs or operational mandates. Recently, however, a growing number of school systems have either carved out more time for instructional issues during those meetings or refocused them entirely to deal with topics related to instruction and student learning. For example, last year, based on feedback from principals, **Alliance College-Ready Public Schools** restructured its monthly daylong principal meetings to “focus on improving instruction and to align with schools' action plans,” whereas “in the past these meetings were consumed with operational issues.”

“It's been a struggle because obviously it's the one time each month when you have all of the principals in a room, so everyone at the home office is champing at the bit to get some of that time,” explains Cristina de Jesus of **Green Dot Public Schools**, another CMO making the switch. “It took a lot of work to help everyone understand that that isn't the purpose of our 95-5 Meetings. If we end the meeting at 3 o'clock, then from 3 to 4 they can come in and talk with the principals. But that will not be a part of the formal 95-5 Meeting agenda because we're going to devote all of that time to building instructional leadership capacity.” (The meetings are so called to signal Green Dot's commitment to enabling principals to spend 95 percent of their time in their own buildings.)



In addition to regional meetings of principals convened by area superintendents four or five times per year, **Aspire Public Schools** also holds CMO-wide meetings for all of its 34 principals. Last year Aspire held two meetings in Los Angeles and three in the Bay Area, requiring one group of principals to fly in for the meeting. “They’re focused on instructional issues, so we talk an hour to an hour and a half at most about operations,” says Chief Academic Officer Elise Darwish. “We go to our COO and say, ‘What is the most pressing thing that you need all of these principals to hear, because you only get an hour and a half with them?’”

**Deepening principals’ knowledge about effective instruction.** School system leaders also intentionally leverage such meetings to help close one of the critical expertise gaps, describe Stephen Fink and Anneke Markholt in *Leading for Learning*. “Recently we’ve spent a lot of time helping principals deepen their knowledge of instructional practices in the [instructional] framework and calibrating their understanding of good instruction,” explains Darwish of Aspire. “But even before that we worked on defining rigor during those meetings, and we mapped out what we called our ‘rigor arch.’ Two years ago, we spent a lot of time looking at wait time and what good wait-time strategies look like in classrooms. What strategies can teachers use to increase wait time and what does ‘higher order’ mean?” She anticipates that Aspire will begin “bringing in a little more on the Common Core, complex texts, writing non-fiction, and how to integrate them.”

“At least half of the day is for ‘consultancies’ where principals can focus on instructional challenges they’ve identified in their own schools.”

—Elise Darwish  
*Aspire Public Schools*

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“When I think of the framework, the thing that I’m hearing principals starting to talk a lot about now is how teachers are struggling with self-monitoring,” adds Tatiana Epanchin, the Bay Area superintendent for Aspire. “Teachers will ask students, ‘On a scale of 1 to 10, how engaged were you in that last conversation?’ Well, that’s not level-4 self-monitoring. And the principals I’m talking with are asking what level-4 self-monitoring actually looks like. So I would imagine that at least in the Bay Area, that’s going to be a huge piece of our regional meetings moving forward. If I had a crystal ball, I’d say that self-monitoring is going to become our next wait time.”

**Active Participation and Authentic Problems of Practice.** In planning their regular principals’ meetings, school systems are moving away from presentations by central office leaders or outside consultants and creating more active learning opportunities for principals. “At least half of the day is for ‘consultancies’ where principals can focus on instructional challenges they’ve identified in their own schools,” says Darwish.

“We know principals can struggle with how to have conversations with teachers around instruction; to offer [professional development] that’s aligned to the evidence from observations in order to target and differentiate professional development for teachers; to get into classrooms to observe and follow-up with conversations that go in depth on elements of instruction,” says de Jesus of Green Dot. “So a large chunk of our monthly 95-5 Meetings is actually focused on helping principals get better at those things. For example, we’ll watch a video of a classroom lesson, judge the instruction based on our teaching rubric, and then role-play conversations with that teacher. And someone else will observe your role-play conversation and give *you* feedback on *your* feedback to that teacher.”

**Modeling good professional development.** School systems are using principals' meetings to model the kinds of professional development practices that principals can use to help their own teachers learn new skills. "Just as we expect principals to model effective teaching strategies when providing [professional development] for teachers, we model strategies they can use *with* teachers," according to **Green Dot's** de Jesus. "For example, the 95-5 Meetings are supposed to model for the administrators using strategies, presentations, and tools that they can take and use with their own staffs immediately."

Epanchin explains that in the regional meetings for Aspire's Bay Area principals she holds five times per year, "I do a lot of modeling. I run those in the same thoughtful way I expect principals to run such a meeting with their own faculties, and I share every tool that I use. They leave with a folder of all the protocols we used that day, with context about the purpose of a particular protocol, and whose needs the protocol meets. I want to give principals a great learning experience during those meetings, but I also want to fill their toolboxes."

**Differentiating support for principal development.** Some school systems are working to build more differentiation into principal meetings to better meet individual needs. "We have monthly professional development meetings for principals, and each meeting has a district-wide theme for all principals and a cluster-specific theme for the 15 principals who work with a particular instructional director," says Chris Mills, an instructional director for **Prince George's County Public Schools**. "But the feedback we got back from the principals at the end of this year was that the time they spent in small groups within the clusters was really valuable, so we're going to switch the model next year to less system-wide time and more cluster time."

**Aspire Public Schools** has been working to strike the right balance of Aspire-wide meetings and regional meetings for several years. "Originally we brought all of our principals together eight times a year," explains Darwish. "But we're finding that it's a lot harder now with 34 principals to differentiate the meetings enough to meet their different needs. So every year we've been looking strategically at how much should be regional and how much should be all together, and every year we've gone to one more regional meeting and one less Aspire-wide meeting. Now I think we've found a good balance with four or five being Aspire-wide and the rest being regional."

Epanchin also plans to build more differentiation into her regional meetings next year. She has asked three of her more experienced principals to facilitate smaller professional learning communities of principals within the region. "We've conducted some inventories that have highlighted several needs and problems of practice, and with some consultation from me they'll choose one they're most interested in pursuing," she says.

One important theme runs through all of the examples offered by partnership sites: School systems do not need to invest in expensive new add-on programs to help principals grow as instructional leaders. Rather, they can repurpose and redesign existing systems, time, and resources to do a better job supporting principals. For example, every school system already evaluates teachers, but those evaluations do little to help principals have professional conversations with teachers about improving instruction. Most school systems regularly convene principals for meetings at the central office, but such meetings traditionally have focused on operational concerns rather than how principals can cultivate effective teaching and improve student learning.

## Key Considerations for School Systems

### Action Area 2.

*Develop principals' instructional leadership practices through job-embedded supports that build expertise*

**PROBLEM:** Traditionally, large school systems have managed schools and supervised principals through an administrative branch organized into regional offices led by area superintendents, while another branch offered principals occasional professional development on topics not especially selected to meet their individual needs. Such an approach has made it difficult for school systems to offer principals coherent and consistent job-embedded opportunities to strengthen high-impact instructional leadership practices.

- Has the school system identified central office leaders who will act as “instructional leadership directors” (ILDs) responsible for helping principals develop strong instructional leadership practices, by *either*:
  - *Redefining the role and function of area superintendents* to focus less on managing schools in a particular geographic region and more on helping principals strengthen their instructional leadership practices; or
  - *Creating a new central office leadership position* that reports to the superintendent or a member of the superintendent’s cabinet and is dedicated to helping principals strengthen their instructional leadership practices?
- Do the central office leaders who act as ILDs use teaching practices known to promote adult learning, such as highly individualized and differentiated support; frequent one-on-one coaching and feedback, modeling how effective principals think and act when executing instructional leadership practices; and helping principals learn from one another through peer networks?
- Do the central office leaders who act as ILDs organize their weekly calendars to prioritize time to visit schools to work on site with individual principals or groups of principals? Are they able to devote *at least* 60 percent of their working hours to activities that directly develop principals’ instructional leadership practices?
- Do ILDs work with a small enough number of principals that they can provide individualized, on-site coaching that meets principals’ differentiated needs on a regular basis (for example, at least twice per month per principal, on average)?
- Does the school system provide other aligned forms of support for strengthening principals’ instructional leadership practices? Are those supports designed to work *through and with* ILDs rather than *around* them?
- If the school system has recently adopted a new framework for effective instruction, has it provided principals with “deep dive” training on how to observe and help teachers improve on key classroom practices described in the framework?
- Has the school system repurposed its regular (monthly) principal meetings to help principals deepen their understanding of effective instruction, strengthen their instructional leadership practices, and plan how to improve teaching effectiveness and student learning in their own schools?

# How School Systems Are Helping Principals' Supervisors Support and Develop Principals More Effectively

Some school systems are identifying highly placed central office leaders who can act as instructional leadership directors (ILDs) responsible for supporting principals' continuous growth as instructional leaders (see pp. 23–29.) But the promise of this new role can only be realized if ILDs receive strong support, too. In fact, Partnership sites and other school systems are discovering that central office leaders taking on ILD responsibilities need the same kinds of supports as principals: clarity about the role and practices expected of them; professional development to ensure they have the expertise necessary to perform a very challenging job well; and opportunity to make principal support their primary focus.

**Clarify.** While **Prince George's County Public Schools'** three assistant superintendents are confident that the new cadre of instructional directors understands the broad vision behind the role, last spring they realized they needed to provide even greater clarity. They drafted a performance rubric against which the instructional directors can benchmark their practices and that the associate superintendents can use to frame more focused conversations about how the instructional directors are doing their jobs. The draft rubric includes five domains: principal management, teacher effectiveness, school improvement, professional development, and systems operations. Each domain includes about eight indicators, with performance descriptors at the "developing," "proficient," and "distinguished" levels for each.

"We're still fleshing out the descriptors and metrics," says Assistant Superintendent Andrew Zuckerman. "But an indicator for 'principal management' might look at the extent to which the instructional director is providing timely and regular action-oriented feedback to principals and at the

'distinguished' level that might be happening 90 percent of the time."

"It felt like it came from the heavens because it really defined what distinguished practice for us is and what it looks like," says one instructional director. "What's distinguished in terms of how you are helping a principal to manage day to day? What's distinguished in the concept of how you are helping principals administer instructional interventions in their buildings? The clear descriptors of practice are going to be so beneficial to us."

Meredith Honig of the University of Washington points out that clarifying the role of ILDs is important for other reasons. "I'm working in one district now where the human resources staff are saying, 'All of these ILDs are doing totally different things with their principals. We can't manage six or seven human resource systems based on what each ILD wants to do. We need to know what their role is.' So in terms of being an anchor for the transformation of the rest of the system, those job descriptions become really important."

**Develop.** Just as principals need deep expertise to help teachers improve instruction, ILDs need expertise to help principals improve instructional leadership. They must have a sophisticated understanding of effective instructional practices and effective leadership practices, as well as the skills to help the adults they work with learn and develop.

In particular, partnership sites have found that even though central office leaders who supervise principals do not formally observe and evaluate teachers, they too need a deep understanding and common "calibration" on the new

instructional frameworks. Otherwise, those leaders cannot effectively support principals to use the indicators and performance descriptors in those frameworks to monitor the quality of instruction in their classrooms, provide teachers with accurate feedback, and plan professional development. **Hillsborough County Public Schools** provided area directors with intensive training on how to observe and analyze classroom instruction using the newly adopted *Framework for Teaching* in 2011 as a prelude to shifting to the new area leadership director role.

In many school systems, ILDs also receive one-on-one coaching from their immediate supervisors, who are often associate or deputy superintendents or chief academic officers. “Our associate superintendent visited schools with us and modeled that whole process of discussion with the principal, the questioning approach,” an instructional director from **Prince George’s County Public Schools** explains. “After that, he gave us an opportunity to ask questions of the principal as well. Then to tie it all up we came back and debriefed on how we could use those strategies ourselves moving forward.”

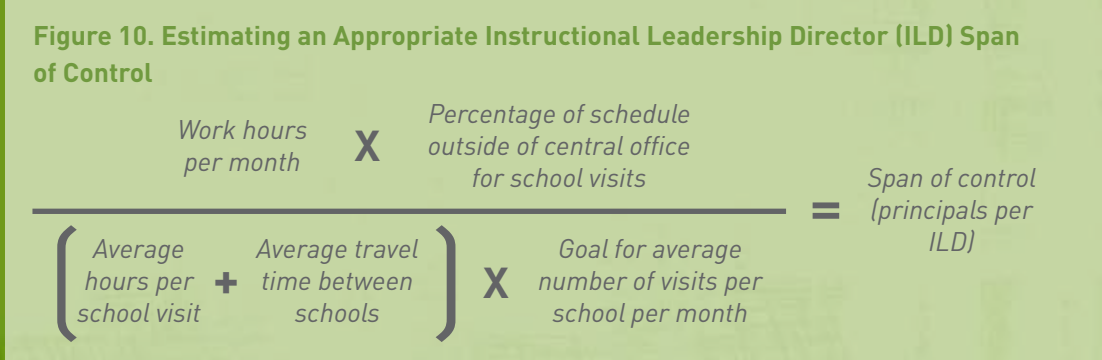
School systems also can help ILDs learn from their peers. “My first-year mentor was Dr. Marshall Scott, another school improvement officer,” says **Houston Independent School District’s** Rolando Treviño. “Dr. Scott and another SIO, Debra Crowe, and I would go into schools together, and they would watch me interact with my principal, and then they would give me feedback.”

Regular meetings and annual retreats provide additional opportunities for ILDs to learn. For example, during their retreat last summer, P.G. County’s instructional directors spent time calibrating their understanding of effective principal leadership practices and brainstorming how to differentiate support for principals at different levels. “We discussed, ‘Well, what will happen if a principal is outstanding or distinguished? What if they’re proficient but still have lots of room to grow? And what happens if the school cannot move forward because of the principal?’ We discussed exactly what that means for all of us in our jobs and the kinds of support we might need to offer principals in each of those tiers.”

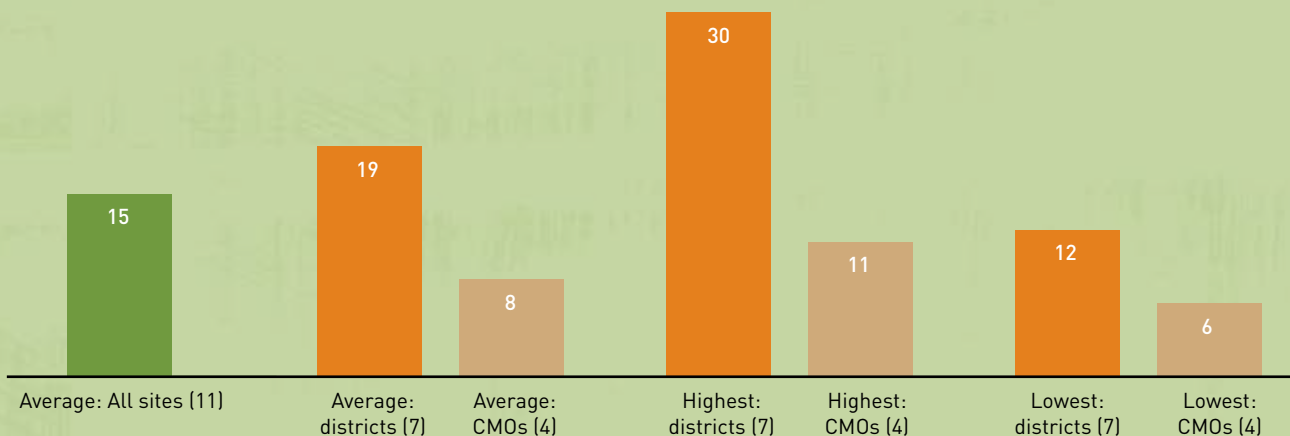
“Just as we’re saying one-on-one coaching and peer learning networks for principals are critical practices for serving and supporting schools in more powerful ways, I need to provide those same kinds of supports to my central office leaders in the Office of School Support and Improvement,” says Beth Schiavino-Narvaez, a recently appointed deputy superintendent for **Montgomery County Public Schools**. “We have dedicated a big chunk of time once a month for all of the community superintendents and school directors to come together to learn about effective practices and to bring back problems of practice,” she explains. “I also need to provide them with one-on-one coaching, not only so that they can keep growing but also so I can model for them the kind of coaching I expect them to be providing for principals.”

**Enable.** “Initially when we started this job, a lot of work got thrown at us from other offices, especially where they had faced cuts in staff. They thought, ‘Oh, well we can let the instructional directors do that.’ It was just the default,” says Chris Mills, an instructional director for **Prince George’s County Public Schools**. “But one of the things that just happened at our retreat two days ago is we got the word from our supervisors that we were told to map out our calendars for the year based on a clear plan for working with each of our principals, and that if we get directives from other offices telling us, ‘Oh, you have to serve on this committee,’ we have permission to say, ‘No thanks.’ And what that’s doing is sending a really strong message to the system about the value of the work that we do with principals.”

A colleague says such “buffering” is not just important for protecting precious time but also for protecting the relationships instructional directors have been working hard to establish with principals. “We had to move away from being the ‘principal police’ because that’s how some other departments initially regarded us. If a principal didn’t do something they’d asked, they would call us. But in our jobs, if you fall prey to that, then the principals will hate to see you coming, and they will not be receptive to the real work that you’re supposed to be doing with them, which is helping them improve the instructional program.”



**Figure 11. Span of Control: Principals per Supervisor in Partnership Sites**



Note: Averages are unweighted. The calculations consider the span of control for Memphis City Schools to be 21.4 because they count regional office directors along with regional superintendents in the denominator. If only regional superintendents are considered, the Memphis span of control is 42.8, which would raise the averages in some of the bars and considerably raise the bar showing “highest” span of control among districts.

Source: Survey of partnership sites conducted in April 2012, supplemented by additional research and interviews.

**Hillsborough County** has hired area support facilitators who now handle some of the telephone calls from parents and community members that once were routinely routed to area leader directors. And some other central office units are beginning to take work off of area leader directors’ plates to free up their time to coach principals. “Until recently, if the air conditioner went out in a school, I’d get the call. But now they get sent to the Office of Facilities,” says George Gaffney, a Hillsborough County area director. “Also, they used to give each area director a budget for school facilities issues that came up, for example if a school decided it needed to put in a new footpath or put up new stage curtains or whatever the case may be. We were responsible for rationing out that money over the course of the year. Now the chief of facilities has said, ‘You don’t need to do that anymore. I will control that money, and that is one less thing you have to do.’ Now all capital outlay requests go to her. That’s big.”

Another factor limiting the time leaders like Gaffney can spend working in schools with principals is the number of principals he supervises and supports, often called by the technical term “span of control.” Based on conversations with leaders in a number of urban school systems, Paul Bambrick-Santoyo, author of *Leverage Leadership*, has calculated some useful rules of thumb that we corroborated in our telephone interviews and site visits for this project. Assuming that a leader spends around 50 to 60 percent of his or her time visiting schools, a span of around seven generally allows for up to one visit per week per school; a span of 15 allows for an average of two visits per month per school; and a span of 30 generally limits the leader to one visit per month per school.<sup>20</sup> Figure 10 provides a formula that school systems can use to generate some initial estimates of their own based on a few variables and assumptions.

“People ask me all the time what the right span of control is,” says Honig. “Typically when people ask me for a hard number, I say ‘six.’ I say six not because it’s realistic for most budgets; I don’t think it is. I say six because if you just map out time, that’s the number an ILD can get to as intensively as they need to help them with their practice, and it’s also the number of principals whose development a person can hold in his or her head. ILDs are going to be working with evidence about where principals are at, and it’s really hard to track much more than six or seven or eight people’s development.”

The span of control for principal supervisors varies widely across partnership sites, from a low of six in one charter management organizations (CMO) to a high of 30 in one traditional school district. Figure 11 shows the unweighted averages for all sites, for traditional districts, and for CMOs, along with highest and lowest spans of control for the two types of school systems. The x-axis lines are set according to Bambrick-Santoyo’s estimates for spans of control that generally allow for one, two, three, or four visits to each school each month.

Overall, school systems are finding that the more support they provide to ILDs, the more successful those central office leaders will be in providing differentiated supports for principals. However, school system leaders also say this is very much a “work in progress” and they have much to learn about how to enable central office leaders to play these new roles.

## 3. Enable Principals to Succeed as Instructional Leaders

Principals need sufficient time and strategic supports to perform their job well. “Expectations for the principalship have steadily expanded since the reforms of the early 1980s, always adding to and never subtracting from the job description,” Michael Copland observed in an oft-quoted article. “One can argue that we have reached a point where the aggregate expectations for the principalship are so exorbitant that they exceed the limits of what might reasonably be expected from one person.”<sup>21</sup>

Copland was writing in 2001. If anything, the last decade has only exacerbated principal overload, particularly the budget cuts many school systems have had to make in central office supports in recent years. An article in May’s *District Administration Magazine* noted the impact on school leaders: “For Beverly Jarrett, principal at Far West High School in the Oakland (Calif.) Unified School District, that has meant an upward creep from 10 hours per day, five days a week when she started five years ago, to 12 to 14 hours per day and one Saturday a month.”<sup>22</sup>

The problem of time has not gone unnoticed amid calls for principals to exercise greater instructional leadership. “Principals do not have time to be instructional leaders,” Donald Barron, a middle school principal and co-chairman of a Maryland task force on principal leadership, bluntly told the *Baltimore Sun* 12 years ago.<sup>23</sup> Like many principals over the years, he argued that if school systems expect principals to make instructional leadership job one, then they must actively enable principals to focus on that job.

Partnership sites and other leading school systems are doing that in two kinds of ways. First, they are helping principals strategically expand instructional leadership capacity in their buildings by sharing such responsibilities with multiple leaders. Second, they are helping principals reduce time on lower-impact tasks and perform required tasks more efficiently.

### Expanding Instructional Leadership by Sharing Responsibility

Research has shown that when more staff members share leadership responsibility with principals, particularly instructional leadership, classroom teaching and student learning improve more rapidly. As a result, school systems are placing greater emphasis on principals’ ability to build and manage strong “instructional leadership teams” in their schools. Such teams often include expert teachers, instructional coaches, other administrators, and department heads. Under such a scenario, principals become “leaders of instructional leaders” in their schools.



That strategy might be especially important at the secondary level, experts say, where research has found principals to be far less engaged in instructional leadership than their elementary-level peers. “There are important differences in what principals are actually able to accomplish in their direct work with teachers depending on school size, school level, and their own content area expertise,” says Copland. “A high school principal of a 2,000-student building who taught physical education is probably not the best choice to provide hands-on instructional coaching for a chemistry teacher who needs to improve knowledge of content in that subject area. But that same high school principal must be able to organize and lead other leaders on the staff who can take on that work.”

Copland’s own research has found that principals do not lose authority in shared-leadership schools. Rather, their jobs change in complex ways as others join them in taking collective responsibility for supporting instructional improvements.<sup>24</sup> The research project led by Kenneth Leithwood and Karen Seashore Louis came to the same conclusion: Instructional leadership is not a zero-sum game.<sup>25</sup> The contributions of other instructional leaders *support* rather than *supplant* a principal’s own responsibility and authority to lead learning, extending a principal’s instructional leadership reach in his or her school building.

**Denver Public Schools** now includes responsibility for cultivating teacher leaders and sharing instructional leadership as an expected leadership practice in its *Framework for Effective School Leadership*. Nearly half of the 13 indicators in the framework refer to that responsibility in some way, and one indicator entirely focuses on how effectively principals distribute leadership among staff members. Teachers can be nominated by their principals to participate in Denver’s Teacher Leadership Academies (TLAs), which help them gain knowledge and skills for effective instructional leadership. This year Denver’s TLAs are offering teachers six differentiated “streams of study,” including two that explore connections between Common Core State Standards and the instructional practices in Denver’s *Framework for Effective Teaching*.

Paul Bambrick-Santoyo, author of *Leverage Leadership*, identified management of the school’s instructional leadership team as one of the seven practices of successful Uncommon Schools principals, and he devotes an entire chapter to it in the book. Given the charter management organization’s (CMO) goal of giving teachers weekly feedback on their practice, Bambrick-Santoyo says that principals themselves might provide ongoing one-on-one coaching for up to 15 teachers, after which they will need to designate and support other instructional leaders in the school to work with the rest of the teaching faculty.<sup>26</sup>

“One of the things we expect our principals to do is develop a cadre of leaders on their own campus,” says Cristina de Jesus of **Green Dot Public Schools**. “How are you leveraging your teacher leaders to get into classrooms in the content area of each teacher? How are you giving them release time? How are you structuring department meetings so that each teacher is getting the support he or she needs?”

Green Dot also expects every assistant principal to be as active an instructional leader as the principal. “If you’re an assistant principal in our system, you’re being groomed to be a principal, period,” says de Jesus. “And that means every assistant principal must be an instructional leader as well, providing professional development for teachers, involved in classrooms, observing instruction. You’re not just going to be handling discipline.”

“[T]hat means every assistant principal must be an instructional leader as well, providing professional development for teachers, involved in classrooms, observing instruction. You’re not just going to be handling discipline.”

—Cristina de Jesus  
Green Dot Public Schools

In fact, she continues, “We have decided we’re going to add a second assistant principal in every school because we’re realizing that there’s only a certain number of hours in the day, and administrators can’t do all of what we’re expecting. So with three administrators in a 600–700 seat school, we think we can raise the level of impact and touch points with teachers in a way that’s going to be meaningful.”

Some school systems are offering principals facilitated opportunities to plan with teacher leaders and other instructional leadership team members. “Each **Aspire** school has a leadership team composed however the principal sees fit, but we bring all members of that team, including the lead teachers and the principal, together each summer for what we call our Lead Meeting,” says **Aspire Public Schools** Chief Academic Officer Elise Darwish. “There’s a common topic, and we provide a bunch of time for the teams to plan for the upcoming school year. I have seen two of these meetings now, and it is truly teachers being collaborative instructional leaders with their principals.”

Finally, several partnership sites are relying on teacher leaders to conduct formal observations of classroom lessons and provide feedback to teachers as an important element of their new evaluation systems. For example, **Hillsborough County Public Schools** trained and certified

## How Tulsa Is Expanding Instructional Leadership Capacity in Schools

Last year **Tulsa Public Schools** initiated a new Staff Development Teacher initiative based on a model pioneered in **Montgomery County Public Schools**, Maryland. Tulsa’s Office of Curriculum and Instruction recruited and trained 48 staff development teachers who each were assigned to work on site in a single school building, although they also convene regularly at the central office to receive ongoing support from a new cadre of academic coordinators. Interviews with principals revealed how staff development teachers are partnering with principals to provide more robust instructional leadership for all teachers.

“The staff development teacher allows the principal, by working collaboratively, to take the work with teachers to a deeper level,” explains one Tulsa elementary school principal. “It allows me to go much deeper with the instructional discourse looking at teaching and learning. When you are one principal with 21 teachers, you just can’t get to that level alone. You don’t have the time.”

“My teachers have now been able to have conversations that we always knew we wanted to have, and in fact *thought* we were having until we actually had them,” says another. “When I walk away from a 30-minute conversation where teachers speak very specifically, intentionally, about these 4th grade students and what they need to reach certain standards, that’s deeper than we’ve ever gotten before. And the staff development teacher was instrumental in helping us get there.”

Some principals asked staff development teachers to follow up in classrooms where they had observed a teacher in need of targeted support. “Sometimes there was a teacher

who was struggling, for example having a hard time with transitions, and I could ask her to go in and take a look at that teacher,” explains one principal. “So it was another avenue of assisting my teachers.”

Other principals asked staff development teachers to observe and empower effective teachers.

“Sometimes it wasn’t, ‘Hey go watch those transitions because she needs help,’ but rather, ‘Go watch those transitions, because when I go in there I think it’s pretty effective,’ ” says another principal. “And helping build that capacity of teachers to be willing to share their expertise in their areas of high effectiveness is important because sometimes teachers are afraid to share with their colleagues. So she also helped me build additional teacher leadership.”

Stacey Vernon, principal of Tulsa’s Will Rogers College Junior High and High School, keeps close tabs on the quality of instruction in her school, blocking out time each week to visit classrooms and observe teaching. Even so, Vernon’s new staff development teacher has been instrumental in helping her better address teachers’ instructional needs. “She is able to do things to support the teachers that no one else has time to do,” explains Vernon. “When I’m in a classroom observing a teacher, I can see if they need help in an area, but I often don’t have time to find the resources to help them. She has the time and the resources to do those things, to really bridge that gap.”



Stacey Vernon

a cadre of teachers called “peer evaluators” to conduct formal observations of experienced teachers and “mentor evaluators” to observe beginning teachers. This year **Pittsburgh Public Schools** is launching a new teacher career ladder position called “Instructional Teacher Leader 2” (ITL2). ITL2 teachers will have a reduced course load, providing them with time to conduct formative observations to support fellow teachers in their own buildings; beginning next year they also will conduct formal observations of teachers outside their own schools.

## Doing Less, and Doing the Rest More Efficiently

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Beyond helping principals build broader instructional leadership capacity, school systems are helping principals carve out sufficient time and focus for instructional leadership by:

- Reducing administrative burdens;
- Helping principals perform tasks more efficiently;
- Enhancing building-level staff capacity for managing day-to-day operations; and
- Providing principals with assistance in scheduling and defending time for instructional leadership practices.

**Reducing administrative burdens.** Some school systems have begun to take common-sense steps to reduce the time principals are required to spend on administrative matters so they have more time for instructional leadership. For example, **Atlanta Public Schools** has instituted “black-out days” during which all principals are expected to be in their buildings supporting instruction. **Prince George’s County Public Schools** reduced the number of meetings requiring principals to be out of their buildings from 30 to 11 last year. **Hillsborough County Public Schools** conducted a survey of principals, based on which the district eliminated or streamlined a number of administrative paperwork requirements.

Meredith Honig of the University of Washington cautions that school systems also need to pay attention to how they are expecting principals to engage in instructional leadership or, ironically, those expectations can become yet another set of compliance demands that detract from meaningful work with teachers. “As research has come out saying principals need to be instructional leaders, some state and local policymakers have responded by increasing the extent to which they regulate principals’ engagement in instructional leadership, which really frustrates principals’ efforts to be strategic,” she explains. “I see principals who are buried under paperwork related to instruction, whereas before it was related to the operational and business matters.”

**Helping principals perform tasks more efficiently.** School systems also are taking steps to help principals perform required administrative, managerial, and instructional tasks more efficiently. Some are providing tools, templates, or data summaries that facilitate required tasks. **Aspire Public Schools** is introducing a technology platform it calls the “Purple Planet” that will track classroom observation results, including specific areas for teacher growth; enable principals to analyze patterns in instruction and monitor teachers’ progress over time; and help principals identify professional development resources for teachers based on specific practices identified for improvement.

“We’re trying to be clearer in our expectations for all of the departments that their mission is to support individual schools and work in service to schools.”

—William Hite  
*The School District of Philadelphia  
(formerly Prince George’s County Public Schools)*

## Figure 12. Pittsburgh Public Schools' New Human Capital Managers

The Human Capital Manager will support an assigned group of schools in meeting their human capital needs. The HCM provides talent management support to principals in recruitment, selection, placement, and performance. HCMs will focus heavily on the deployment and continuous improvement of the existing workforce. The HCM will connect school leaders to Human Resource partners in Employee Evaluation, Employee Relations, and Benefits.

The Human Capital Manager will be the HR point of contact for school leaders. They will build strong relationships with school leaders and will understand the schools' academic goals and how HR can support schools to have the right talent to achieve those goals. The HCM will be accountable for meeting staffing and customer service needs throughout the school year. This position offers the successful candidate the opportunity to be a part of transforming how Pittsburgh Public Schools delivers HR services to schools, and, as such, how school-based staff ensure all students achieve academic excellence.

Source: Pittsburgh Public Schools, Human Capital Manager position posting, [http://www.pps.k12.pa.us/143110127104380/lib/143110127104380/Human\\_Capital\\_Manager\\_Final\\_081911.pdf](http://www.pps.k12.pa.us/143110127104380/lib/143110127104380/Human_Capital_Manager_Final_081911.pdf).

Other school systems are restructuring and reorienting central office units to provide more personalized support for principals based on their individual needs and school context. For example, over the past three years **Pittsburgh Public Schools** has restructured its human resources department to provide more targeted support to principals. Last year it established a new cadre of human capital managers, each one of whom works with a “cluster” of principals to support all of their staffing needs. Figure 12 shows how the district described that new job in the formal position description it posted last year.

According to Honig and her co-authors of the *Central Office Transformation* study, that kind of customer-service sensibility represents a profound change to the one-size-fits-all approach that central office human resource units and other departments traditionally have taken. They call the new strategy “case management” because “central office administrators work closely with individual schools to understand their goals, identify barriers to teaching and learning improvement in schools, and address those barriers, even if they fell beyond the purview of their particular central office units.” But they also caution that the approach requires “reculturing” and significant staff development to promote a new set of practices, not just structural changes in how central offices are organized.

William Hite, now the superintendent of The School District of Philadelphia, discovered the same thing when he initiated similar reforms as superintendent of **Prince George's County** last year. “We’re trying to be clearer in our expectations for all of the departments that their mission is to support individual schools and work in service to schools,” he says. “Principals don’t interact with the chief of [human resources]; they interact with the staffer. So if that staffer doesn’t have an understanding of their value to the school’s work, and if the staffer thinks the principal needs to stop everything to meet central office needs, then that’s working against what we’re trying to do.”

Hite offers an example: “At a recent meeting of staff members across units, we invited a panel of principals who introduced problems of practice they were trying to solve, and our central office individuals immediately went into their traditional roles. ‘Principal, this is what I need from you.’ And I said, ‘Wait a second. You need to tell us what you’re going to do and what your department is going to do to support the principal in meeting those needs.’ That’s much harder, so we’re thinking about what kind of professional development we need to provide for those folks.”

Even with such changes in central office policies and practices, a growing number of school systems are coming to the conclusion that principals will need additional assistance in their

buildings to meet the new expectations for instructional leadership. Some are working on the administrative side of the equation by training or assigning additional staff members to help principals complete a wide range of managerial tasks. Others are working on the instructional side of the equation by helping principals enhance their instructional leadership teams. Still other school systems are doing both.

**Enhance building-level staff capacity for operations.** Over the years, many principals who have carved out significantly more time for instructional leadership have done so by delegating administrative tasks to other staff members. In *Leverage Leadership*, Bambrick-Santoyo describes how successful Uncommon Schools principals designate “operations leaders,” build operations teams, and then empower those staff members to “block and tackle” to shield the principal from operational demands that do not absolutely require his or her attention.<sup>28</sup>

But some school systems are realizing that bringing to scale the notion of “instructional leadership as job one” will require them to hire additional staff who can help manage administrative tasks. For example, **Partnership to Uplift Community (PUC) Schools** hires an additional site leader (the PUC title for principals) once a school reaches an enrollment of 250 students. Traditionally, one site leader has focused on operational leadership and the other on instructional leadership, although the operation-focused site leaders have taken on more instruction-related duties since the adoption of PUC’s new teacher evaluation system.

In August, **Hillsborough County** initiated the first stage of implementing the National School Administration Manager (SAM) Innovation Project, a strategy developed by The Wallace Foundation to help principals free up more time for instructional leadership. As part of the project, a new or existing staff member is designated the school administration manager (SAM), and both the principal and the SAM receive coaching on how to share aspects of administrative leadership. The project also provides time-management software and helps principals set goals for time spent on instructional leadership based on a standardized Time/Task Data Collection procedure. A national evaluation of the SAM project found that principals were able to repurpose from about six to nine hours per week for instructional leadership activities, depending on the model chosen and number of years implementing the program.<sup>29</sup>

**Providing principals with assistance in scheduling and defending time for instructional leadership practices.** According to Bambrick-Santoyo, the underlying conclusion of his study of successful principals was simple but profound: Compared with their peers, successful principals “leveraged more out of each minute of the day” for instructional leadership. They did so by “locking in” blocks of time for each of seven practices on their weekly calendars and only scheduling other obligations around those hard-and-fast commitments.

Bambrick-Santoyo applies the same lessons in his work with principals in Newark. “When we first did this, only one of my principals was observing classrooms consistently every week,” he explains. “Everybody else knew it was important, everybody else made a plan for it, but it didn’t happen. So we began to schedule weekly ‘check-in’ meetings with teachers that required principals to provide feedback from an observation. And five of the six principals immediately had a transformation, although one later regressed. For the two principals who still weren’t getting it done, it took not just locking it into their schedules, but also me following up and monitoring” using a tool he developed called an *Observation Tracker*.

In *Leverage Leadership*, Bambrick-Santoyo offers samples of principals’ weekly and monthly calendars “to show exactly how the actions outlined in the chapter would fit into a busy schedule.”<sup>30</sup> Figure 13 shows how one principal’s weekly calendar accommodates time for all seven instructional leadership levers. He also provides strategic advice for carving out

the time necessary to schedule and “lock in” each leadership practice. For example, in the chapter on observation and feedback, he explains how some successful principals ensure that teachers receive weekly feedback on their practice by scheduling multiple observations in blocks; locking in weekly feedback meetings with teachers; combining those meetings with other instructional conversations with teachers; and distributing the observation load among all instructional leaders in the school.

**Tulsa Public Schools** principal Stacey Vernon offers a final caveat. She manages to lock in time for classroom visits every week but struggles to find enough time to work with teachers in groups. “Time is the big obstacle, but it’s not just time to get into the classrooms. That I can do,” she says. “It’s time for the staff to come together as a whole. An hour after school for a staff meeting doesn’t cut it, especially in secondary schools, where you have sports and other activities. Twenty percent of your staff is missing for legitimate reasons.”

**Figure 13. How an Uncommon Schools Principal Schedules Time for Instructional Leadership Levers**

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
6:00am					
:30	Greeting and breakfast	Greeting and breakfast		Greeting and breakfast	Greeting and breakfast
7:00am					
:30	Staff culture check	Morning assembly			Morning assembly
8:00am		Meet Wilson	Meet Bradley		
:30		Meet Vargas	Meet Frint		
9:00am	Observe Wilson, Vargas, Jenkins				
:30					
10:00am			Observe Mitzia, Boykin, Devin		Observe Hoyt, Setles, Palma
:30					
11:00am		Staff culture check			
:30	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch		Lunch
12:00pm	Observe Henry, Bernales, Christian				Meet Bradley
:30		Meet Worrell		Leadership team meeting	Meet Palma
1:00pm	Meeting with principal supervisor	Meet Christian	Meet Boykin		Meet Setles
:30		Meet Bernales	Meet Devin		Meet Hoyt
2:00pm			Meet Mitzia		Large-project work time
:30					
3:00pm					
:30			Professional development session	Staff culture check	
4:00pm	Dismissal	Dismissal		Dismissal	Dismissal
:30					
5:00pm					
:30					

Work time
  School culture
  Observations
  Meetings

Source: Bambrick-Santoyo, P. (2012). *Leverage Leadership: A Practical Guide to Building Exceptional Schools*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, An Imprint of John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Used with permission.

## How One Associate Superintendent Is Carving Out More Time for Instructional Leadership Work with Principals

Over the past two years Tatiana Epanchin, the Bay Area superintendent for **Aspire Public Schools**, visited every principal every week for two hours each. With many principals, Epanchin conducted classroom observations or walkthroughs, debriefing afterward to “anchor feedback, calibrate what we’re seeing, and draw out and leverage a lot of sophisticated details to analyze areas of strength or areas for improvement.” She also worked with some principals to provide better feedback on teachers’ lesson plans. With others she used role-playing exercises to help principals learn “how to have really tough conversations with teachers who aren’t as effective as you need them to be.”

Epanchin also tried to carve out time to work with each principal to improve on leadership growth goals they had negotiated together. In one case Epanchin’s collaboration with a principal on one of his learning goals resulted in such success that she wants to replicate the model for other principals. “He really wanted the whole instructional team to be working through the same lens with teachers, including the instructional coaches, who in Aspire are not school-based but go from school to school.” She worked with the principal to coordinate regular meetings of the instructional coaches, deans, and lead teachers.

The team ended up choosing two indicators on the instructional framework, then organized classroom observations, debriefings, and teacher feedback on those target areas every other Thursday. “The resulting focus was amazing,” she says. “It gave that principal so much data and evidence about classroom teaching in those two domains, and teachers got a ton of feedback on them. It really contributed to a sense of collective responsibility for everybody and helped that school turn a corner. I want to work with Jen [the director of Bay Area Instructional Coaching] to run a model like that in the other schools.”

However, Epanchin often found it difficult to carve out enough time for instructional issues in all of her visits with

principals, so she plans to adapt her strategy. “Sometimes when you first arrive at the school and walk into their office, they have a list of 16 operational issues that are immediate burning problems for them, and dealing with those 16 problems takes an hour and 15 minutes. Then we’re down to just 45 minutes left, so we don’t get a chance to really delve into the areas they want to improve on as instructional leaders.”

For example, she says, “One of my principal’s goals was to make sure her Friday professional development time met the needs of all of her teachers. So we created this detailed plan to work together to plan weekly professional development and for me to observe the professional development on Fridays to give her feedback on it. We intended to go through that cycle several times over the course of the year, but we never got to a point where we could actually sit down and plan professional development together because there were always those burning operational issues in the way.”

To provide enough time to deal with operational issues and also help principals meet their goals for instructional leadership, Epanchin created a new plan to visit each principal every other week for three hours at a time. Her assistant has helped principals schedule three hours on their calendars to work on the same instructional leadership goals during alternate weeks, during which she will have dedicated times available to debrief by phone.

“Principals will have an uninterrupted time every other week where they will do their thinking and focus on those ‘big rock’ instructional leadership things that principals are often unable to make time for,” she explains. “And when I visit, yes, we can take 40 minutes to deal with all of the operational issues that come up if we need to, but we’ll still have two hours to go and work on the professional development plan or to go into every single classroom and look at a targeted practice on the [instructional] framework.”

# Key Considerations for School Systems

## Action Area 3.

*Enable principals to succeed as instructional leaders by providing them sufficient time and strategic supports to perform the job well*

**PROBLEM:** Many principals have difficulty carving out sufficient time and attention to engage in high-impact instructional leadership practices on a regular and consistent basis while fulfilling all of their many other job responsibilities.

- Does the school system support principals in establishing and leading strong instructional leadership teams in their schools, either by training existing staff members or by assigning additional staff members (such as staff development teachers)?
- Has the school system systematically identified and developed teacher leaders who can partner with principals on a wide range of practices to ensure that all teachers in every building benefit from strong instructional leadership? Do teacher leaders have dedicated release time to work with the principal, other instructional leaders, and teachers to improve teaching and learning?
- Has the school system reduced administrative burdens on principals to help them carve out sufficient time for high-impact instructional leadership practices? For example:
  - Does the school system limit the number of meetings and activities that require principals to be away from their buildings during the school day and during teachers' professional development time?
  - Has the school system worked with principals to identify administrative tasks or paperwork requirements that can be significantly streamlined or eliminated altogether?
- Do central office units provide tools, targeted assistance, and customized support to help principals perform tasks more efficiently? For example:
  - Does the school system provide protocols, checklists, and technology-based platforms specifically designed to help principals complete administrative, personnel, and instructional planning tasks more efficiently?
  - Have central office units adopted a customer service orientation to provide principals with timely and responsive support in the areas of curriculum, human resources, budgeting, operations, and public relations? Are those central office units organized to enable staff members to act as case managers who each provide customized support for a cluster of schools?
- Has the school system helped principals build more in-house capacity to manage day-to-day operations, either by training existing staff members or by assigning additional staff members (such as school administrative managers)?
- Has the school system clearly signaled to principals that they should organize their weekly calendars to prioritize time for the core set of high-impact instructional leadership practices? Has it provided principals with training and technical assistance in how to schedule and "lock in" and "defend" sufficient time for instructional leadership practices on their weekly calendars?



# The Final Piece: Creating and Communicating a Strong Rationale for Action

As part of their broader efforts to measure and expand effective teaching in schools, partnership sites and other leading school systems are rethinking the principal role. District and charter management organizations (CMO) leaders are expecting principals to work with other instructional leaders across the school system to *systematically cultivate high levels of teaching effectiveness*, the most important educational resource that school systems can bring to bear to improve student learning.

In the simplest terms, the three action areas discussed previously describe how school systems that expect principals to cultivate high levels of teaching effectiveness in their schools can create the conditions that set principals up for success. The action areas invite leaders to consider the following critical policy questions:

- How should we **clarify** the principal's role as an instructional leader by specifying the high-impact practices for which principals will be accountable?
- How will we **develop** principals' instructional leadership practices through job-embedded supports that increase knowledge, strengthen skills, and build expertise?
- How can we **enable** principals to succeed as instructional leaders by providing them sufficient time and strategic supports to perform the job well?

While those questions might seem simple, the answers likely will demand so much detailed work in support of so many nuanced changes that it can become difficult to keep sight of the forest through the trees. For such ambitious reforms to succeed, they must be guided by a coherent plan informed by a clear theory of action; actively sponsored by the superintendent and other system leaders; and continuously explained to stakeholders via ongoing communications about why the changes are important and what they will accomplish. As adjunct RAND staff member Simon Sinek puts it, great leaders “start with why” in order to inspire everyone to take action.

“Sometimes superintendents want to jump into a list of reforms, like, ‘Let’s redesign [human resources],’ or ‘Let’s hire [instructional leadership directors] and get them starting to do [professional development] for principals,’ ” explains Meredith Honig. “But a list is not a theory of action. This kind of reform is complex, and people very easily get lost, so central office staff and principals need to see the road map for how the reforms are all part of a coherent change effort and how they will help principals improve teaching.”

Moreover, superintendents and their cabinet members must continuously communicate the underlying rationale and theory of action behind that plan year in and year out. A good example comes from Montgomery County, Maryland, where Superintendent Joshua Starr and Deputy Superintendent Beth Schiavino-Narvaez are working to help central office staff

members and principals understand the mission of the new Office of School Support and Improvement (OSSI) that Schiavino-Narvaez was hired to head up in April.

“The office that used to house the community superintendents was called the Office of School Performance, and it was very heavy on monitoring and accountability but not so much on building principals’ capacity,” explains Schiavino-Narvaez. “So as we launch the new office, we need to be able to articulate what’s different about our work and why, both within the central office and with our principals, and that is a big part of the challenge.”

In a recent episode of an online television series called “MCPS Super,” Starr and Schiavino-Narvaez work hard to connect the dots for central office leaders and principals.<sup>31</sup> Starr introduces the episode, which focuses on the district’s new focus on professional learning

communities, by referencing the underlying rationale. “It rests on a pretty simple idea,” he tells viewers. “We don’t have a student learning problem; we have an *adult* learning problem. If we’re going to help our kids grow and learn and get better at what they do, we as adults have to be actively engaged with each other in the same thing. We have to learn in order to help our kids learn.”

Starr filmed the episode at the largest school in the district, Montgomery Blair High School, and in it he engages both Schiavino-Narvaez and Montgomery Blair’s principal, Renay Johnson, in a conversation about how principals can support teacher learning through professional learning communities and how the central office will, in turn, support principals to lead that effort. “Beth, we have 202 schools with 202 principals, and this is new for some and not new

for others,” Starr points out. “How is your Office of School Support and Improvement going about supporting our school leaders so that they’re helping our teachers collaborate around instruction?”

Schiavino-Narvaez responds, “We recognize that schools are in different places. Some have been doing this for many years, and some have just been starting on the journey. We’re working with them to develop a tool so that they can know how well they’re doing in implementing professional learning communities, and more importantly, we use that tool to differentiate our support for school leaders.” She also wants principals to understand that, “This is not something we’re doing ‘to schools.’ The learning starts with us in the central office. The three deputy superintendents have started with our leadership teams, and we’ve organized into professional learning communities. And we want to make sure that we’re using evidence to improve our practice to serve and support schools.”

“So everybody’s learning?” Starr asks. “That’s the idea?”

In school systems around the country, efforts to establish greater clarity and specificity about effective instructional practices are raising important new questions about instructional *leadership* practices, not only for principals but also for teachers and central office administrators. School districts and CMOs are seizing that opportunity to think deeply about how principals and other school leaders should be spending their time—and not spending their time—as well as how central offices can better select, evaluate, and support principals to meet a new set of expectations.

“But a list is not a theory of action. This kind of reform is complex, and people very easily get lost, so central office staff and principals need to see the road map for how the reforms are all part of a coherent change effort and how they will help principals improve teaching.”

—Meredith Honig  
University of Washington

Much remains to be learned about how to better support principals as stewards of instructional effectiveness. But the days of simply exhorting principals to be better instructional leaders are ending. School systems have come to understand they must take much more responsibility for providing the clarity, development, and strategic “enablers” that make strong instructional leadership possible.

In fact, school system leaders, principals, and teachers must all work together to discover new and innovative ways of partnering across a continuum of instructional leadership that extends from the central office to the classroom. According to Max Silverman of the Center for Educational Leadership, “Real change won’t happen unless the superintendent is willing to present a compelling rationale, to invest in professional development at the central office level, and to see this as a long-term strategy that ultimately implicates the central office as well as principals and teachers.”



## APPENDIX: Primary Central Office Leaders Who Directly Supervise and Support Principals

	<b>Titles of Primary Central Office Leaders Who Directly Supervise and Support Principals</b>	<b>Number of Leadership Positions</b>	<b>Average Number of Principals per Leader</b>
<b>Atlanta Public Schools</b>	Regional K-12 Executive Directors of Schools	4	22
<b>Denver Public Schools</b>	Instructional Superintendents (including the Executive Director for Innovation Schools and Executive and Deputy Directors of Turnaround Schools)	13	12
<b>Hillsborough County Public Schools</b>	Area Leadership Directors	8	30
<b>Memphis City Schools</b>	Regional Superintendents <i>along with</i> Regional Directors	8 (4 of each)	21 counting regional superintendents <i>plus</i> directors  43 counting regional superintendents <i>only</i>
<b>Pittsburgh Public Schools</b>	Assistant Superintendents	3	20
<b>Prince George's County Public Schools</b>	Instructional Directors	13	15
<b>TCRP-Alliance College-Ready Public Schools</b>	Vice Presidents of Schools	3	7
<b>TCRP-Aspire Public Schools</b>	Area Superintendents	3	11
<b>TCRP-Green Dot Public Schools</b>	Cluster Directors	3	6
<b>TCRP-PUC Schools</b>	Regional Directors	3	9
<b>Tulsa Public Schools</b>	Executive Assistants to the Associate Superintendent, Director of Innovative Schools	5	15

Note: In addition to the central office leaders listed above, some sites also provide coaches or mentors who offer targeted supports to novice and/or struggling principals. Figures for "average number of principals per leader" have been rounded to nearest whole number.

# Endnotes

1. Robinson, V. M. J., Llyod, C. A., & Rowe, K. J. (2008). "The impact of leadership on student outcomes: An analysis of the differential effects of leadership types," *Educational Administration Quarterly* 44(5): 635–674.
2. Supovitz, J., Sirinides, P., & May, H. (2010). "How principals and peers influence teaching and learning," *Educational Administration Quarterly* 46(1): 31–56.
3. The range is based on several studies: (1) Horng, L. E., Klasik, D., & Loeb, S. (2010, August). "Principals' time use and school effectiveness," *American Journal of Education* 116: 401–523. (2) Supovitz, J. A., & May, H. (2011). "The scope of principal efforts to improve instruction," *Educational Administration Quarterly* 47(2): 332–352. (3) Supovitz, J. A., & Buckley, P. (2008, March). "How principals enact instructional leadership." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New York.
4. Supovitz, J. A., & May, H. (2011). "The scope of principal efforts to improve instruction," *Educational Administration Quarterly* 47(2): 332–352.
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6. Fink, S., & Markholt, A. (2011). *Leading for Instructional Improvement: How Successful Leaders Develop Teaching and Learning Expertise*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, An Imprint of John Wiley & Sons.
7. Fink & Markholt, p. 18.
8. Leithwood, K., Seashore Louis, K., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How Leadership Influences Student Learning*. New York: The Wallace Foundation.
9. Honig, M. I. (2012). "District central office leadership as teaching: How central office administrators support principals' development as instructional leaders," *Educational Administration Quarterly* 48(4): 733–774.
10. The research for this paper was conducted as part of the Bill & Melinda Gate's Foundation's broader Principal Leadership Knowledge Development project. The research included a written survey, telephone interviews, and on-location visits to learn how partnership sites and other school districts and charter management organizations are working to support principals as instructional leaders and managers of human capital, as well as to collect insights from national experts on principal leadership. In addition to this report, the research has informed development of a Principal Support Framework, an aligned School System Self-Assessment and Planning Tool, a Principal Support Toolkit, and several technical assistance meetings and convenings held during 2012.
11. Unless otherwise sourced, all quotations in this report are from interviews, focus groups, or surveys conducted for this project.
12. Marshall, K. (2009). *Rethinking Teacher Supervision and Evaluation: How to Work Smart, Build Collaboration, and Close the Achievement Gap*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, An Imprint of John Wiley & Sons.
13. Bambrick-Santoyo, P. (2012). *Leverage Leadership: A Practical Guide to Building Exceptional Schools*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, An Imprint of John Wiley & Sons.
14. Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, p. 669.
15. The manner in which school systems organize to carry out such functions can depend on their size, and smaller districts and charter management organizations are often organized into fewer units. For example, many small school districts do not have area superintendents who act as principals' immediate supervisors, and in very small school districts principals often report directly to the superintendent. Nevertheless, all districts face the questions posed in this section about how to strengthen principals' instructional leadership practices.

16. Honig, p. 734.
17. Honig, p. 734.
18. Honig, M. I., Copland, M. A., Rainey, L., Lorton, J. A., & Newton, M. (2010, April). *Central Office Transformation for District-wide Teaching and Learning Improvement*. New York: The Wallace Foundation.
19. Honig, pp. 746–7.
20. Bambrick-Santoyo, p. 273.
21. Copland, M. (2001, March). "The myth of the superprincipal." *Phi Delta Kappan* 82(7): 528–533.
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26. Bambrick-Santoyo, p. 224.
27. Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton, & Newton, p. 71.
28. Bambrick-Santoyo, pp. 239–265.
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30. Bambrick-Santoyo, p. 12.
31. The episode can be viewed online at the following website: [www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/superintendent/mcpsuper/sept2012/](http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/superintendent/mcpsuper/sept2012/).



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