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ABSTRACT
        This document provides guiding questions and a process for
school district personnel to assess the district's organizational capacity
for supporting strong educational leaders in a standards-based system. These
questions reflect the most recent research literature about leadership and
its optimal organizational supports in high-performing school and district
systems, as well as findings from ongoing McREL research, including a recent
study of actual leadership supports in three regional school districts.
Leadership is defined in terms of its support role for building communities
of learners in schools and districts--communities that are organized around
improving the learning of all students to high standards. In this document,
these leaders are called "leaders in support of standards-based teaching and
learning." The district self-assessment measure addresses the district's
professional development policies and practices related to building the
strengths needed by this type of leader. Additionally, this document builds
on the organizational scheme set forth in "Asking the Right Questions: A
Leader's Guide to Systems Thinking about School-Improvement," issued by
McREL. The literature indicates the need for specific reorganization and
structural supports for leaders of high-performing schools. It also points
out the need to support education reform through strategic allocation of
resources. An appendix provides "An Organizing Guide for Considering Possible
Actions." (Contains 47 references.) (DFR)

ASSESSING DISTRICT SUPPORT
FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT:

ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

REL Contract #RJ96006101

ASSESSING DISTRICT SUPPORT FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT:

ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

Submitted to
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
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Prepared by

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

SETTING THE STAGE

This document provides guiding questions and a process for school district personnel to assess the district's organizational capacity for supporting strong educational leaders in a standards-based system. These questions reflect the most recent research literature about leadership and its *optimal organizational supports* in high-performing school and district systems, as well as findings from ongoing McREL research, including a recent study of *actual leadership supports* in three regional school districts. Additionally, this document builds on the organizational scheme set forth in *Asking the right questions: A leader's guide to systems thinking about school improvement* (McREL, 2000).

Leadership within this context is defined in terms of its support role for building communities of learners in schools and districts, communities that are organized around improving the learning of *all students* to *high standards*. Defined in this way, leaders assume roles of *communication and vision- builders*. They help to set organizational direction toward this goal of standards-based teaching and learning by clarifying common understandings about the specific nature of standards-based teaching and learning and structuring action plans accordingly. They also are developers of *collaborative cultures*, who serve to facilitate the learning of all within the school or district about how best to improve the learning of all students. They help create widespread *access to knowledge* for teachers, students, and support staff along with the will to use such knowledge in the classroom. Finally, they *marshall and allocate resources* and *develop organizational structures* so that the ongoing learning needed for instructional change is supported in school and district organizational structures. In this document, such leaders are called *leaders in support of standards-based teaching and learning*. The district self-assessment measure addresses the district's professional development policies and practices related to building the strengths needed by *this* type of leader.

What Leaders Need to Know and Be Able to Do

The first step in any venture designed to improve the leadership of America's schools in support of standards-based teaching and learning is to define the standards for such leaders. What do effective leaders need to know and be able to do? The research indicates that the qualities of an effective principal have changed over time, and that public pressure on principals is increasing. Educational administrators are facing new demands for leadership from increased public expectations and educational reforms about high standards for all students, and these changes require a new kind of knowledge and skills (Murphy, 1998).

Further, there are strong needs for technical assistance in developing leadership–nationally and regionally. In a Gallup Poll of teachers, principals, and curriculum coordinators across the seven-state region served by McREL, 93% of respondents reported that external technical assistance in leadership development was very or somewhat important (Gallup, 2000). Additionally, 49% of teachers reported that lack of leadership or administrative support is an obstacle to reform implementation. On the national front, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) has identified strengthening district and school leadership as its top priority for the year 2000.

A major issue identified in the literature on effective school administrators is the difference between *leadership*, which is defined as setting directions and creating purpose, and *management*, defined as responsibility for technical functions of school operation. Management is a necessary but not sufficient condition for leadership, and principals need to strike a balance between them (ERS, 2000). Principals report that current expectations and reforms exceed their capacity for both managerial efficiency and leadership, and management tasks crowd out tasks related to improving teaching and learning (Barth, 1997; Cascadden, 1997; Williams & Portin, 1997; Lashway, 1998). This document reflects both aspects of the literature, with an emphasis on the *leadership* aspects that might enable schools to better support standards-based teaching and learning.

Several national documents address the questions about what leaders need to know and be able to do. These leadership standards documents reflect an emphasis on vision-building, communication and community-relations skills, resource allocation, uses of data for strategic planning, personal ethics, and culture-building skills. Taken together, such skills are described as providing guidance that is supportive of ongoing learning. In a listing of principal standards developed for the American Association of School Administrators, Hoyle, English, & Steffy (1998) report that an effective school leader has the following attributes:

- visionary leadership, including creating and communicating a vision "centered on the success of all children and youth"

- skills in school governance and collaborative policy formulation that demonstrate an understanding of the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context

- effective communication and community relations skills, including the ability to build effective school-community partnerships

- skills in organizational management, including the ability to make "data-driven decisions that show good stewardship of resources"

- the ability to plan and develop curriculum that enhances teaching and learning for all students

- the ability to use research and best practice to create instruction systems that maximize the learning of all students

- the ability to effectively evaluate staff performance

- the ability to create staff development programs that enhance the self-improvement of every individual and overall school performance

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- the ability to use education research, evaluation, and planning to improve student performance

- demonstrated ethical, moral, and personal integrity, and a sensitivity that promotes democratic, multicultural schools.

These standards are based on the broader Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards (listed below) developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) in 1996.

Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards for School Leaders (CCSSO, 1996)

Standard 1: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by **facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community**.

Standard 2: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by **advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth**.

Standard 3: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by **ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment**.

Standard 4: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by **collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources**.

Standard 5: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by **acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner**.

Standard 6: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by **understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context**.

So the first step—describing in general terms what school leaders should know and be able to do—has been taken. National standards for school leaders exist. They are relatively broad, but serve as a useful framework for defining our best, most current understandings about what makes a good leader.

How Districts Can Support the Development of this Knowledge and These Skills

The second step, therefore, might be thought of in terms of how to best develop such proficiencies in all leaders. What sorts of learning opportunities might best support principals and other school leaders to develop strength in these areas? How can they most effectively learn how to meet these standards? While principal preparation programs play some part in developing leaders'

knowledge and skills, the research indicates that frequently this preparation is not matched to the current demands of the job (Murphy, 1999). Therefore, districts are increasingly being called upon to fill the gaps left by preservice training of principals.

The CCSSO has made an initial foray into professional development for leadership in its portfolio-based professional development process for school leaders. This process is developed as a feedback loop, in which progress toward personal goals is continuously assessed and the goals revised based on individual growth and emerging needs. The framework for professional development is based on individual principals' assessment of areas of need in relation to the ISLLC standards. The CCSSO document, *Collaborative professional development process for school leaders* (CCSSO, 2000) establishes procedures for:

- individual needs assessment, preliminary goal-setting, and strategic planning

- identifying and convening professional development "teams" that provide feedback to the principal about progress toward meeting targeted goals

- preparing professional development portfolio products and reflective commentary

- analysis of portfolio products with the professional development team

- review of progress, formative self-evaluation, and revision of plans

One important prerequisite for implementing such a process, however, is that the district as an organization can provide a systemic commitment to leadership development. The authors of the CCSSO document note that "Any school, district, or individual interested in implementation must begin by assessing the environment's readiness to initiate and sustain this process." (CCSSO, p. 7). This document provides such a measure, as a way of assessing the school district's readiness for changes in leadership development consistent with quality professional development strategies (such as the ISLLC model) for school leaders.

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A MODEL FOR SYSTEMS THINKING

This document uses the structure provided by an earlier McREL publication, *Asking the right questions: A leader's guide to systems thinking about school improvement* (McREL, 2000), which provides a template for a systems thinking process for school leaders to address the impact of reform initiatives. In this document, that template's applications are developed for use at the district, rather than the school level. It has also been refined to focus specifically on the implications for *leadership development in support of standards-based teaching and learning*, as described in terms of the leadership standards used in the ISLLC and AASA materials.

The organizational system described in the earlier McREL document (2000) is based on work by Cordell and Waters (1993), who identify three major domains of school systems: the Technical Domain, the Personal Domain, and the Organizational Domain. While these areas overlap, the different perspectives in the framework can help district leaders organize their thinking about the needs for leadership support in their districts to make better decisions.

The Technical Domain

The Technical Domain of a school system includes what students learn, how they are taught, and the methods that are used to assess their acquisition of new knowledge and skills. Within the context of leadership in support of standards reforms, it includes:

- Standards
- Curriculum
- Instruction
- Assessment

The Personal Domain

The Personal Domain relates more to attitudes, skills, and behaviors of the people in the educational system. This includes school and district leadership, professional development, communication, and personal relationships, as well as the culture created by these factors interacting together. Specific components of the personal domain relating to leadership in support of standards-based reform include:

- Staff development
- Supervision
- Internal communications
- Climate and culture

The Organizational Domain

The Organizational Domain refers to the "resources and structures of the system" in which teaching and learning occur. Issues related to this domain include the external environment (e.g., changing demographics, changing policy requirements, accountability mandates), stakeholders (such as community members or parents), resources, and technology. The components of the organizational domain addressed in this model include:

- External environment
- Stakeholders
- Resource allocation
- Technology
- Accountability

The central ideas around which every aspect of the system should revolve are the purpose, goals, and guiding principles (collectively called here the *vision*) of the school and district community. This is illustrated in Exhibit 1. The radiating grid lines in the figure indicate that the educational system is made up of a complex web of interactions.

Exhibit 1
Domains of Educational Systems

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Using this Model to Examine Leadership Development

This process serves as a series of activities for school district personnel to engage in as they examine the extent of organizational supports for school-level leaders, mainly principals, but also teacher leaders to learn the knowledge and skills they need to fully support standards-based teaching and learning. This process consists of two main steps:

1) Identifying and clarifying the nature of the school district's vision

2) Examining the district context for supporting leaders to learn the necessary knowledge and skills they need by using the framework of the systemic thinking model described above.

Optimally, this process should spark informed conversations within the district about the nature of the district's vision, how well it supports leaders and others to learn about and articulate that vision, and how well policies, procedures, organizational structures, and resources are organized to support leaders to learn about the vision and how to best support standards-based teaching and learning in their classrooms. Additionally, it should spur district personnel to consider possible actions to take, both in terms of clarifying or modifying the district vision statement, and in strengthening their approaches to district leadership development.

This process is described as a way of starting substantive conversations in the district, to build understanding about the nature of the district's purpose, goals, and operating principles. As such, it is likely that it will require a time commitment of at least several days for group members to initiate the process. Further, it presumes that district personnel will have a level of trust amongst themselves so that they can engage substantively and honestly in these conversations. It is hoped that these initial conversations will lead to continued discussions about the district's purpose and the role of leadership and leadership development relative to that purpose.

This document is divided into sections, Step 1, which includes questions about the district vision, and Step 2, which asks questions specifically about district support for leadership development. The second step is composed of three subsections, which address questions about the Technical, Personal, and Organizational Domains of the district as they relate to leadership development. Step 1 and the three subsections of Step 2 are organized in this general manner:

- **Research summary**– providing a brief synopsis of the most recent research regarding high-performing schools and districts–characteristics of their visions and leadership supports

- **Suggested discussion activities**– which outline recommendations for organizing district personnel to go through the problem-solving process

- **Specific questions for discussion**– which are based on the research about high performing learning communities

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- **Possible actions for consideration**–which are specific to each district's unique context and the needs that emerge through this process.

A sample vignette of a hypothetical district's procedures are provided for <u>Step 1</u> and at the conclusion of <u>Step 2</u>, after all three domains have been explored through the structured discussion. Because there is so much overlap across the domains in <u>Step 2</u>, postponing the consideration of possible actions until all three domains have been explored allows participants to consider more holistic possibilities than might be the case with a more step-by-step approach.

STEP 1
IDENTIFYING AND CLARIFYING THE DISTRICT VISION

Research Summary

In school districts with high capacity for supporting their leaders to learn the necessary skills and knowledge to support ambitious instructional reform, district efforts are aligned and organized primarily around a shared vision of improved learning for all students. This unifying vision is commonly defined and understood at community, district, school, and classroom levels, and is characterized by broad-based ownership and support. It serves as a focusing agent for the district. District leadership demonstrates commitment to it by strategically allocating resources and revising district organizational structures to support progress toward it, as well as by minimizing distractions. Professional development opportunities for leaders and teachers are selected based on their alignment with the vision. Further, the district culture emphasizes shared accountability and support for teachers and schools to make progress, as well as some building-level flexibility in procedures.

For example, in a study of nine Texas school districts that repeatedly "beat the odds" in supporting their high-poverty schools for high student achievement, Ragland, Asera, & Johnson (1999) found that improving student performance on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) provided a concrete focus for many of the districts. District leadership focused on ambitious, performance-related goals that required substantial improvement and communicated the high expectations throughout the district. Some districts emphasized primarily TAAS performance, while others described additional goals like language fluency and lower dropout rates. These goals were broadly based and served as a focus and catalyst for actions throughout the districts:

> As superintendents worked with their school boards and communities to establish goals, it is important to note that the goals were not merely the topic of one night's school board meeting. The goals were not simply a footnote on the district's stationery. The goals had meaning for teachers, students, parents, principals, and business leaders. The goals caught the imagination of the entire school community and sparked creative action. (Ragland, et al., 1999, p. 8)

Another aspect of district action relative to these achievement goals was the creation of a

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"sense of urgency" based on achievement data. District leaders used data both to illustrate how attention to key academic objectives could improve achievement toward learning goals and to show where there were needed improvements. They often used data to highlight successful schools, programs, or teachers, providing a consistent message that these successes were attainable, but also questioning why such successes were not the case in all schools, for all teachers. The goals, which were concrete expressions of the district vision, were described clearly enough and were public enough so that anyone in the district or in the community could grasp what they were. They were also challenging enough to generate a sense of excitement and expectation–motivating those in the district to work toward them. However, Sergiovanni (2000) notes that goals should not be reductionist–they should not be framed exclusively in terms of performance on a single measure.

The role of school leaders in relation to clarifying and communicating an educational vision or purpose is vital. According to Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond (1999), the principal constructs and sells an instructional vision, which is ideally aligned with local or state standards and designed with broad and substantive input from school and community members. The vision should address the improved learning of all students and reflect a willingness to adjust school structures and procedures to work toward that goal. The principal may serve as the primary voice of that vision to external and internal groups, but if the vision is broadly supported and developed, teachers and others will also provide a chorus. However, in cases where teachers do not support or actively oppose the school vision or goals, the principal's role may entail reassigning those teachers and selectively hiring others who are more supportive (Charles A. Dana Center, 1999).

To guide principals and other leaders in their work, therefore, a clear, broadly-held, and comprehensive expression of the district's vision is necessary. The theme of a common purpose that unites the organization around learning goals is described by Elmore & Burney (1997), who report that "The common work creates settings in which principals, teachers, and staff developers have to create a common language, a common set of norms and expectations, and a common view of practice in order to get the work done." All of these activities cohere in the highest-capacity settings to develop a common culture supportive of learning.

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To summarize, the literature on high performing learning communities in education indicates need for a widely understood, commonly held unifying vision that:

- **is focused on teaching and learning**

- **is communicated through concrete examples, but not limited to a single achievement measure**

  - **structures goals so that later successes can build on earlier, more easily attainable ones**

  - **is clearly and widely understood**

  - **is developed through a broad-based process and sustained over time**

  - **conveys a shared sense of responsibility throughout the district**

  - **drives action and resource allocation**

Suggested Discussion Activities

The first portion of this conversation is organized around the district's *vision*. The primary work unit for this discussion (and for ongoing discussions) should be small groups (3-5 people) of district-level leaders, including representation from building level principals, teachers, board members, central office support staff (particularly professional development supervisors), community or board members, and executive leaders (e.g., superintendents or assistant superintendents).

Depending on district size, a number of small groups may be organized to work their way through the following systems issues around leadership development, but the small-group interaction is key. If there are a number of groups working on these issues, it will be helpful to develop some agreements at the small group level, which then are reported out and used for discussion purposes among the larger group as a whole.

The following sequence of activities may be helpful in structuring conversations around the district's vision, using the research-based questions that follow as a discussion guide:

- Address the first question in a large-group format, using district documents as references (if available).

- Once the first question has been addressed satisfactorily across stakeholders, break into small groups to consider questions 2 through 9, using the following type of process.

  1) Individuals read the summary of research and then read the questions, assessing a rating from 1 to 5 on the Likert scale and providing 2 examples of evidence justifying their ratings for each item.

  2) In their small groups, group members discuss their ratings and evidence and develop a group score and body of evidence for the district's rating on each item.

  3) Group members report their ratings and evidence to the larger group, as part of a structured whole-group discussion about the nature, quality, and clarity of the district vision related to the research about the role of vision in high-performing schools and districts

Following this type of procedure should help clarify how different people understand the way that a coherent district vision can impact student learning and the current status of the district's vision.
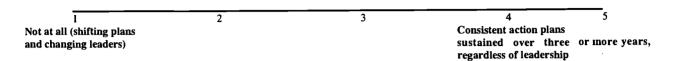
Questions for Group Discussion

1. What is the district vision?

2. To what extent does the district have examples of specific materials that convey concrete demonstrations of classroom work (teaching and learning) that exemplify the district's vision?

1	2	3	4	5

District does not have specific examples
of materials that convey concrete understandings
about what the vision means for teaching and learning

District has a variety of supporting
materials and examples across a wide
array of content areas and levels that demonstrate
concrete examples of the district's vision.

3. To what extent does the district have a comprehensive assessment plan (using standardized tests, district-level assessments, and classroom-level assessments to measure student progress toward the standards)?

1	2	3	4	5

District lacks comprehensive
assessments, possibly focuses only
on external accountability measures

District has comprehensive,
multi-level assessment plan
that measures district standards

4. To what extent does the district strategic plan address the parts of a standards-based educational system (curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional development)?

1	2	3	4	5

Strategic plan only
addresses one part of the standards-based
system (e.g., curriculum alignment)

Plan is comprehensive
(addressing all system
elements) and aligned with
standards

5. To what extent have goals in the district been set so that early successes can create momentum for work toward progressively more complex goals?

1	2	3	4	5

Not at all

Goals have been comprehensive and
structured for early success

6. To what extent did internal and external stakeholders develop the district vision and plan for a standards-based system (curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional development)?

1	2	3	4	5

Vision/plan developed by
small group of individuals

Vision is
comprehensive and widely developed and
supported by different stakeholders

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7. To what extent has the district vision and plan to address the needs of a standards-based system (curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional development) been sustained over time?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all (shifting plans and changing leaders)			Consistent action plans sustained over three or more years, regardless of leadership	

8. To what extent does the district vision and plan convey a shared sense of responsibility throughout the district for student learning (shareholders should include central office administration, support staff, teaching staff, building administration, and the Board)?

1	2	3	4	5
Responsibility is directed only at a few select groups and learning is narrowly defined			Responsibility for learning is clearly-defined across all role groups and stakeholders and defined in multiple ways	

9. To what extent does the district vision and planning impact policy action and resource allocation to support a standards-based system (curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional development)?

1	2	3	4	5
Vision and planning unrelated to action and resource allocation			Vision and planning directly related to action/ resource allocation	

Considering Possible Actions

The activities and questions listed above should help structure discussions so that participants have clearer understandings about these types of questions:

- In what areas does our district's vision provide the most concrete guidance for action? What does the vision look like in terms of teaching and learning ? Are there examples?

- In which areas do we need more concrete examples of our vision?

If there is a difference between the two, the next step in a district is to ask

- What do we need to do to gain a clearer, more concrete understanding of our district's vision in practice (in teaching and learning)?

The possibilities for action depend on the district context, perceived needs, priorities for leadership

development, and how well-aligned the district vision is with current policies and practices. Depending on the context, possible strategies might include such things as enlisting outside technical assistance in developing stakeholder buy-in or aligning resources according to the emphases of the district's vision. To decide on appropriate strategies, district personnel may wish to examine the pertinent research literature (a sampling of which have been provided here) or to talk with other school or district leaders who have engaged in vision-building initiatives.

Because individual district actions depend so much on contextual factors, the vision-building activities of district personnel from the Omega school district are briefly described here as a concrete example of strategic possibilities that districts might undertake. The Omega district is a fictional amalgam of districts currently under study by McREL staff, as well as districts that have been examined by other researchers.

An example from the Omega school district. At first, the Omega school district's team felt that their district's vision was relatively clear. After all, the written vision statement addressed two apparently simple goals:

    A. to reflect community participation in district action and goal-setting; and
    B. to improve student learning of the district standards, particularly in mathematics, reading, and writing

However, as small groups began to discuss what these goals meant in terms of teaching and learning, it quickly became apparent that not everyone had the same understanding. For example, one group was quick to clarify their differences.

"Student learning the district standards—basically, that means that we want kids to improve their performance on the state accountability test," said Sandy Cisneros, a fourth-grade teacher who was particularly aware of the test's importance for his school and students.

The secondary math coordinator disagreed. She had worked on developing the district standards documents and was quick to point out where the district standards and state tests diverged. "For example, we address the concept of probability in math early on—by grade four--in our district standards and benchmarks—but that has not yet been measured by the elementary state test. And we encourage constructivist techniques."

But Sandy disagreed. He noted that, at his school, in order to address the test requirements, some topics (like, in some cases, probability) were touched on lightly, while considerable time was spent on teaching test-taking skills so that the students, many of whom were second-language learners, would achieve higher scores. He said that, in several faculty meetings, his principal had expressed the importance of high performance on the state test. He said that she had suggested teachers use strategies like direct instruction on the topics most likely to be tested and instruction on test-taking skills. A middle school principal agreed—that there was considerable pressure on principals for student achievement. He reported that some of his colleagues in the district talked about this a lot, and that some of them had cracked down on inquiry methods and were focusing on teaching students how to do well on the test.

"Wait." The professional development director leapt into the conversation. "Don't you see? We don't know what this vision means for teaching and learning. We have a statement about learning, but what does that mean in terms of student work? How would we know that a student has learned the standards? Will their state test score tell us?" The group expressed general disagreement with this. They noted that the state test was not well-aligned with the district's curriculum and that it emphasized low-level reasoning skills–so, while it might be sensitive to low-end effects, "learning the standards" entailed much more high-level skills the test wasn't designed to measure.

"What would those skills be, then, and how would we know them when we saw them?" mused Sandy. "How about getting some exemplary samples of student work and going through them with teachers? Would that help us understand the nature of the district's vision better?" Most members of the group agreed and planned to gather evidence about student achievement from different schools, with the support of the Superintendent, who was participating in a different group.

"But what about the input from the community?" This comment came from the middle school principal, Howard Franklin. "I have a very active neighborhood group that wants to be involved in their kids' education. I think one of the reasons that we have this first part of the vision is because these particular parents were unhappy with the previous administration and felt their needs were being ignored."

"Would it be helpful to include some of them in this work–clarifying what the standards mean?" asked the professional development director. The group agreed that this probably would be helpful and set about planning to organize parent participation in looking at student work to clarify the understandings about the district's vision for student learning.

Partially through this conversation, the group determined that, while the vision was relatively clear, it did not provide leaders, teachers, or other people with concrete guidelines for teaching and learning. They developed some strategies to clarify what the vision meant. Throughout the course of their conversation, they also touched upon some possibilities for extending the scope of the district's relatively sparse assessment system–largely by incorporating the student work addressed above as part of an infrastructure for developing classroom-level assessments.

STEP 2
ASSESSING DISTRICT SUPPORTS FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

This process is a modification of the systemic thinking model put forth in McREL (2000) to focus attention on the district context for supporting leadership for standards-based teaching and learning.

It should be noted that the focus on this type of initiative is consistent with the vision of leadership embodied in documents like the ISLLC standards, but emphasizes leadership *tasks* rather than leadership *roles* (e.g., school principal). "Leadership" is defined here in a more "distributed" sense (Elmore, 2000; Spillane, et al., 1999), considering leadership as it is embodied in teacher

leaders and others who assume responsibility for improved student learning. This focus on leadership tasks, widely distributed and focused on improving student learning, embodies a second assumption–that this focus is consistent with the district's priorities as expressed in its vision.

This document provides guiding questions organized around the model of systemic thinking to address the implications for supporting leadership for standards-based teaching and learning across the domains (technical, personal, and organizational) of the system. Questions are based in the current research about leadership and high-performing learning communities.

Exhibit 2 provides an illustration of the education system domains and several guiding questions to consider in terms of leadership development.

Exhibit 2
Education System Domains and Guiding Questions

Domain	Description	Components	Guiding Questions
Technical	The content of schooling	Standards Curriculum Instruction Assessment	To what extent does the district provide school leaders with the opportunity to learn needed knowledge and skills that support improved student learning? How broadly available are these opportunities to learn?
Personal	The attitudes and skills of the people in the system	Staff Development Supervision Internal Communication Climate and Culture	To what extent does the district provide school leaders with opportunities to learn how to strengthen the skills and build supportive attitudes of people in the system?
Organizational	The resources and structures of the system	External Environment Stakeholders Resource Allocation Technology Accountability	To what extent does the district provide organizational supports for school leaders to learn what they need to know and practice these skills?

By examining the guiding questions provided here and using them to assess the district context, shape discussions and plan for action, district leaders and other stakeholders can consider a broad array of organizational issues related to organizational support of leadership development. While there may not be important implications for all 13 of the systemic components described in the model, it is worthwhile to examine all three domains in terms of their implications for leadership development. Additionally, several areas addressed by the research map onto multiple domains–for instance, research about professional development (the Personal Domain) may be discussed through the Organizational Domain. However, taken as a whole, this exercise illustrates a comprehensive systems approach to assessing leadership development based on the most recent research.

Once the district context has been assessed in this way, the next step of this process is to consider possible actions–which is arguably the most important part of the process. Considering the possible implications of each component of each domain and the actions to take may require a further review of the relevant literature or talking to other district personnel who have undertaken a similar effort in building their capacity for leadership development.

An illustration of possible actions in response to specific questions is provided in Exhibit 3.

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Because issues overlap considerably across the three domains, the hypothetical vignette illustrating possible actions is provided at the end of these three sections.

Exhibit 3
Domains, Specific Questions, and Examples of Possible Actions

Initiative	Develop Specific Questions		Consider Possible Actions
Leadership development for leadership in support of standards-based teaching and learning	Technical Domain– To what extent does the district provide school leaders with the opportunity to learn needed knowledge and skills that support improved student learning?	To what extent does the district provide school leaders with regular opportunities to engage constructively in the analysis of student work?	Collect examples of student work; convene teachers or content experts to develop rubrics for evaluating student work, initiate discussions about the learning demonstrated and what constitutes appropriate evidence of learning.
	Personal Domain– To what extent does the district provide school leaders with opportunities to learn how to strengthen the skills and build supportive attitudes of people in the system?	To what extent are feedback to principals based on their district performance evaluations directly related to standards-based teaching and learning?	Examine alignment of principal evaluation criteria with standards-based teaching and learning; develop mechanisms to improve educative value of principal performance evaluations (e.g., initiate a pilot walk-through program as part of principal formative evaluation process)
	Organizational Domain– To what extent does the district provide organizational supports for school leaders to learn what they need to know and to practice these skills?	To what extent does the district provide school leaders and others with technical assistance about how to collect, use, and interpret data to guide leadership and classroom practice in support of standards-based teaching and learning?	Examine data collection and reporting structures at the district level; realign positions to provide training and building-level support for diagnostic data use, invest in training on data-based decision-making

STEP 2: THE TECHNICAL DOMAIN

Domain	Description	Components	Guiding Questions
Technical	The content of schooling	Standards Curriculum Instruction Assessment	To what extent does the district provide school leaders with the opportunity to learn needed knowledge and skills that support improved student learning? How broadly available are these opportunities to learn?

Research Summary

The research around the Technical Domain of schooling indicates that content knowledge plays a part in effective leadership of standards-based reforms. When administrators lack deep understanding of content and reform goals, they are unlikely to provide adequate support for the reform in terms of sufficient resources (Price, Ball, & Luks, 1994; Nelson & Sassi, 2000). Initial research about leadership in New York's School District#2 indicates that, as the district moves from

a literacy reform to a mathematics reform focus, principal lack of mathematics content knowledge is posing problems (Learning Research and Development Center [LRDC], 2000).

Not only do these studies raise questions about how deeply and in what ways one must know a subject to effectively conduct leadership tasks of resource allocation, they also raise questions about effective supervision (an element of the Personal Domain). If a principal does not have deep knowledge of a subject, particularly at the secondary level, they will not be able to effectively supervise teaching in that content. Stein & d'Amico (1998) say that

> The effect of the interrelationship between support and accountability may depend upon who is at the helm. In the hands of competent, knowedgeable supervisors, it leads to better teaching and learning inside classrooms. In the hands of less competent and less knowledgeable supervisors, it may not have the same effect...The above discussion naturally leads to the question of how reform in multiple subject matter areas can be managed. In how many subject matters can district leaders and principals be reasonably expected to become competent?" (Stein & d'Amico, 1998, pp 30-31).:

Given the breadth of content areas addressed in America's schools, it is clear that what good leaders need to know and be able to do, simply in terms of content expertise, is overwhelming. Is it at all possible for one mere mortal–the formal school leader–the principal–to do all of these things *and* do them well? If we are to expect all of these leadership tasks to be well-done and to affect instructional changes positively, it is necessary to consider more distributed models of leadership, in which different leadership tasks are assumed by a variety of individuals at the school level (e.g., Spillane, et al., 1999).

Senge (2000) highlights a similar distribution of leadership tasks and responsibilities needed to make fundamental change efforts successful. He classifies leaders into three different types; *network leaders*, who may not have formal authority to make changes, but who provide important supports for others to learn about the changes and form a critical mass of converts, *line leaders*, who may have some authority to make substantive changes (e.g., building principals), and *executive leaders*, (for instance, district superintendents) who provide large-scale support and the overarching vision for change. Under this paradigm, a network of individuals assume distributed leadership tasks.

Elmore (2000) suggests that the distribution of educational leadership tasks is necessary, given the complexity of current reform goals:

> "In a knowledge-intensive enterprise like teaching and learning, there is no way to perform complex tasks without widely distributing the responsibility for leadership (again, guidance and direction) among roles in the organization, and without working hard at creating a common culture, or set of values, symbols, and rituals. Distributed leadership, then, means multiple sources of guidance and direction, following the contours of expertise in an organization, made coherent through a common culture. It is the "glue" of a common task or goal–improvement of instruction-and a common

frame of values for how to approach that task–culture–that keeps distributed leadership from becoming another version of loose coupling." (Elmore, 2000, p. 15)

Distributed leadership offers a way around the limitations of individual principals' capacities by developing leadership expertise, responsibilities, and resources among a broad variety of people with different types of knowledge and skills. It also offers promise for the sustainability of school improvement efforts beyond the tenure of the principal.

If distributed leadership is interposed as a strategy for creating long-lasting high-performing learning communities in schools, what are its implications for the nature of principal knowledge and skills? While standards like the ISLLC standards emphasize a variety of knowledge, skills and personal attributes that should be held by the principal, if leadership tasks are more distributed, the principal might draw on some of these skills, but others might be held by other people who assume different tasks and responsibilities. The particular skills and knowledge that a principal would use might be dependent on personal strengths and weaknesses.

Ongoing research at McREL indicates that, while effective leaders of change may not actually know *all* of the content addressed in standards reforms, they do tend to have 4 critical qualities:

- They have expertise in at least *one* content area–which generally has taken them some time to develop.

- They have a clearly understood instructional model from which they operate and construct their understanding about teaching and learning–and they have awareness of their own qualities as learners.

- They acknowledge their own limitations–they "know enough to know what they don't know". Additionally, based on their own understandings of content and pedagogy, they are able to recognize expertise in others.

- They are willing to seek out help and share authority and responsibility in areas in which their skills and understandings are less strong–building networks of leadership responsibility.

In summary, the research around leadership related to the technical domain of schooling indicates that:

- **content knowledge plays a part in effective reform leadership**

- **the nature of leaders' own understanding about teaching and learning plays a role in their capacity to support changes in standards-based teaching and learning, particularly in terms of supervision duties**

- **distributed models of leadership provide an alternative strategy to ensure adequate leadership understanding about content, pedagogy, and assessment issues related to implementing standards in the classroom**

- **effective leaders tend to acknowledge themselves as ongoing learners and use networks of experts as resources in different technical areas**

Suggested Discussion Activities

The following sequence of activities may be helpful in structuring conversations about the Technical Domain's implications for leadership development, using the research-based questions that follow as a discussion guide:

- Use the same small-group organization as in <u>Step 1</u>, with 3-5 people who represent different stakeholders participating in each group.

- Individuals should read the summary of research and then read the questions, assessing a rating from 1 to 5 on the Likert scale, with a '1' indicating the least possible extent of district support and a '5' indicating the most possible district support. For each question, individuals should be prepared to provide 2 examples of evidence justifying their ratings for each item. Also, for this set of questions, there may be different answers depending on the definition used for "school leaders" (e.g., teacher leaders, principals, etc.). Individuals need to consider each of these possibilities in discussions–as responses may be different for different groups and have different implications for action.

- In their small groups, group members discuss their ratings and evidence and develop a consensus group score and body of evidence for the district's rating on each item.

- Group members report their ratings and evidence to the larger group, as part of a structured whole-group discussion about technical implications for district support of leadership development.

- A general consensus about the district's status in terms of the technical domain should be recorded for later use in discussing possible action strategies over all three domains.

Following this type of procedure should help to clarify specific issues related to the Technical Domain and their implications for a district's approach to leadership development.

Questions for Group Discussion

1. To what extent does the district provide regular professional development for leaders (teachers, principals, and others) about standards and curriculum?

1	2	3	4	5

2. To what extent does the district provide school leaders with regular opportunities to participate in effective instructional practice linked to the standards (as instructors, as learners, as observers in expert classrooms, etc.)?

1	2	3	4	5

3. To what extent does the district provide school leaders with regular opportunities to engage constructively in the analysis of student work?

1	2	3	4	5

4. To what extent does the district support collaborative learning experiences (induction/mentoring, study groups, support of professional networks, membership dues for professional associations) for school leaders that are specific to the district vision for schools and classrooms?

1	2	3	4	5

5.   To what extent does the district schedule support collaborative learning experiences for school leaders (teachers, principals, and others) focused on improving student learning, related to clearly-described, complex student achievement goals?

1   2   3   4   5

6.   To what extent are all the opportunities above made available to teachers, department chairs, and other school personnel who may assume leadership tasks within a distributed leadership framework?

1   2   3   4   5

The next step in the process is to consider the implications of the Personal and Organizational Domains for leadership development in the district. Then, you will need to consider possible actions that address the context in your particular district (After you have looked across all three domains, Appendix A provides an organizational guide for synthesizing your findings as you go on to the next step of considering actions).

STEP 2: THE PERSONAL DOMAIN

Domain	Description	Components	Guiding Questions
Personal	The attitudes and skills of the people in the system	Staff Development Supervision Internal Communication Climate and Culture	To what extent does the district provide school leaders with opportunities to learn how to strengthen the skills and build supportive attitudes of people in the system?

Research Summary

Success in building system-level capacity in the Personal Domain is largely dependent on how skilled leaders are in structuring opportunities for teachers to learn and how well the principal understands and supports the reforms (Davidson & Taylor, 1998). According to Elmore, Peterson, & McCarthy (1996), transforming teaching practice is "fundamentally a problem of enhancing individual knowledge and skill," (p. 240) and the role of the principal in this process therefore becomes one of supporting ongoing learning about complex reforms.

To develop broadly-held knowledge supporting the realization of the school vision, the school leader's role involves two main tasks, which may overlap. First of all, the principal and other leaders need to work to support teacher professional growth and development as individuals and as faculty members. Secondly, the principal's role of providing both summative and formative monitoring of instruction and innovation through teacher supervision may be used educatively to

provide guidance for teachers to change (Spillane, et al., 1999). Both of these tasks may be undertaken in a variety of ways. For instance, to support teacher professional development, the principal may work with teachers to develop guidelines for professional development that align with the school's vision for student learning. She may allocate human or fiscal resources to release teachers for professional development–either external or internal professional development. Similarly, she may invest in technical assistance to help teachers work with student data to help inform programmatic decisions based on how well different actions relate to the school goals for student learning.

Unless teachers understand the current reforms, such reforms will fail, and this requires changes in the culture of schools to support ongoing teacher learning (Fullan, 1996). Knapp (1997) identified common approaches to supporting learning opportunities across high-capacity settings. In these schools and districts, teachers and others were offered numerous opportunities for professional development which was engaging, intellectually challenging, ongoing, and respectful of their professional knowledge. Additionally, these sites offered numerous other avenues for learning about reforms—such as teachers' participating in scoring student assessments, deliberating about textbook adoptions, or using replacement units.

Other studies indicate similar findings. High-quality learning experiences are necessary for teachers to learn about the implications of reform for changes in their classroom practice. But the presence of professional community and sustained supports for ongoing learning are also necessary. All of these things have implications for the skills and actions of school leaders (King & Newmann, 2000; ECS, 1999).

The research indicates that the leadership behaviors that effect instruction do so by promoting a shared vision and cultural values and norms around instruction. They are focused on providing learning opportunities and incentives for teachers to change practice (Liberman, Falk, & Alexander, 1994; Rosenholtz, 1989; Haynes, 1998; Puma, et al., 1997; Shields, et al., 1995; Stringfield, Datnow, & Ross, 1998). By helping to develop and manage a school culture conducive to conversations about the core technology of instruction (Spillane, et al., 1999), school leaders organize the school culture around common values expressed in a vision of student learning. Additionally, members of the culture use a shared technological language for discussing what constitutes good teaching and learning (Spillane, Peterson, Prawat, Jennings, & Borman, 1996), so that they share understandings about goals and procedures. Part of the role of school leaders is in developing this vocabulary as part of communicating the vision. When this does not take place, it allows schools to remain "loosely-coupled' organizations (Weick, 1976), where the work of teachers and administrators does not connect around instructional practice. Spillane, et al., (1996) note that:

"Discourse within a group can serve to enhance 'learning' from policy, but certain conditions need to be present. This includes focusing on the same concrete referents and developing a common language to describe these referents...individuals from different discourse communities often assume that they are talking about the same phenomena when they use the same language and words, but in fact, they may end up talking past one another. They do not mean the same thing in terms of an actual teaching and learning event." (pp. 437-438)

The role of school principals within the district context (Elmore & Burney, 1997) is that of a cultural link between district-wide and school-level efforts, connecting the problems of each school to the district "context of norms and values focused on connections among schools." (P. 20) They are among the key purveyors of an increasingly explicit and widespread technical culture around instructional improvement that has a distinct set of norms, a professional language, and a set of practices.

In addition to facilitating ever-clearer communication about group goals, school leaders assume other roles in building a supportive culture. Some are in management of disciplinary and other issues so that school climate emphasizes a focus on instruction. Yet others involve leadership roles of establishing trust among school staff and the community (e.g., Spillane, et al., 1999). Principals who work collaboratively with staff to develop school goals and strategies tend to have more effect on instructional practice--largely because staff then experience authentic and meaningful input and opportunities to learn. According to Jennings & Spillane (1996), "For administrators and teachers to enact ambitious instruction for all students they will need genuine opportunities to engage with the ideas—opportunities to raise and discuss their apprehensions and misunderstandings about ambitious instruction ...Merely telling administrators and teachers about ambitious instruction is unlikely to work." (p. 479). One way to acculturate principals may be through support groups and mentoring relationships, as in New York's Community School District #2 (Elmore & Burney, 2000).

As well as helping to establish a culture characterized by trust, another principal role is that of building "academic press" among members of the school community (Spillane, et al., 1999). In some cases, the press for more focus on learning has been described in terms of the use of data both to create a sense of "urgency" to demonstrate the need for change, and also to document the progress that has been made so far (Ragland, Asera, & Johnson, 1999). In a study of nine high-performing, high-poverty schools, the Charles A. Dana Center (1999) described one strategy for building academic press in terms of structuring work so that early successes would build motivation for further work:

> By targeting a visible, attainable goal, principals were able to give students, parents, and teachers clear indicators of change in just a few weeks or months. These early accomplishments helped reduce or eliminate excuses and created a readiness for additional (often more difficult) changes. By focusing on one issue, principals were able to direct their energies in a way that would have a high likelihood of success. This first success became the cornerstone of future successes. (p. 11).

In summary, the research around the personal domain indicates that leaders need to be supported with specific opportunities for access to new skills and knowledge that relate to information use for strategic planning with teachers and the community, and culture-building.

Leaders need access to knowledge related to <u>information use</u> that is characterized by:

- **professional development opportunities specifically about implementing the district vision in schools and classrooms**

- **regular investment in principal professional development (money and personnel support)**

- **formal and informal socialization (induction/mentoring) processes that are specific to the district vision for schools and classrooms**

- **sustained and job-embedded learning opportunities for learning**

- **timely provision of and technical assistance with student achievement data that can be used for strategic planning with teachers and community members**

- **feedback about practice from principal and teacher evaluation processes that are educative to the teacher and/or principal and that are directly related to district vision and goals**

The type of district <u>culture</u> supportive of high-performing learning communities includes:

- **high expectations for principal, teacher, and student performance, and processes in place to monitor progress toward clearly-described, complex student achievement goals through systematic, ongoing collection and analysis of data**

- **clear communication processes about organizational goals and individual roles and tasks to support the organization in meeting those goals**

- **shared accountability for system performance across roles and levels of the system**

- **collaborative norms across the organization**

- **district flexibility and school-level autonomy**

- **strong elements of trust across the organization and between the organization and the community**

Suggested Discussion Activities

The following sequence of activities may be helpful in structuring conversations about the Personal Domain's implications for leadership development, using the research-based questions that follow as a discussion guide:

- Use the same small-group organization as described previously, with 3-5 people who represent different stakeholders participating in each group.

- Individuals should read the summary of research and then read the questions, assessing a rating from 1 to 5 on the Likert scale and providing 2 examples of evidence justifying their ratings for each item. For this set of questions, as previously, there may be different answers depending on the definition used for "school leaders" (e.g., teacher leaders, principals, etc.). Individuals need to consider each of these possibilities in discussions—as they may be different and have different implications for action.

- In their small groups, group members discuss their ratings and evidence and develop a consensus group score and body of evidence for the district's rating on each item.
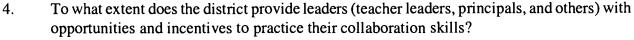
- Group members report their ratings and evidence to the larger group, as part of a structured whole-group discussion about technical implications for district support of leadership development.

- A general consensus about the district's status in terms of the personal domain should be recorded for later use in discussing possible action strategies over all three domains.

Following this type of procedure should help to clarify specific issues related to the Personal Domain and their implications for a district's approach to leadership development.

Questions for Group Discussion

1. To what extent are district professional development programs for school leaders (teacher leaders, principals, and others) focused on identifying and addressing specific problems of their schools?

1	2	3	4	5

2. To what extent does the district provide principals (and other personnel if they conduct teacher supervision) with regular opportunities to learn the knowledge and skills needed for supervision consistent with the district's vision for standards-based teaching and learning?

1	2	3	4	5

3. To what extent does the district provide school leaders (teacher leaders, principals, and others) with regular opportunities to strengthen their communication skills?

1	2	3	4	5

4. To what extent does the district provide leaders (teacher leaders, principals, and others) with opportunities and incentives to practice their collaboration skills?

1	2	3	4	5

5. To what extent are high expectations expressed for school leaders to meet goals for student learning?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

6. To what extent are feedback to principals based on their district performance evaluations directly related to standards-based teaching and learning?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

7. To what extent are district guidelines for teacher evaluation aligned specifically with the district's vision for standards-based teaching and learning?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

The next step in the process is to consider the implications of the Organizational Domain for leadership development in the district. Then, you will need to consider possible actions that address the context in your particular district (After you have looked across all three domains, Appendix A provides an organizational guide for synthesizing your findings as you go on to the next step of considering actions).

STEP 2: THE ORGANIZATIONAL DOMAIN

Domain	Description	Components	Guiding Questions
Organizational	The resources and structures of the system	External Environment Stakeholders Resource Allocation Technology Accountability	To what extent does the district provide organizational supports for school leaders to learn what they need to know and to practice these skills?

Research Summary

Elements of the Organizational Domain relate to physical arrangements of space, time, people, and other resources as well as procedures (both standard operating procedures and formally defined approaches to tasks) and lines of communication with the external environment. School organizational structures, such as teacher incentives to change, the nature of teacher evaluation policies, and staffing, scheduling, and/or grouping practices are factors that consistently relate to the extent of instructional change in schools. Overall, the research indicates that supportive organizational structures are a necessary but not sufficient element of capacity for reforms.

The research on high-performing districts indicate that some districts provide considerable structural support and investment for their leaders to learn. One such district is New York's Community School District #2 described by Elmore & Burney (2000). This district is characterized by a public and concrete commitment to improving student learning, where quality of instruction is largely determined by explicit benchmarks and standards. This serves as its overarching vision. To support this vision, the district has invested in learning needs of principals for some time. Both formal and informal structures are in place to support principal learning, and these structures are coherent with Barth's recommendations (1997) for administrator professional development. Formal structures in the district include the following:

- *Monthly principal conferences*, focused on a particular instructional area and dedicated almost exclusively to problems of instruction, rather than administration. Principals are then expected to transmit the content of these meetings back to their staffs through school-level meetings. These conferences help to establish instructional priorities for principals, to provide them models of what the instruction should look like, and to provide them with tools for helping teachers deliver this instruction.

- *School-based staff developers* who focus solely on improvement of instruction—one content area at a time. These individuals serve as a concrete example of distributed leadership in areas where principals likely need it most—the supervision of instruction. Staff developers primarily focus on teacher professional development, but, as Elmore & Burney note, they also reinforce the principal's role as an instructional leader. "Through this model, principals have expert, school-based resources that they describe as "purists," focused wholly on improving instruction." (Elmore & Burney, 2000, p. 17) Because principals are also held accountable for improving instruction in the district, these staff

developers help to drive principal agendas by deepening the principal's understanding of instruction and supporting the instructional vision at the school.

- *Principal site visits*, conducted as a walkthrough by central office personnel to provide feedback to principals and to monitor progress. Walkthroughs occur one to four times per year, and tend to take roughly three hours. They are organized around instruction and principals are expected to be knowledgeable about the practice of every teacher in the building, which encourages principals to spend considerable time in classrooms. Additionally, improvement of instruction is a clear priority; Elmore & Burney describe one instance in which a principal was asked to immediately terminate a teacher who had not shown any improvement over the course of the year.

- *Principal study groups*, which are convened on an as-needed basis and often led by experienced principals and district personnel.

- *New principal support groups and mentoring structures*, which provide new principals with opportunities to learn from each other, as well as from more experienced and effective principals. Mentoring relationships tend to be organized around issues of curriculum and supervision, although mentors also provide assistance with prioritizing administrative tasks.

Another element of organizational structure relating to learning for leadership addresses incentives for teachers to learn about and to assume some of the responsibilities of distributed leadership tasks. Elmore (1996) notes that currently districts and schools rely primarily on teachers' intrinsic motivation to engage in challenging practices. He recommends not only that district and school organizational structures focus and intensify this intrinsic motivation, but also that external incentive systems be developed.

> ...if you ask teachers to change the way they deal with students and to relate to their colleagues differently, the incentives that operate at the organizational level have to reinforce and promote those behaviors. Encouragement and support, access to special knowledge, time fo focus on the requirements of the new task, time to observe others doing it–all suggest ways in which the environment of incentives in the organization comes to reflect the requirements of learning (p. 17)

Odden & Busch (1998) note that, based on the research about motivation and performance awards in non-educational organizations, school-based performance awards may hold promise as such an incentive. Another strategy might include the exploration of alternative compensation structures.

Leadership roles in supporting standards-based teaching and learning involve how well personnel manipulate organizational structures and resources to support the collaborative, focused elements of culture that build collaborative learning communities in schools. For instance, principals or teacher leaders might use discretionary funds to support school-based financial incentives for teachers to change instruction (Elmore; 1996; Haynes, 1998). To combat the general lack of institutionalized incentives for teachers to change instruction, several alternatives include the

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development of school-level structures that intensify and focus teachers' intrinsic motivation to improve student learning (Elmore, 1996). This might include adjusting schedules to provide common time for teachers to plan and work together around the task of improving student learning (Haynes, 1998; Stringfield, et al; 1998) or developing interdependent work structures for teachers (e.g., team teaching assignments or other sorts of teacher work groups) (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995).

Another key leadership task is communication with outside stakeholders about school goals and progress toward them, particularly as practices and structures may change to support student learning. Such communication is an important aspect of the changes that need to take place in such community-school linkage organizations as the School Based Management committees currently prevalent as outreach mechanisms (Murphy & Beck, 1995; McDermott, 1999). Given that the public tend to hold traditional cultural beliefs about schooling, which means they support traditional methods and schools that look familiar to them (Rowan & Miskel, 1999; Tyack & Cuban, 1995), it is important that school leaders are equipped with understandings of new reforms, the ability to articulate them well, and the ability to work with external stakeholders to build support for them.

Leadership tasks around resource allocation relate to the procurement and distribution of appropriate resources in appropriate ways. This entails selection and procurement of resources like classroom materials, release time for teachers to participate in learning opportunities, technical support for teachers or others to work with student data, and stipends for teachers who assume duties of assessment development or curriculum alignment with school goals or standards. Massell (1998) identified three specific aspects of resources contributing to the organizational capacity of schools and districts:

- The quantity and types of people supporting the classroom (e.g., teachers' aides, curriculum specialists and school/district administrators)

- Material resources–physical plant conditions, access to technology, science labs

- The organization and allocation of resources–where and how much resources are targeted.

In summary, the literature indicates the need for specific reorganization and structural supports for leaders of high-performing schools:

- activities and resources focused around improving student learning, related to clearly-described, complex student achievement goals

- central office staff organized to support learning needs of leaders and schools, rather than to ensure compliance with procedures

- structures that strengthen school/community ties and maximize community ownership and support of education efforts

- formal and informal socialization (induction/mentoring) processes that are specific to the district vision for schools and classrooms

- structures that support principals and teachers in the strategic use of student achievement data to inform planning processes

- scheduling practices that support collaborative learning experiences for principals around improving student learning, related to clearly-described, complex student achievement goals

- policy structures (e.g., incentives and accountability structures) that are specific to the district vision for schools and classrooms

Also, the research indicates the need to support education reform through the strategic allocation of resources that:

- build a supportive culture, structure, and knowledge base in ways that support all students to achieve broadly held, clearly-described, complex learning goals

- support principal and teacher learning specifically about implementing the district vision in schools and classrooms

- are directed by systematic use of achievement data to monitor progress toward clearly-described, complex student achievement goals

Suggested Discussion Activities

The following sequence of activities may be helpful in structuring conversations about the Organizational Domain's implications for leadership development, using the research-based questions that follow as a discussion guide:

- Use the same small-group organization as described previously, with 3-5 people who represent different stakeholders participating in each group.

- Individuals should read the summary of research and then read the questions, assessing a rating from 1 to 5 on the Likert scale and providing 2 examples of evidence justifying their ratings for each item. For this set of questions, as previously, there may be different answers depending on the definition used for "school leaders" (e.g., teacher leaders, principals, etc.). Individuals need to consider each of these possibilities in discussions–as they may be different and have different implications for action.

- In their small groups, group members discuss their ratings and evidence and develop a consensus group score and body of evidence for the district's rating on each item.

- Group members report their ratings and evidence to the larger group, as part of a structured whole-group discussion about technical implications for district support of leadership development.

- A general consensus about the district's status in terms of the personal domain should be recorded to facilitate the next step in the process–discussing and researching possible action strategies over all three domains.

Following this type of procedure should help to clarify specific issues related to the Organizational Domain and their implications for a district's approach to leadership development.

Questions for Group Discussion

1. To what extent are district resources allocated based on the systematic use of student achievement data that monitors progress toward clearly-described, complex student achievement goals?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

2. To what extent does the district provide school leaders and others with technical assistance about how to collect, use, and interpret data to guide leadership and classroom practice in support of standards-based teaching and learning?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

3. To what extent does the district provide school leaders with timely analyses of student achievement data specific to the vision for standards-based teaching and learning that can be used for strategic planning with teachers and community members?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

4. To what extent is systematic data collection and analysis in the district focused on monitoring progress toward clearly-described, complex student achievement goals?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

5. To what extent are the responsibilities and roles of central office personnel designed to help leaders, teachers, and others learn what they need to know to improve standards-based teaching and learning, rather than to monitor and ensure compliance with regulations?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

6. To what extent are policy structures (e.g., incentives, accountability structures) specific to the district vision for standards-based teaching and learning in schools and classrooms?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

7. To what extent does the district support (e.g., financial support, alternate leadership positions, specialized training, curricular support staff) alternative forms of leadership in support of standards-based teaching and learning?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

8. To what extent does the district provide school leaders with opportunities to learn how to develop effective communication and public support with external stakeholders?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

9. To what extent do district policies and practices encourage school autonomy and innovation focused on standards-based teaching and learning?

1	2	3	4	5

The next step is to consider possible actions, using a synthesis of issues across domains. Appendix A provides an organizational guide for synthesizing your findings as you go on to the next step of considering actions.

Considering Possible Actions

In order to consider possible strategies to address these systemic issues, it will be useful for participants in these discussions to do the following:

1) Gather and synthesize the main findings from the Technical, Personal, and Organizational Domains. Because issues tend to overlap, it makes sense to explore responses across all domains.

2) Prioritize issues to meet local needs.

3) Consider possible actions on high-priority items.

4) Develop an action plan and institute a procedure for monitoring and evaluating the process and its impact on student performance.

A concrete example is provided below from the fictional Omega district. It shows possible areas for discussion and courses of action, most of which address multiple domains in the system.

By going through these processes and asking these kinds of specific questions about the nature of the district vision and about systemwide supports for leadership development, district leaders can build a relatively comprehensive understanding of different aspects of changes related to leadership development in support of standards-based teaching and learning. This process and the vignettes provided are described primarily to stimulate discussion and illustrate possible problem-solving techniques by local practitioners.

An example from the Omega school district. When district personnel reconvened to address leadership development, they had invested several months in meetings organized around concrete examples of student work. During this series of meetings, participants developed a somewhat better idea of what the district vision meant for teaching and for student learning.

After discussing the Technical, Personal, and Organizational Domains and their implications for leadership development, the groups reconvened to summarize the district's status across all three domains. After some discussion, the large group decided that the district's most pressing needs were in the areas of professional development for leaders specific to instruction. This related particularly to effective supervision tied to the vision of teaching and learning that they had developed over the

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past few months. Leaders lacked opportunities to participate in or even see effective instructional practice linked to standards.

Sandy Cisneros suggested that the vision-building processes that the group had done with student work be extended and incorporated into the district's monthly principal meetings. Howard Franklin, the middle school principal, agreed that this was a good idea, but remarked that those meetings tended to be dedicated mainly to information items. "Hey," he asked, "Would it be possible to handle the information-type items through district email or some other way, so that we could use the time that principals have together to discuss these teaching and learning issues?" The larger group agreed that this was likely to be a more productive use of principals' time than the current "stand-and-deliver" format used at principal meetings and the principals participating in the group made plans to convene a committee of principals to restructure the nature of the monthly meetings.

A middle-school math teacher suggested, "Maybe we can use some of the student work samples to identify teachers that our leaders could observe. I've already gone to observe Fran Edwards' algebra class, based on what I saw of her students' work." A school board member said that one possibility might be to organize a brokering/information service—a resource for interested teachers and principals to use, and another participant suggested that a portion of the district Website be dedicated to showing both student work and links to teachers who were willing to be observed by other teachers and district leaders.

After some thought, the middle-school teacher remarked, " You know, I think that observing exemplary practice is really important for teachers and principals to learn about what we want to see in classrooms. But what about the vulnerability of those teachers?"

Sandy said, "I know what you mean. In my school, the principal has really expressed an emphasis on performance on the state test. We are all under pressure because our school is the lowest-performing elementary school in the district. If a teacher is doing something different in the classroom—not direct instruction, not test-skills, is it safe for the teacher to demonstrate that? As a teacher in this kind of school—even supporting what we've been doing the past few months, I'd be kind of nervous about how my principal might view my approach—especially since she is writing my evaluation. That's the case even if we are saying as a district that what students are learning in that class is just what we want to see happening across the district for all students."

The group agreed that building trust among staff was a big issue—one of the main requirements for developing a learning community among leaders and other staff. Howard Franklin volunteered that some language arts teachers in his school had developed a "real team" and observed each others' writing classrooms. "It all started when we had this one teacher who was a writer-in-residence at the university. She has spent years working on teaching the writing process to all grade levels of students—and she's a writer herself. When I hired her, she immediately partnered up with one of the veteran teachers and they started team-teaching—working on teaching the writing process and also providing each other with feedback and coaching. After a few years, they started working with some other teachers. Now we have a group of five teachers who are all experts in the process—and they keep learning how to get better—from each other."

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The superintendent suggested that a policy approach to this type of problem might be to convene an advisory group from among principals and teachers to examine the district guidelines for teacher evaluation and supervision. This would be done with an eye toward revising them so that they were consistent with current understanding about teaching and learning, as grounded in the examination of student work. The group agreed that policies consistent with the vision would smooth the process of learning about the different issues in the Technical Domain.

A high school principal brought up the point that district accountability and reward structures were focused on external tests. "Look," he said to Sandy, "I can see where your principal's coming from. She's looking at possible sanctions and reorganization if the test scores don't come up." He turned to the superintendent. "What do we do about that? How easy is it for principals to work on these longer-term payoffs when they're under pressure to get the test scores up now?"

The district assessment director, Liz Ogden, said, "Well–one issue has to do with how well-aligned our goals are with what the tests measure. I have a sense that they're similar–but we're more ambitious than the test." The district math coordinator volunteered to work with Liz and a group of principals and teachers to examine the alignment and work toward developing in-district measures that might better reflect the district emphases. One suggestion was to enlist outside technical assistance in working with test data.

The high-school principal said, "One thing I noticed when we were going over some of these examples of student work–well, somebody would have a question. And we wouldn't know how to answer it. We didn't have the answer right there. I mean, Liz, you could probably explain it, but it would be real nice to have access to you for all sorts of questions." The ensuing discussion revealed that Liz was too busy with district reporting requirements to be available to all twenty-four schools in the district for trouble-shooting on assessment issues, but that one possibility was to work with a local university. The university had a graduate program in educational measurement, and Liz estimated that she had the time to supervise graduate students to work with the schools. The superintendent scheduled a meeting with himself, Liz, and the university faculty to discuss a structured internship program to support school-based data-driven decision making in the district.

"I know all this stuff is important," interjected Helen Livingston, a first-year principal, "but let's try to focus on our priorities–helping our leaders learn about what good instruction looks like–consistent with the understanding of the vision that we're all working towards. And then aligning our teacher supervision policies to support those types of practices." She reminded the group that they had already set out a strategy for looking at the alignment of teacher supervision guidelines with the district vision for learning. Howard Franklin noted that the committee's task of reorganizing principal meetings around student work would be a starting point for building leaders' understandings of the vision.

"And our assessment work on the alignment between our district's goals and the state test might help to tell us what the relationship will be between our goals and how well our kids do on the test. It might help to reassure principals that if we spend time working toward our goals, performance on the state test may not suffer–so they may be more willing to invest in a more ambitious venture," added Liz Ogden.

"Finding teachers who exemplify the instruction that leads to this type of work and who can serve as models for our leaders to learn from is one of the next things we need to attend to," Helen summed up. Howard mentioned the teachers in his school who were developing cooperative groups and offered to approach them about serving as expert resources in middle school language arts–with his support. Other people in the room offered to contact teachers in their buildings about acting as expert resources. The district professional development coordinator also volunteered to work with her colleagues from other school districts in finding exemplary teachers–while first making sure that the districts' goals were compatible.

Before the group adjourned, Helen drafted a chart showing various peoples' responsibilities, timelines, and suggestions for how the district could monitor the group's progress on these issues. The group also scheduled a time for reconvening and evaluating how its efforts had paid off–in terms of looking at their actions in conjunction with information about classroom processes and student learning on several different measures.

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APPENDIX A

AN ORGANIZING GUIDE FOR CONSIDERING POSSIBLE ACTIONS

An Organizing Guide for Considering Possible Actions

In determining the best course of action for any district, it may be necessary for personnel to first examine patterns across the three systemic domains and to prioritize their efforts. These tables provide an organizational guide for the process of considering possible actions.

Technical Domain—To what extent does the district provide school leaders with the opportunity to learn needed knowledge and skills that support improved student learning?

Specific Questions	Possible Actions to Consider
1. To what extent does the district provide regular professional development for leaders (teachers, principals, and others) about standards and curriculum?	1.
2. To what extent does the district provide school leaders with regular opportunities to participate in effective instructional practice linked to the standards (as instructors, as learners, as observers in expert classrooms, etc.)?	2.
3. To what extent does the district provide school leaders with regular opportunities to engage constructively in the analysis of student work?	3.
4. To what extent does the district support collaborative learning experiences (induction/mentoring, study groups, support of professional networks, membership dues for professional associations) for school leaders that are specific to the district vision for schools and classrooms?	4.
5. To what extent does the district schedule support collaborative learning experiences for school leaders (teachers, principals, and others) focused on improving student learning, related to clearly-described, complex student achievement goals?	5.
6. To what extent are all the opportunities above made available to teachers, department chairs, and other school personnel who may assume leadership tasks within a distributed leadership framework?	6.

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Personal Domain— To what extent does the district provide school leaders with opportunities to learn how to strengthen the skills and build supportive attitudes of people in the system?

Specific Questions	Possible Actions to Consider
1. To what extent are district professional development programs for school leaders (teacher leaders, principals, and others) focused on identifying and addressing specific problems of their schools??	1.
2. To what extent does the district provide principals (and other personnel if they conduct teacher supervision) with regular opportunities to learn the knowledge and skills needed for supervision consistent with the district's vision for standards-based teaching and learning?	2.
3. To what extent does the district provide school leaders (teacher leaders, principals, and others) with regular opportunities to strengthen their communication skills?	3.
4. To what extent does the district provide leaders (teacher leaders, principals, and others) with opportunities and incentives to practice their collaboration skills?	4.
5. To what extent are high expectations expressed for school leaders to meet goals for student learning?	5.
6. To what extent are feedback to principals based on their district performance evaluations directly related to standards-based teaching and learning?	6.
7. To what extent are district guidelines for teacher evaluation aligned specifically with the district's vision for standards-based teaching and learning?	7.

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Organizational Domain--To what extent does the district provide organizational supports for school leaders to learn what they need to know and to practice these skills?

Specific Questions	Possible Actions to Consider
1. To what extent are district resources allocated based on the systematic use of student achievement data that monitors progress toward clearly-described, complex student achievement goals?	1.
2. To what extent does the district provide school leaders and others with technical assistance about how to collect, use, and interpret data to guide leadership and classroom practice in support of standards-based teaching and learning?	2.
3. To what extent does the district provide school leaders with timely analyses of student achievement data specific to the vision for standards-based teaching and learning that can be used for strategic planning with teachers and community members?	3.
4. To what extent is systematic data collection and analysis in the district focused on monitoring progress toward clearly-described, complex student achievement goals?	4.
5. To what extent are the responsibilities and roles of central office personnel designed to help leaders, teachers, and others learn what they need to know to improve standards-based teaching and learning, rather than to monitor and ensure compliance with regulations?	5.
6. To what extent are policy structures (e.g., incentives, accountability structures) specific to the district vision for standards-based teaching and learning in schools and classrooms?	6.
7. To what extent does the district support (e.g., financial support, alternate leadership positions, specialized training, curricular support staff) alternative forms of leadership in support of standards-based teaching and learning?	7.
8. To what extent does the district provide school leaders with opportunities to learn how to develop effective communication and public support with external stakeholders?	8.
9. To what extent do district policies and practices encourage school autonomy and innovation focused on standards-based teaching and learning?	9.

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